

# Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

Stories 1-50



Edited by Esther Thien  
Illustrated by Karen Chin



**Tales of the  
Buddha's Former Lives**  
**Stories 51 – 100**

Retold by Esther Thien  
Illustrated by John Patterson

## Dear Reader,

If you wish to contribute to the production costs of this and many other beautiful Dharma Books and CDs for free distribution, so that more people could be touched by the beauty of Dharma and be inspired to lead happy and meaningful lives, please photocopy the sponsorship form at the end of this book, fill in your particulars and mail it back to us.

*“The Gift of the Dharma Excels All Gifts.”*

# CONTENTS

Preface .....	vi
From the Storyteller to the Reader .....	viii
51. King Goodness the Great [Perseverance] .....	1
52. King Fruitful and Queen Sivali	
[chapter 1. Rebirth of the Bodhisattva] .....	8
[chapter 2. Gaining Power] .....	13
[chapter 3. Giving Up Power] .....	22
53. A Gang of Drunkards [Sobriety] .....	31
54. The Whatnot Tree [Prudence] ( <i>same as story 85</i> ) .....	33
55. Prince Five-Weapons and the Sticky-Hair [The Diamond Weapon] .....	36
56. A Huge Lump of Gold [Moderation] .....	41
57. Mr Monkey and Sir Crocodile [Harmlessness] .....	43
58. A Prince of Monkeys [Carefulness] .....	46
59, 60. Two Ways of Beating a Drum [Excess] .....	50
61. Two Mothers [Renunciation] .....	52
62. The Priest Who Gambled With a Life [Misguided Morality] .....	57
63. Lady Wicked and the Wise Buttermilk Man [Seduction] .....	65
64, 65. Country Man and City Wife [Unfaithfulness] .....	71
66. The Wisdom of Queen Tender-heart [Desire] .....	73
67. A Wife and Mother Who Was a Sister First [An Intelligent Woman] .....	77

68.	3,000 Births [Rebirth] .....	79
69.	The Strong-minded Snake [Determination] .....	80
70.	The Wise Shovel Man [Renunciation] .....	82
71.	The Green Wood Gatherer [Laziness].....	86
72.	The Great Good Elephant King [Generosity and Ingratitude] .....	89
73.	Four on a Log [Gratitude] .....	94
74.	New Homes for the Tree Spirits [Wise Advice] .....	101
75.	The Fish That Worked a Miracle [The Power of Wholesomeness].....	103
76.	The Meditating Watchman [Fearlessness].....	105
77.	The Nightmares [chapter 1. The 16 Frightening Dreams] .....	108
	[chapter 2. Roaring Bulls That Do Not Fight].....	112
	[chapter 3. The Frightening Sound of ‘Munch, Munch, Munch’] .....	117
	[chapter 4. Teaching] .....	123
78.	Illisa the Cheap [Miserliness] .....	125
79.	The Treacherous Headman [Betrayal] .....	133
80.	Fear-maker and the Little Archer [Self-deception].....	136
81.	Forest Monks in a King’s Garden [Student Without a Teacher] .....	142
82.	The Curse of Mittavinda [chapter 1. Jealousy] .....	145
	[chapter 2. Greed].....	151
	[chapter 3. Pleasure] .....	154
83.	A Hero Named Jinx [Friendship].....	160
84.	A Question From a Seven-year-old Child [Six Worthy Ways] .....	163

85.	The Whatnot Tree [Prudence] ( <i>see story 54</i> ).....	33
86.	Lesson From a Snake [The Value of Goodness].....	165
87.	A Priest Who Worshipped Luck [Superstition].....	169
88.	The Bull Called Delightful [All Deserve Respect].....	172
89.	The Phoney Holy Man [Hypocrisy].....	176
90.	One-Way Hospitality [Ingratitude] .....	180
91.	Poisoned Dice [Deception].....	183
92.	The Mystery of the Missing Necklace [chapter 1. One Crime Leads to Another] .....	185
	[chapter 2. The Mystery is Solved] .....	189
93.	The Careless Lion [Circumspection] .....	193
94.	The Holy Man Who Tried To Be Extremely Holy [Extremism].....	195
95.	Clear-sighted the Great, King of the World [Impermanence].....	197
96.	The Prince and the She-devils [chapter 1. Five Meals in the Forest] .....	201
	[chapter 2. A Feast in the Palace].....	206
97.	A Man Named Bad [Self-Acceptance].....	209
98.	A Man Named Wise [Cheating] .....	211
99.	Achieving Nothing [Nothing].....	213
100.	A Mother's Wise Advice [Non-violence] .....	215
	APPENDIX A. Who Was the Bodhisattva? .....	217
	APPENDIX B. An Arrangement of Morals.....	218

# Preface

The book, **Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives** originates from a collection of stories known as the *Jataka Tales*. The Buddha Himself used the Jataka stories to explain concepts like karma and rebirth and to emphasise the importance of certain moral values.

Though meant for readers of all ages, these simple stories, written along the line of *Aesop's Fables*, are made even more relevant in the fragmented societies of today, where young children, especially those in their formative years, seek guidance and are moulded in their value system.

All Jataka stories have a moral at the end on how to correct our ways and develop virtuous conduct and good behaviour. They promote and highlight those human values which contribute to harmony, pleasure and progress.

They played, and continue to play in some societies, an enormous role in the cultivation of peace and generosity. For instance, in India, these and other similar stories were a principal instrument in the socialisation of children, discouraging them from selfishness and laying the foundations for the solidarity of the family and community.

One story teaches respect for elders, and the need to gain control over conceit, which is a minor defilement. Another teaches the value of gratitude. And yet another teaches about the detrimental effects of associating with unwholesome people.

Others help cultivate the mind in many ways, advocating values like generosity, the use of gentle language, the nobility of the ways of wise people, the value of morality and the evils of unwholesome associations. In this and many other aspects, the Jataka stories contribute to the happiness and development of the minds of impressionable ones.

The happiness that they engender goes beyond the mundane to reach the supra mundane. They lead mankind to all that is good in this world and to the ultimate happiness taught by the Buddha.

These stories are adapted based on the collection published in:

*Buddhist Tales For Young & Old Volume 2, stories 51-100, King Fruitful* (New York: Buddhist Literature Society Inc, 1997)  
– Interpretation of Pali Jataka stories by Kurunegoda Piyatissa Maha Thera, as told by Todd Anderson.

The sources used to counter-check when producing this book include:

1. *The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Lives*, ed. E.B. Cowell (London: Pali Text Society, 1981), 6 vols., index – English translation of Pali Jataka stories.
2. *The Ten Perfections*, Ven. Narada Thera (Singapore: Evergreen Buddhist Culture Service, 2002)

The sequence numbers used for the stories are in the same order as *The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Lives*.

**May all beings be well and happy.**

**May the blessings of the Triple Gem be with you always.**

**And may all progress well on the path of the Dharma!**

Yours in the Dharma,  
Sister Esther Thien  
Executive Editor  
Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery  
Dharma Propagation Division  
Awaken Publishing & Design

## **From the Storyteller to the Reader**

When you read or listen to these very old stories, and wonder how much is really true, the Buddha gave some advice that might help. He said that when you listen to what a monk says you should test the meaning, weigh or consider it, and after observation and analysis when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.

**Let us praise the Exalted,  
Worthy, Fully Self-Enlightened One  
and follow the Truth.**



# 51

## **King Goodness the Great** **(Perseverance)**

Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva was born into the royal family of Benares, in northern India. When he became king he was known as King Goodness the Great. He was named so as he was trying to do good all the time, even when the results might not benefit him. For example, he spent most of the royal treasury on the building and running of six houses of charity. In these places, food and aid were given freely to all the poor and needy who came along, even to unknown travellers. Soon, King Goodness the Great became famous for his patience, loving-kindness and compassion. It was said that he loved all beings just like a father loves his young children.

King Goodness also observed certain fasting days and practised the 'Five Precepts', giving up five types of unwholesome actions. These are: destroying life, taking what is not given, doing wrong in sexual ways, speaking falsely, and losing one's mind from alcohol. Because of this, his gentle kindness became purer and purer.

Wishing to harm no one, King Goodness the Great refused even to imprison or injure wrongdoers. Knowing this, one of his high-ranking ministers tried to take advantage of him. He devised a scheme to cheat some of the women in the royal harem. Soon everybody got wind of this, and it was reported to the king.

The king sent for the bad minister and said, "I have investigated and found that you have committed a criminal act. Word of it has spread and you have dishonoured



## Tales of the **Buddha's Former Lives**

---

yourself here in Benares. It would be better for you to go and live somewhere else. You may take all your wealth and your family. Go wherever you like and live happily there. Learn from this lesson.”

The minister took his family and all his belongings and moved to the city of Kosala. Since he was a very clever man, he worked his way up and became a minister of the king there. Soon he became the most trusted adviser to the King of Kosala. “My lord, I came here from Benares. The city of Benares is like a beehive where the bees do not sting! The ruling king is very feeble and weak. With only a very small army you can easily conquer the city and make it yours,” he said to the king one day.

The king doubted this, so he answered, “You are my minister, but you talk like a spy who is leading me into a trap!” “No, my lord. If you don’t believe me, send your best spies to examine what I say. I am not lying. When robbers are brought before the King of Benares, he gives them money, advises them not to take what is not given, and then sets them free,” replied the minister.

The king decided to check if this was true. So he sent some robbers to raid a remote village at the border of Benares. The villagers caught the looters and took them to King Goodness the Great. “Why do you steal and take what is not yours?” asked King Goodness.

The robbers answered, “Your Highness, we are poor people. There is no way we can survive without money. As your kingdom has plenty of workers, there is no work for us to do. So we had to steal in order to survive.” Hearing this, the king gave them gifts of money, advised them to change their ways, and set them free.

When the King of Kosala was told of this, he sent another gang of bandits to the streets of Benares. They too plundered the shops and even killed some of the people. When they were captured and brought to King Goodness, he treated them just as he had treated the first group of robbers.

---

Hearing this, the King of Kosala sent his troops and elephants marching towards Benares.

In those days, the King of Benares had a mighty army which included very brave elephants. There were many ordinary soldiers, and also some who were as huge as giants. It was said that they were capable of conquering the whole of India.

The giant soldiers told King Goodness about the small invading army from Kosala. They asked for permission to attack and kill all of them.

But King Goodness the Great would not send them into battle. He said, “My children, do not fight just so that I may remain as the king. If we destroy the lives of others, we also destroy our own peace of mind. Why should we kill others? Let them have the kingdom if they want it so badly. I do not wish to fight.”

“Our lord, we will fight them ourselves. Don’t worry. Only give us the order,” replied the royal ministers. But again he prevented them.

Meanwhile, the King of Kosala sent him a warning, telling him to give up his kingdom or fight. King Goodness the Great sent this reply back, “I do not want you to fight with me, and you do not want me to fight with you. If you want the country, you can have it. Why should we kill people just to decide who is to be king? What does it matter, even the name of the country itself?”

Hearing this, the ministers came forward and pleaded, “Our lord, let us go out with our mighty army. We will beat them with our weapons and capture all of them. We are much stronger than them. We would not have to kill any of them. And besides, if we surrender the city, the enemy army would surely kill all of us!”

But King Goodness would not be moved. He refused to harm anyone. He replied, “Even if you do not wish to kill, by fighting many will be injured. By accident



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

some may die. No one knows the future — whether our attackers will kill us or not. But we do know whether our present actions are right or wrong. Therefore I will not harm, or cause others to harm anyone!”

Then King Goodness ordered the city gates to be opened for the invaders. He took his ministers to the top floor of the palace and advised them, “Say nothing and try to remain calm.”

The King of Kosala entered the city of Benares easily. Seeing that no one was against him, he surrounded the royal palace. He found that even the palace doors were open. So he and his soldiers entered and went up to the top floor. They captured King Goodness the Great and all his ministers.

They were taken to the cemetery outside the city, and buried up to their necks, standing straight up, with only their heads above the ground. But even while the dirt was being trampled down around his neck, the Great King Goodness remained serene and said nothing.

So great were the discipline and obedience of the ministers to King Goodness that none spoke a word against anyone. But the King of Kosala had no mercy. “Let the jackals do as they please come nightfall!” he barked.

As the sky turned dark, a large band of jackals wandered into the cemetery. They could smell a feast of human flesh waiting for them.

Seeing the approaching jackals, King Goodness and his ministers shouted all at the same time to frighten the jackals away. This happened thrice before the clever jackals realised that these men were doomed and placed there for them to feast upon. No longer afraid, they ignored the shouts and came on boldly. The jackal king walked right up to the face of King Goodness.

---

The king offered his throat to the beast. But before it could bite into him, the good king grabbed hold of the jackal's neck with his teeth. Though the jackal king was not harmed in any way, it howled in fear as King Goodness had gripped its neck so tightly. This frightened the other jackals and they all ran away.

Meanwhile, the jackal king thrashed back and forth, trying madly to free itself from the mighty jaws of the human king. In the process, it loosened the dirt packed around the king's neck and shoulders. King Goodness was able to wiggle himself free from the loosened earth and pull himself up from the hole in the ground when he released the screaming jackal. Then he freed all his frightened ministers.

At that time, it happened that there was a dead body nearby which was lying on the border of the territories claimed by two rival demons. They were arguing over the division of the body, insulting each other in ways that only demons can.

Suddenly, one demon said to the other, "Why are we quarrelling instead of enjoying the corpse? Right over there is King Goodness the Great. He is famous for being a righteous man. He will divide the dead body for us in a fair manner."

They dragged the body to the king and asked him to divide it between them fairly. "My dear friends, I would be glad to divide this for you. But I am really filthy now and in need of a bath. I must clean myself first," he said.

So the two demons used their magic powers to bring scented water, perfume, clothing, ornaments and flowers from the king's own palace in Benares. He bathed, perfumed himself, dressed, and put on the ornaments and flower garlands.

When King Goodness was all refreshed, the demons asked if there was anything else they could do. He replied that he was hungry. So, once again by their magic powers, the demons brought the most delicious flavoured rice in a golden bowl and perfumed drinking water in a golden cup — all taken from the royal palace in Benares.



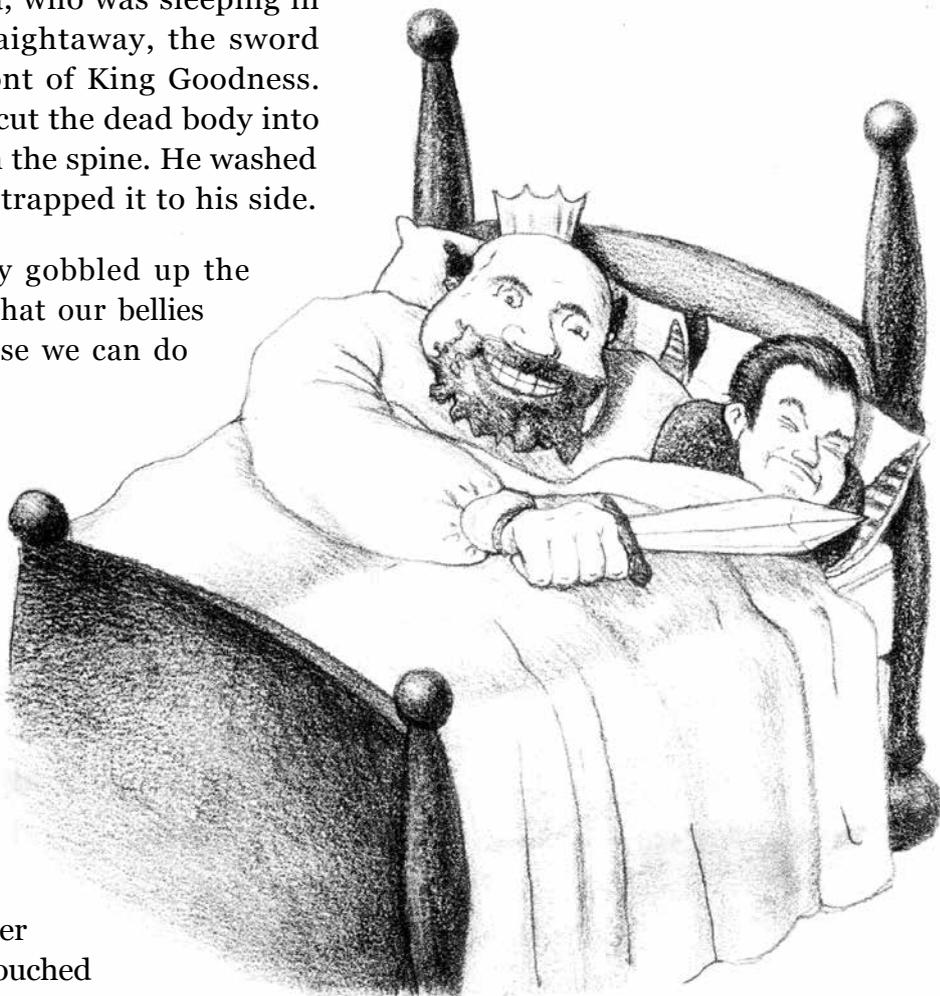
## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

When he was satisfied, King Goodness asked the demons to bring him the Benares' Sword of State that was kept underneath the pillow of the King of Kosala, who was sleeping in the palace in Benares. Straightaway, the sword appeared, by magic, in front of King Goodness. The king used the sword to cut the dead body into two equal halves, right down the spine. He washed the sword of the state and strapped it to his side.

The hungry demons happily gobbled up the fairly divided corpse. "Now that our bellies are full, is there anything else we can do to please you?" they asked King Goodness gratefully.

He replied, "Use your magic and set me in my own bedroom in the palace next to the King of Kosala. In addition, put all my ministers back in their homes." Without a word, the demons did exactly as the king had asked.

The King of Kosala was fast asleep in his royal chamber when King Goodness gently touched



---

his belly with the sword of the state. The king awoke in great fright, and was shocked to see King Goodness leaning over him with a sword in hand in the dim lamplight. He had to rub his eyes to make sure he was not having a nightmare!

Then he asked the great king, “How did you manage to get in here despite the heavy security? You were buried up to your neck in the cemetery — how is it that you are now spotlessly clean, sweet-smelling, dressed in your own royal robes, and decorated with fine jewellery and the loveliest flowers?”

King Goodness recounted the story of his escape from the band of jackals, and how the two demons gratefully helped him with their magic powers.

On hearing the stories, the King of Kosala bowed his head down in shame and cried, “Oh great king, even the ferocious demons recognised your supreme goodness. But I, lucky enough to be born as an intelligent and civilised human being, have failed to see how wonderful your pure goodness is.”

“I promise I will never plot against you again, my lord — you who have attained such perfect harmlessness. And I promise to serve you forever as the truest of friends. Please forgive me, great king.” Then, behaving like a servant, the King of Kosala laid King Goodness the Great down on the royal bed, while he himself slept on a small couch.

The next day, the King of Kosala gathered all his soldiers in the palace courtyard. He publicly praised the King of Benares and asked for his forgiveness. He returned to King Goodness his kingdom and promised that he would always protect the good king. Then he punished his adviser, the dishonourable minister, and returned to Kosala with all his troops and elephants.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

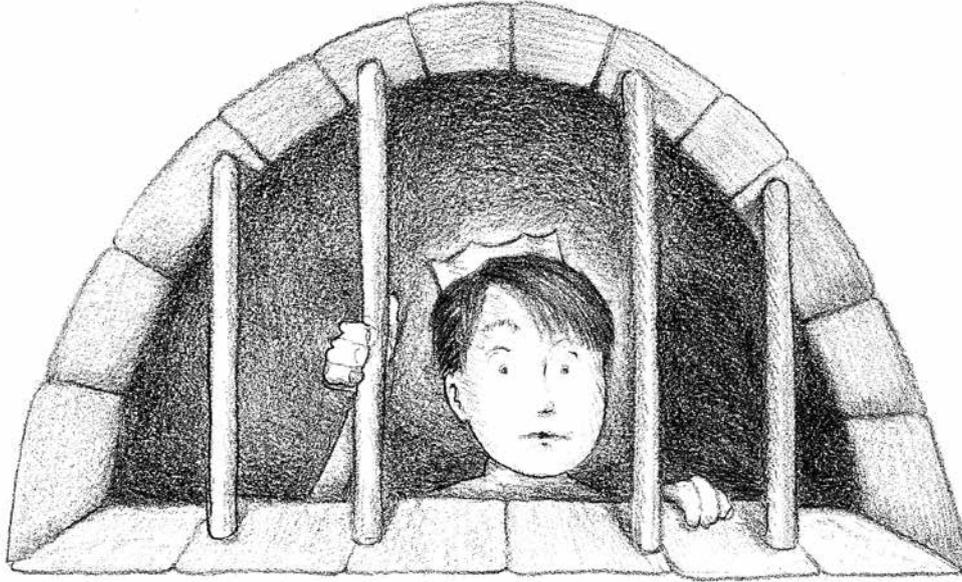
---

Seated majestically on his golden throne, with its legs like those of a gazelle and shaded from the sun by a large pure white royal umbrella, King Goodness the Great taught his loyal subjects this,

*“People of Benares, morality and virtue begin with giving up the five unwholesome actions once and for all. The noblest qualities a human being can have, whether he is a ruler or a subject, are loving-kindness and compassion. One cannot harm another — no matter what the reason or the cost is. And despite the danger, one must persevere until the greatness of the good heart wins in the end.”*

Throughout the rest of his reign, the people of Benares lived peacefully and happily. King Goodness the Great continued to perform wholesome deeds. Eventually he died and was reborn as he deserved.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ Do not harm others in any situation. The good heart wins over all with perseverance.***



52

## **King Fruitful and Queen Sivali** **(Chapter 1. Rebirth of the Bodhisattva)**

Once upon a time, in the city of Mithila, there lived a king who had two sons. The older son was named “Badfruit”, and his younger brother was called “Poorfruit”.

While they were still fairly young, the king made his eldest son the crown prince. He was second in command and next in line to the throne. Prince Poorfruit became the commander of the army.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Eventually, the old king died and Prince Badfruit became the new king. His brother, in turn, became the crown prince.

Before long, one of the servants took a dislike to Crown Prince Poorfruit. He went to King Badfruit and told a fib — that his brother was planning to kill him. At first the king did not believe him. But the servant repeated the lie so many times that the king eventually took it for real and became frightened. So he had Prince Poorfruit put in chains and locked up in the palace dungeon.

“I am a righteous man who does not deserve these chains. I never wanted to kill my brother. I wasn’t even angry with him. So now I shall invoke the power of Truth. If what I say is true, may these chains fall off and the dungeon doors be opened!” thought the prince to himself. Miraculously, the chains broke into pieces, the door opened, and the prince fled to a village on the outskirts. The villagers there recognised him. As they respected him, they helped him, and the king was unable to recapture his younger brother.

Though the crown prince lived in hiding, he became the master of the entire remote region and soon had the command of a large army. “Although I wasn’t an enemy to my brother at first, I must be an enemy to him now,” he thought.

So he took his army and surrounded the city of Mithila, and sent a message to his brother: “I was not your enemy, but you have made me so. Now I have come to wage war against you. You have two choices — either surrender your kingdom or fight.”

King Badfruit decided to go to war. He would do anything to keep his power. Before leaving with his army for the battlefields, he bade farewell to his queen who was pregnant with his child. “My love, no one knows who will win this war. Therefore, if I die, you must protect the child inside you,” he said to her. Then, he bravely went off to war and was quickly slain by the soldiers of his enemy brother.

News of the king’s death spread through the city. The queen disguised herself as a poor, dirty and homeless person. She put on old rags for clothes and smeared herself with dirt. She put some of the king’s gold and her own most precious jewellery into a basket,

---

and covered these with dirty rice that no one would want to steal. Then, she left the palace before sunrise carrying the basket on her head. Nobody recognised her in this attire, and so she left the city by the northern gate. Since she had always lived inside the city, the queen had no idea where to go. She had heard of a city called Campa, thought it might be a good place to settle down, and so sat down at the side of the road and began asking if anyone was going to Campa.

It so happened that the the unborn child the queen was carrying was no ordinary baby. This was not his first life nor his first birth. Millions of years before, he had been a follower of the teachings of a long-forgotten one — a “Buddha”, a fully “Enlightened One”. He had wished with all his heart then to become a Buddha just like his beloved master.

He had been reborn many times — sometimes as poor animals, sometimes as long-living gods and sometimes as human beings. He always tried to learn from his mistakes and develop the “Ten Perfections”, so that he could purify his mind and remove the three root causes of suffering — the poisons of craving, anger and the delusion of a separate self. By practising the Perfections, he would someday be able to replace the poisons with the three purities — non-attachment, loving-kindness and wisdom.

This ‘Great Being’ had been a humble follower of the forgotten Buddha. His goal was to gain the same enlightenment as the Buddha — the experience of complete Truth. People call him a ‘Bodhisattva’, which means ‘Being who seeks Enlightenment for oneself and others’. No one really knows about the millions of lives lived by this great hero. But many stories have been told — including this one about a pregnant queen who was about to give birth to him. After many more rebirths, he became the Buddha who is remembered and loved by all in the world today.

At the time of our story, the Bodhisattva had already achieved the Ten Perfections. So the glory of his coming birth caused a trembling in all the heavenly worlds, including the Heaven of 33 ruled by King Sakka. When he felt the trembling, being a god, he knew it was caused by the unborn baby inside the Queen of Mithila who was in disguise. And



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

he knew this must be a being of great merit, so he decided to go and help out.

King Sakka made a covered carriage with a bed in it, and appeared at the roadside in front of the pregnant queen. He looked just like an ordinary old man. “Does anyone need a ride to Campa?” he called out.

The homeless queen answered, “I wish to go there, kind sir.”

“Come with me then,” said the old man.

Since the queen was about to be due, she was quite large. “I cannot climb up into your carriage. Why don’t you just carry my basket and I will walk behind,” she said.

The old man, the king of the gods, replied, “Never mind! Never mind! I am the cleverest driver around. So don’t worry. Just step into my cart!”

Lo and behold, as she lifted her foot, King Sakka magically caused the ground under her to elevate, and she stepped into the carriage easily. Immediately, she knew this must be a god, and fell fast asleep.

King Sakka drove the cart until he came to a river. He woke the queen up and said, “Wake up, daughter, and bathe in this river. Dress yourself in these fine clothes that I have brought you. Then have some food.” She obeyed him, and then lay down and continued to rest.

When she woke up in the evening, she saw tall houses and walls. “Which city are we in, father?” she asked.

“We are in Campa,” he answered.

“In so short a time? I heard it was a long way to Campa,” she asked again.

“I took a short cut,” replied King Sakka. “You may enter safely through the southern gate of the city. I must continue with my journey,” he replied. So they parted and King Sakka disappeared in the distance, back to his heavenly world.

The queen entered the city and went to an inn. It happened that there was a wise man

---

who lived in Campa. He recited spells and gave advice to help people who were sick or unfortunate. He saw the beautiful queen from a distance when he was on his way to bathe in the river with 500 followers. The great goodness of the unborn one within her gave her a soft, warm glow that only the wise man noticed. At once he took a gentle liking for her, as if she were his own youngest sister. He left his followers outside and went into the inn.

“Sister, which village are you from?” he asked. “I am the queen of King Badfruit of Mithila,” she answered.

“Then why did you come here?”

“My husband was killed by the army of his brother, Prince Poorfruit. I was afraid, so I ran away to protect my unborn baby.”

“Do you have any relatives in this city?” asked the wise man.

“No sir,” she answered.

“Don’t worry. I come from a rich family and I myself am rich too. I will take care of you just as I would for my own younger sister. Now you must touch my feet and call me ‘brother’.”

When she had done this, the followers came inside. The wise man explained to them that she was his long lost youngest sister. He instructed his closest followers to take her to his home in a covered cart, and to inform his wife to look after her.

The followers did exactly as they were told. The wise man’s wife welcomed her, gave her a hot bath, and made her rest in bed.

After bathing in the river, the wise man returned home. At dinner time, he asked his sister to join them and invited her to stay in his house.

A few days later, the queen gave birth to a wonderful little baby boy. She named him “Fruitful”. She told the wise man this was the name of the boy’s grandfather, who had once been the King of Mithila.



## **(Chapter 2. Gaining Power )**

The baby soon grew up into a fine young boy. As his friends often made fun of him for being fatherless, he asked his mother who his father was. She told him to pay no heed to what the other children said, and revealed to him that his father was the dead King Badfruit of Mithila, and how the King's brother, Prince Poorfruit, had stolen the throne. After that, it didn't bother him when others called him "son of a widow".

Before he turned 16, bright young Fruitful had already mastered all there was to know about religion, literature and the skills of a warrior. He also grew and became a very handsome young man.

One day, he decided it was time to regain his rightful crown, which had been stolen by his uncle. So he went up to his mother and asked, "Do you have anything precious that belongs to my father?"

"Of course! I did not escape empty-handed. I brought pearls, jewels and diamonds so there is no need for you to work. Go directly and take back your kingdom!" she exclaimed.

"No, mother, I will take only half. I will use that money, sail to Burma, the land of gold, and make my fortune there."

"No, my son, it is too dangerous to sail abroad. There is plenty of fortune here!"

Being a filial son, he answered, "No, mother, I must leave half with you so that you can live in comfort as a queen should." Soon after, he departed for Burma.

On the same day that Prince Fruitful set sail, his uncle King Poorfruit became very ill. He was so sick that he could no longer leave his bed.

Meanwhile, on the ship bound for Burma there were some 350 people. It sailed for seven days before a violent storm blew suddenly and damaged the ship. All except the prince cried out in fear and prayed for help to their various gods. But the Bodhisattva did not cry out in fear or pray to any god for help. Instead he helped himself.

First, he filled his belly with concentrated butter mixed with sugar, since he didn't know when he could take his next meal again. Next, he soaked his clothes in oil to protect himself from the cold ocean water and help him stay afloat. When the ship began to sink, he clung onto the tallest part of the ship, the mast, for dear life. As the deck went underwater, he climbed up the mast.

Meanwhile, his trembling, frightened shipmates were sucked underwater and gobbled up by hungry fishes and huge turtles. The seawater all around turned a bloody red.

As the ship sank, Prince Fruitful reached the top of the mast, and jumped far out into the sea to avoid being devoured by the marine animals that had collected near the wrecked ship. It was said that the very same moment Prince Fruitful escaped the snapping jaws of the fishes and turtles, King Poorfruit died in his bed.





## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

After his mighty leap from the top of the mast, the prince fell into the emerald-coloured sea. For seven days and seven nights, he swam tirelessly. On the eighth day, as usual, even in the deep sea, he observed the fasting day of the full moon by washing his mouth with salt water and practising the “Eight Precepts” to purify himself.

Long ago in the very distant past, the gods of the four directions had appointed a goddess to be the protector of all oceans. Her duty was to protect the good, especially those who honour and respect their mothers and elders.

Prince Fruitful was one such person who deserved the protection of the ocean goddess. Unfortunately, the goddess had neglected her duties as she was too busy indulging herself in heavenly pleasures.

When she finally remembered to watch over the oceans, she saw the prince struggling for his life after swimming for seven days and seven nights in the emerald sea. “I will lose favour with the other gods if I let Prince Fruitful die in the ocean,” she thought.

So she appeared before him in all her splendour and beauty. Wishing to learn from the Bodhisattva, the goddess tested him by saying that he was only making a foolish attempt in swimming so zealously with no shore in sight.

“Oh lovely goddess, I know that effort is the way of the world. So long as I’m in this world with an ounce of strength left, I will try and try, even in mid-ocean with no shore to be seen,” came the reply of the prince when he saw the goddess.

To test him further, the goddess said discouragingly, “This vast ocean stretches much farther than you can see, with nary a shore in sight. Your effort is useless — for here you must die!”

Undeterred, the prince replied, “Dear goddess, how can effort be useless? There is nothing disgraceful in making an attempt even if one might fail. Only time will tell if one can succeed

---

or not, but the value is in the effort itself in the present moment. Disgrace lies in making no effort at all through laziness. One who stops trying only causes his own downfall!”

Pleased with his lofty principles and perseverance, the goddess saved him from a watery grave and safely led him to Mithila.

Meanwhile in Mithila, the dead King Poorfruit had left behind an only daughter called Princess Sivali. She was well-educated and wise.

When the king was dying, the ministers asked, “Who will be the next king, my lord?” “Whoever can satisfy my daughter Sivali, whoever recognises the head of the royal square bed, whoever can string the bow that only a thousand men can string, or whoever can find the 16 hidden treasures will be the next king,” he answered and took in his last breath.

After the funeral of the king, the ministers began their search for a new king. First, they looked for someone who could satisfy the princess, and so called for the general of the army.

Princess Sivali wished that Mithila could be ruled by a strong leader, so she decided to test him. She told him to come to her, and immediately he ran up the royal staircase to look for her. She said, “To prove your strength, run back and forth in the palace.” Thinking only of pleasing her, the general ran back and forth until she motioned for him to stop. Then she demanded, “Now jump up and down.” Again, the general did as he was told without a second thought. Finally, the princess asked him to massage her feet, and he sat in front of her and began rubbing her feet obediently.

When he did that, she kicked him down the royal staircase. “This fool has no common sense. He follows orders blindly without a second thought. He has no strength of character and definitely lacks the will power needed to rule a kingdom. So throw him out of here at once,” said the princess to her ladies-in-waiting.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

The same thing happened with the treasurer, the cashier, the keeper of the royal seal and the royal swordsman. The princess found them all to be unworthy fools.

The ministers decided to give up on the princess and find someone who could string the bow that only a thousand men can string. But again they could find no one. Similarly, they couldn't locate anybody who knew the head of the royal square bed, or who could find the 16 treasures.

Worried that they would not find a suitable king, the ministers consulted the royal family priest. "Calm down, my friends. We will send out the royal festival carriage. The one it stops for will be able to rule over all India," assured the priest.

They decorated the carriage and yoked the four most beautiful royal horses to it. The high priest sprinkled the carriage with holy water from a sacred golden pitcher. "Now go forth, riderless carriage, and find the worthy one with enough merit to rule the kingdom," he proclaimed.

The horses pulled the carriage around the palace and then down the main avenue of Mithila. They were followed by the four armies — the elephants, chariots, cavalry and foot soldiers.

The most powerful politicians of the city expected the procession to stop in front of their houses. But instead it left the city by the eastern gate and went straight to the mango garden. Then it stopped in front of the sacred stone where Prince Fruitful was sleeping.

"Let us test this sleeping man to see if he is worthy to be the king. If he is the one, he will not be frightened by the noise of the drums and instruments of all four armies," suggested the chief priest. And what a lot of noise they made, but the prince just turned over on his other side and remained fast asleep. So they tried again, creating a din even louder than the first. Still, the prince simply rolled over from side to side in slumber.

---

The head priest examined the soles of the sleeping prince and exclaimed, “This man can rule not only Mithila, but the whole world in all four directions.” So he woke the prince up and said, “My lord, arise, we beg you to be our king.”

Prince Fruitful replied, “What happened to your king?”

“He died,” said the priest.

“Did he have any children?” asked the prince.

“Only a daughter, Princess Sivali,” answered the priest. Then Prince Fruitful agreed to be their new king.

The chief priest spread jewels on the sacred stone. After bathing, the prince sat among the jewels. He was sprinkled with perfumed water from the gold anointing bowl. Then he was crowned as King Fruitful. The new king rode in the royal chariot, followed by a magnificent procession, back to the city of Mithila and the palace.

Princess Sivali still wished to test the new king. So she sent a man to tell him she wished for him to come at once. But King Fruitful simply ignored the messenger and continued to inspect the palace with its furnishings and works of art.

The messenger reported this to the princess and she sent him back two more times with the same results. “This is a man who knows his own mind and is not easily swayed,” he said to the princess. “He paid scant attention to your words as we pay to the grass when we step on it!”

Soon the new king arrived at the throne room, where the princess was waiting. He walked steadily up the royal staircase — not hurrying, not slowing down, but dignified like a strong young lion. The princess was so impressed by his attitude that she went to him, respectfully give him her hand, and led him to the throne. He then gracefully sat on the throne.

“Did the previous king leave behind any advice for testing the next king?” he asked the royal ministers.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

“Yes, my lord,” they said, “Whoever can satisfy his daughter, Princess Sivali, will be the next king.”

The young king responded, “You have seen the princess give me her hand. Are there any more tests?”

“Whoever recognises the head of the royal square bed will be the next king, my lord,” they said. The king took a golden hairpin from his head and gave it to Princess Sivali.

“Put this away for me,” he said to her.

Without thinking, she put it on the head of the bed. As if he had not heard it the first time, King Fruitful asked the ministers to repeat the question. When they did, he pointed to the golden hairpin.

“Is there another test?” asked the king again.

“Yes, my lord,” replied the ministers. “Whoever can string the bow that only a thousand men can string will be the next king.” When they brought the bow, the king strung it without even getting up from the throne. He did it as easily as a weaver woman who bends the rod that untangles cotton for spinning.

“Are there any more tests?” the king asked yet again.

“Whoever can find the 16 hidden treasures will be the next king. This is the last test, my lord.” replied the ministers.

“What is the first on the list?” he asked. They said, “The first is the treasure of the rising sun.” King Fruitful realised that there must be some clues to help locate each treasure. He knew that a Silent Buddha is often compared to the glory of the sun. So he asked, “Where did the old king go to meet and offer food to the Silent Buddhas?” When they showed him the place, he had them dig up the first treasure.

---

The second was locating the treasure of the setting sun. King Fruitful realised this must be where the old king had said goodbye to the Silent Buddhas. In the same manner he found all the hidden treasures.

The people were happy that their new king had passed all the tests. As his first official act, he had houses of charity built, one in the centre of the city and one at each of the four gates. He donated the entire 16 treasures to the poor and needy.

He also sent for his mother and the kind, wise man of Campa, giving both of them the honour which they deserved. A great celebration was held, and all the people of the kingdom came to Mithila to celebrate the restoration of the royal line. They decorated the city with fragrant flower garlands and incense, and provided cushioned seats for visitors. There were fruits, sweets, drinks and cooked food everywhere. Musicians and dancing girls were hired by the ministers and the wealthy to entertain the new king. And there were also beautiful poems recited by wise men, and blessings chanted by holy men.

Seated on his throne under the royal white umbrella, King Fruitful appeared as majestic as the heavenly god King Sakka in the midst of the grand celebration. He remembered his great effort while struggling in the ocean against all odds. He was rewarded for his perseverance, self-reliance and indomitable energy; while those who merely prayed perished miserably. This filled him with such joy that he spoke this rhyme,

*“Things happen unexpectedly, and prayers may not come true,  
But effort brings results that neither thoughts nor prayers can do.”*

After the wonderful celebration, King Fruitful ruled Mithila with perfect righteousness. He also humbly gave honour and alms food to the Silent Buddhas — the Enlightened Ones who lived in a time when their teachings could not be understood.

In time, Queen Sivali gave birth to a son. He was named Prince Longlife, as the wise men of the court saw signs of a long and glorious life ahead of him. When he grew up, King Fruitful appointed him second-in-command.



### **(Chapter 3. Giving Up Power )**

Long, long ago when this story took place, it happened at a time when people led extremely long lives, even as long as 10,000 years! In this story, King Fruitful had ruled for about 7,000 years when one day the royal gardener brought him an especially wonderful collection of fruits and flowers. He enjoyed them so much that he wanted to visit the garden. So the gardener arranged and decorated the garden with care, and invited him to tour it.

The king set out on a royal elephant, followed by his entire court and many of the ordinary people of Mithila. When he entered through the garden gate, he saw two beautiful mango trees. One tree was laden with luscious perfectly ripe mangoes, while the other was completely empty of fruits. He took one of the fruits and enjoyed its delectable sweet taste. He decided to savour more of the delicious mangoes on his return trip.

When the people noticed that the king had eaten the first fruit, they knew the mangoes were safe and edible. They scrambled for the fruits and in a flash all mangoes had been eaten. Greedy for the taste of the mangoes, some even broke the twigs and stripped the leaves, searching for more when the fruits were gone.

When King Fruitful returned, he was surprised to see the tree stripped bare and nearly destroyed. The fruitless tree, however, remained as beautiful as before, its bright green leaves shining in the sunlight.

“What happened here?” the king asked his ministers.

“Since your majesty had eaten the first fruit, the people felt free to devour the rest. Searching for more when all the mangoes had been eaten, they destroyed the leaves and

---

twigs. The fruitless tree was spared as it had no fruits in the first place,” they explained.

This saddened the king. He thought, “This fruitful tree was destroyed, but the fruitless one was spared. My kingship is like the fruitful tree — with greater power and possessions, the fear of losing them is also greater. The holy life of a simple monk, on the other hand, is like the fruitless tree — giving up power and possessions leads to freedom from fear.”

After that, the Bodhisattva decided to give up all his wealth and power, to leave the glory of kingship behind and abandon the constant task of protecting his position. He decided it would be better to channel all his effort into leading the pure life of a simple monk. Only then could he discover deep lasting happiness, which would spread to others as well.

He returned to the city. Standing next to the palace gate, he called for the commander of the army and said, “From today onwards, no one is to see my face except a servant to bring me my food and another one for my water and toothbrush. You and the ministers will continue to rule according to the old law, and I will live as a simple monk on the top floor of the palace.”

After some time, his people began to wonder about the change in him. “Our king has changed. He no longer speaks to us, or watches bull fights and elephant fights, or visits his garden to admire the swans in the ponds. Why does he not speak to us?” they asked the servants who brought the king his food and water. “Did he mention anything to you?”

“He is trying to keep his mind from thinking about desirable things, so it will be peaceful and wholesome like the minds of his old friends, the Silent Buddhas. He is trying to develop the purity of the ones who own nothing but good qualities. Once we even heard him say out loud, “I can think only of the Silent Buddhas, who are free from chasing ordinary pleasures. Their freedom makes them truly happy — who will take me to where they live?” replied the servants to the crowd that had gathered in the palace courtyard.



## Tales of the **Buddha's Former Lives**

---

Time flew by, and soon four months had passed. At that point, King Fruitful realised there were too many distractions in the beautiful kingdom of Mithila that prevented him from finding inner peace and Truth. So he decided to give up everything once and for all, become a forest monk and live in the Himalayan Mountains.

He had the yellow robes and begging bowl of a monk brought to him. Then he ordered the royal barber to shave his head and beard. He planned to leave the palace early the next day.

Meanwhile, Queen Sivali had heard about his plans. She gathered 700 of his most beautiful queens and took them to see him. They passed by King Fruitful while he was coming down the stairs, but didn't recognise him dressed as a monk. When they got to the top floor, Queen Sivali found it empty, with only the king's shaven hair and beard still there. Instantly, she realised that the unknown monk she had seen earlier was her husband.

All 701 queens, in their lovely veils and richest finery, ran down the stairs to the palace courtyard and followed the king-turned-monk on his trail. Upon Queen Sivali's instructions, they all let down their hair and tried to entice the king to stay. They sobbed and pleaded. All the people of the city also became very upset and started following the king around when they heard of his intention to renounce his throne. "We heard that our king wants to live the life of a simple monk. How can we ever find such a good and fair ruler again?" they wept.

But all the crying and begging from his queens and people did not change the mind of the Bodhisattva, for he had decided and was determined to stick to it. Finally, Queen Sivali stopped crying.

Seeing that the beautiful queens from the harem did not stop her husband, she went to the commander of the army and instructed him to set fire to the slum houses and abandoned buildings that were in the king's path, and to all the bushes and wet leaves

---

in different parts of the city. She was hoping that this would create a lot of smoke and stop the king from leaving.

“All Mithila is burning, my lord! The beautiful buildings with their valuable art works, precious metals, jewels and treasures are all being destroyed. Return, oh king, and save your riches before it is too late,” cried Queen Sivali at the feet of the king.

“They belong to others. I own nothing now, so I’m not afraid of losing anything. My mind is at peace,” replied the Bodhisattva.

With that, he left the city through the northern gate, still followed by all 701 queens. According to Queen Sivali’s instructions, they showed him villages being robbed and destroyed. There were armed men attacking, while others seemed wounded and dead. But what looked like blood was really just red dye, and the dead were only pretending. The king knew it was a trick, since there were no actual robbers and plunderers in the kingdom in the first place.

Suddenly, the king stopped and asked his ministers, “Whose kingdom is this?”

“Yours, oh lord,” they answered.

“In that case, anyone who crosses this line will be punished,” he ordered as he drew a line across the road. No one, including Queen Sivali, dared to cross the line. But when she saw that the king continued down the road, with his back to her, she was grief-stricken. Beating her chest she fell across the line. Once the line was crossed, the whole crowd lost its fear and followed her.

The entire crowd headed by the army and Queen Sivali kept on with their journey tailing behind King Fruitful, who continued for many miles towards the Himalayas in the north.

Meanwhile, there was a monk named Narada, who lived in a golden cave in the Himalayas. He was a very wise man. By great mental effort he had gained supernatural powers that



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

only the holiest men are said to have. After meditating in a wonderful trance for some time he suddenly shouted, “What happiness! Oh what happiness!”

Then, using his special powers, he scanned over all India to see if anyone else was sincerely seeking that same happiness and freedom from all distractions of the world. He saw only King Fruitful, the Bodhisattva who would someday become the Buddha. He saw that he had given up all his earthly powers. And yet he was still being blocked and hindered by the crowd following him from his previous worldly life. In order to help and encourage the king, he magically flew through the air and floated in front of the king.

“Oh monk, why is this crowd, with all its noise, following you?” he asked King Fruitful. The king replied, “I have given up the power of kingship and left the world for good. That is why my former subjects follow me, even though I left them happily.”

“Don’t be too confident, oh monk. You haven’t succeeded in leaving the world yet, for there are still obstacles within you. These are the ‘Five Hindrances’ — the desire for ordinary pleasures of sight, sound and so forth, the desire to harm others, laziness, nervous worrying, and unreasonable doubts. Therefore, practise the Perfections, be patient, and don’t think either too much or too little of yourself,” advised the holy monk.

He finished by saying, “I give you my blessing — may goodness, knowledge and Truth protect you on your way.” Then he disappeared and reappeared back in his golden cave.

Due to this wise advice, King Fruitful became even less concerned with the crowd outside, realising that the greatest obstacles or hindrances, were the ones inside him.

Meanwhile, Queen Sivali fell at his feet once again. “Oh king, hear the wails of your subjects. Comfort them by crowning your son to rule in your place if you need to leave for good,” she pleaded.

---

“I have already left my subjects, friends, relatives and my country behind. Have no fear, the nobles of Mithila have trained Prince Longlife well, and they will protect and support both of you.”

“But oh king, by becoming a monk, you are leaving me without a husband. What a shame! What am I to do?” she continued.

“Only be careful not to teach the prince any unwholesome thoughts, words or deeds. Otherwise you will bring painful results to yourself,” he advised.

As the sun set, the queen made camp while the king went into the forest to sleep at the foot of a tree. The next day she continued to follow him, bringing the army with her as they approached a small city.

It happened that, while the Bodhisattva was travelling, a man in the city had bought a fine piece of meat from a butcher. He had placed it on a table to cool after cooking it. But a stray dog grabbed and ran off with it. The man chased after the dog to the southern gate of the city before giving up because he was too tired to continue.

This dog happened to cross the path of King Fruitful and Queen Sivali. Frightened by them, he dropped the meat on the road. Seeing that it was a good piece of meat and that the real owner was unknown, King Fruitful cleaned the meat, put it in his begging bowl and ate it.

Queen Sivali, who was used to eating the delicacies of the palace, was disgusted and said to him, “Even at the point of death, an upper-class person would not eat the leftovers of a dog! Eating such disgusting food shows you are completely unworthy!”

“It is your own vanity that keeps you from seeing the value of this meat. If rightfully obtained, all food is pure and wholesome!” replied King Fruitful.

As they continued towards the city gate, the good king thought, “Queen Sivali keeps following me. This is a bad thing for a monk. I must find a way to teach her that she must go.”



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Just then they came upon some children who were playing. Among them was a girl with a bracelet on one wrist and two on the other. Believing that she was a wise child, the king asked her, “My child, why is it that one arm of yours makes noise with every movement, while the other does not?”

The little girl replied, “Oh monk, it’s because on one arm there are two bracelets, while on the other there is only one. When there are two, the second knocks against the first and creates the noise. The arm with only one bracelet, however, remains silent. So if you want to be happy, you must learn to be content when you are alone.”

The Bodhisattva said to the queen, “Did you hear the wise words of this child? As a monk I would be ashamed if I allow you to stay with me in front of her. So be on your way, we shall part here. We are husband and wife no more! Goodbye!”

The queen agreed and they took separate paths. But she became grief-stricken once again and soon returned to follow the king. They entered the city together, so he could collect alms food.

They came to the house of an arrow-maker. They watched him as he wetted a red-hot arrow, and straightened the shaft by gazing down at it with one eye shut. The king asked, “My friend, why do you view the arrow with only one eye open when making it?”

“With both eyes open, the wide view of the second eye is distracting. Only by focusing and concentrating my view through one eye can I truly produce a straight arrow. So likewise if you want to be happy, you must learn to be content when you are alone,” answered the arrow-maker.

The king collected his alms food and then they left the city. “Did you hear what that craftsman said?” he asked the queen. “It is the same word of wisdom. As a monk I would be ashamed if I continue to let you stay with me in front of him. So be on your way and I’ll go mine. We are husband and wife no more! Goodbye!” But still she followed him.



Thus, the Bodhisattva cut a stalk of tall grass and said to her, “Just as the two pieces of this grass stalk cannot be joined anymore, I will not join you again in the marriage bed! We can never be together again as husband and wife. Like a full stalk of uncut grass, live on alone, my ex-wife Sivali.”

The queen went mad with grief and shock when she heard her husband say this. She beat herself with both hands until she fell to the ground completely unconscious. The Bodhisattva quickly left the roadway, erased his footsteps and disappeared into the jungle.

First, he had given up the power and wealth of a monarch. Now he had given up the power and desires of a husband. At last, he was free to follow the path of a Truth-seeking wandering monk. He made his way to the Himalayas and in only one week was able to develop special mental powers. Never again did he return to the ordinary world.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Meanwhile, the royal ministers, who had been following the queen from a distance, tried to revive her when they discovered that she had fainted. “Where is my husband, the king?”, she asked when she was conscious again. “We don’t know, your majesty. We only saw you unconscious on the ground when we arrived,” they replied. The queen panicked and immediately ordered a search. They looked and looked, but of course he was gone.

Months and years later, Queen Sivali realised she was no longer angry, jealous or vengeful towards her ex-husband who was now a monk. Instead, she admired him more than ever, even more than when she first gave him her hand and led him to the throne during their first meeting, for she had recovered from her fear and grief.

She also had four monuments erected in honour of the courageous King Fruitful. They were built at the places where he had spoken to the floating holy man Narada, where he had eaten the good meat left behind by the dog, and where he had conversations with the little girl and the arrow-maker.

Then she had Prince Longlife crowned as the new king in the royal garden next to the two mango trees. Together with the army and crowds of followers, they returned to the city of Mithila.

Queen Sivali had learnt something by following and finally losing her husband King Fruitful. She too had tasted freedom!

The wise lady gave up her royal duties and retired to meditate in the garden by the mango trees. Eventually, through her efforts, she achieved a high mental state and was reborn in a heavenly world.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ It’s easier to gain power than to give it up.***

# 53

## A Gang of Drunkards (Sobriety)

Once upon a time, when Brahmadata was king, the Bodhisattva was born in a wealthy family in Benares and became the richest man there.

At that time, there was a gang of drunkards who roamed the streets. All they ever thought about was how to get alcohol, the addictive substance they felt they couldn't live without.

One day, when their pockets were emptied completely, they decided to rob the richest man in Benares. But they didn't realise he was a Bodhisattva and so wouldn't be so easy to fool!

They discussed and planned to brew some 'Mickey Finn'. They would then lace the drink secretly with sleeping drugs before offering it to the rich man. Once the drugs took effect, they would rob him of all his wealth, jewellery and luxurious clothes.

In order to carry out their scheme, they set up a temporary little roadside bar. They poured their last bit of liquor into a bottle, and mixed in some strong sleeping pills.





## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Later, when the rich man was on his way to the palace, one of the alcoholics called out, “Honourable sir, why not start your day right — by having a drink with us? The first one is on the house!” Then he poured a glass of the drugged liquor.

But the Bodhisattva did not drink any form of alcohol. Nevertheless, he wondered why these drunkards were so generous with their favourite drink. It just wasn't like them.

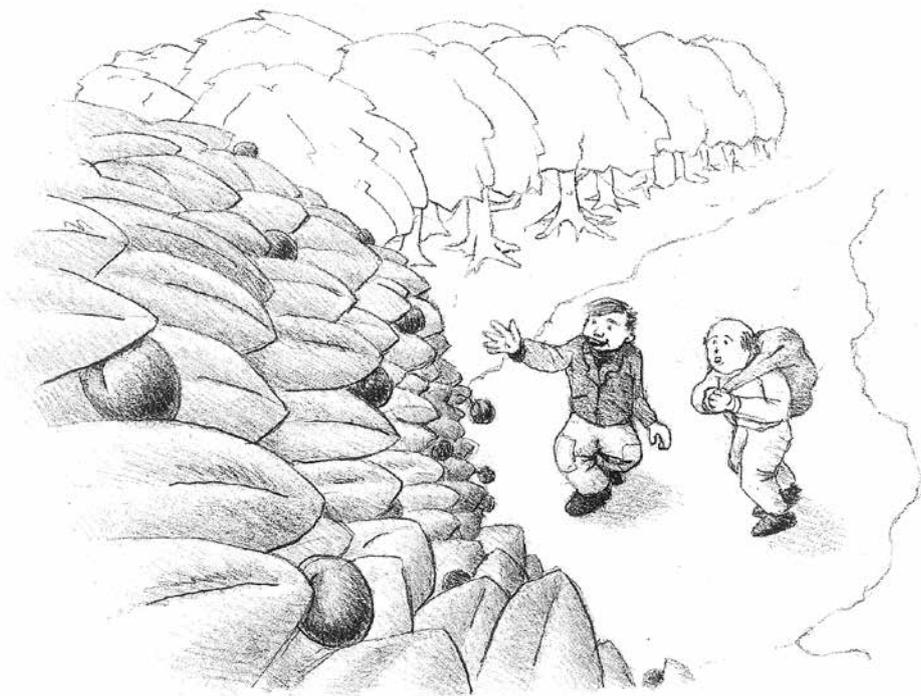
He realised it must be some kind of a trick. So he decided to teach them a lesson and said, “It would be an insult to appear before the king in a drunken state, or with even the slightest smell of liquor on my breath. But please be so kind as to wait for me here. I'll see you again when I return from the palace.”

The drunkards were disappointed but they decided to be patient and wait. Later that day, the rich man came back to the little roadside bar. The alcoholics were getting desperate for they had not had a sip the entire day. They called him over and said, “Honourable sir, why not celebrate your visit to the king by having a drink of this fine liquor. Remember, the first one is free!”

The rich man peered hard at the liquor bottle and glass and then replied, “I don't trust you. That bottle and glass of liquor are exactly as they were this morning. If it were as good as you say so, you would have tasted some yourselves by now. In fact, you would have drunk it all! I'm no fool. You must have spiked the drink.”

The richest man in Benares went on his way, and the gang of drunkards went back to their plotting and scheming.

***THE MORAL IS*** ⇒ ***Stay sober at all times, and always keep your common sense with you.***



54

## The Whatnot Tree (Prudence)

Once upon a time, there was a caravan leader. He went from country to country selling various goods. His caravans usually had at least 500 bullock carts.

One day, on one of these trips, he came to a very thick forest. Before entering it, he gathered all the members of the caravan together and warned, “My friends, poisonous plants and



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

trees are known to grow in this forest. Therefore, be careful to avoid all poisonous trees, fruits, leaves, flowers and honeycombs. Do not eat any fruit, leaf, flower or other plant parts without asking me first.” Everyone nodded and promised to take great care.

Now there was a village near the outskirts of the forest, and just outside that village stood a tree called the ‘whatnot tree’. Its trunk, branches, leaves, flowers and fruits looked just like those of a mango tree. It was so similar that even the colour, shape, smell and taste of the fruit resembled closely to those of a mango. But unlike the mango, the whatnot fruit was an extremely poisonous fruit!

Some who were ahead of the caravan came upon the whatnot tree. They were all hungry, and the whatnot fruits looked like delicious, ripe mangoes. So before anyone could say a word, some started eating the fruits, without a second thought.

Others remembered the leader’s warning, but thinking this was just a different breed of mango tree and not wishing to be left out from the fruit feast, they too devoured the fruits.

Fortunately, some who were wiser than the rest decided it would be safer to heed the warning of the caravan leader. Although they didn’t know it, their leader was actually a Bodhisattva.

When the leader arrived at the tree, those who had waited and not touched the fruits asked, “Sir, what is this tree? Is it safe to eat these fruits?”

“No, no. This may look like a mango tree, but it isn’t. It is a poisonous whatnot tree. Don’t even touch it!” replied their leader after careful investigation.

Those who had eaten the whatnot fruit were terrified. “Try and vomit up all you have just eaten now,” said their leader. When they had all thrown up the poisonous whatnot fruit, their leader gave them four kinds of sweet foods to eat — raisins, cane sugar paste, sweet yogurt and bee’s honey to refresh their taste buds.

Unfortunately, the greediest and most foolish ones who had thoughtlessly eaten the

---

poisonous fruits without a second thought could not be saved. It was too late, for the poison had started to spread.

In the past, when caravans camped near the whatnot tree, people consumed its fruits and died in their sleep. Local villagers would bury the bodies in a secret hiding place the next morning, and then divide the merchandise and bullock carts of the caravans among themselves.

They expected the same to happen this time. So at dawn the next day, the villagers raced towards the whatnot tree.

“The bullocks will be mine,” some said.

“I want the carts and wagons,” shouted others.

“And I will take the loads of merchandise,” said the last group.

But when they reached the whatnot tree, they were surprised to see that most of the people in the caravan were still well and alive. “How did you know this is not a mango tree?” the villagers asked breathlessly.

“We did not know,” came the reply. “But our leader had warned us ahead of time, and when he saw it he knew,” continued the caravan members.

“Oh wise one, how did you know this is not a mango tree?” asked the villagers again, this time to the caravan leader.

He replied, “I knew because, firstly, this tree is easy to climb. Secondly, it is located right next to a village. So if the fruits on such a tree remain unpicked, they cannot be safe to eat!”

Everyone was amazed that such lifesaving wisdom was based on such simple common sense. Having finished his words, the caravan continued on its journey safely.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ The wise are led by common sense; fools follow only hunger.***



55

## Prince Five-Weapons and the Sticky-Hair Monster (The Diamond Weapon)

Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva was born a prince, heir to the King and Queen of Benares. 800 fortune tellers were invited to the palace on the day of his naming, and were given their hearts' desires as presents. They were asked to tell the fortune of the newborn prince, so that they could find a good name for him.

One of the fortune tellers was an expert in reading the marks on the body. He said, "My lord, this is a being of great merit. He will become the next king."

---

The fortune tellers were very clever. They told the king and queen only good things. “Your son will be trained and become the most skilful person in the use of five weapons. He will be famous and stand peerless as the greatest master of all the five weapons throughout India,” they said. Based on this, the king and queen named their son ‘Prince Five-Weapons’.

When the prince turned 16, the king decided to send him to college. “Go, my son, to the city of Takkasila. Find a world-famous teacher and learn all you can from him. Give him these one thousand gold coins as payment,” he said and sent him on his way.

Prince Five-Weapons studied very hard under the tutelage of the world-famous teacher of Takkasila, and soon became his best student. When the teacher had taught him all that he knew, he gave the prince a special graduation award. He gave a gift of five weapons and then sent him back to Benares.

On his way home, he came to a forest which was haunted by a monster. “Young man, don’t venture into the forest,” the local people warned Prince Five-Weapons. “There is a monstrous demon called Sticky-Hair living inside the forest. He kills everyone he sees!”

But the prince was fearless like a young lion, so he journeyed deep into the forest, until he came upon the dreadful monster. It was as tall as a tree, with a head as gigantic as the roof of a house and eyes as large as dishes. It had two huge yellow tusks sticking out of its gaping mouth, which was filled with ugly brown teeth. Its enormous belly was covered with white spots, and its hands and feet were blue.

The monster roared and growled at the prince, “Where are you going in my forest, little man? You look like a tasty morsel to me. I’m going to gobble you up!”

The prince had just graduated from college and won the highest award from his teacher. So he thought he knew just about everything, and that he could do just about anything. He replied, “Oh fierce demon, I am Prince Five-Weapons, and I have come on purpose to find you. I dare you to attack me! I will kill you easily with my first



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

two weapons — my bow and poison-tipped arrows.”

He put a poisoned arrow in his bow and shot it straight at the monster. But the arrow just stuck to its glue-like hair, without hurting it at all. Then the prince shot again and again, one after another, until all 50 poison-tipped arrows he had with him were sent flying towards the demon. However, like the first arrow, they too glued fast to the hair of the beast called Sticky-Hair without harming it in the least.

The beast shook its body, from its ugly rooftop-sized head down to its blue coloured feet, and all the arrows fell to the ground.

Prince Five-Weapons drew his third weapon, a 33-inch-long sword, and plunged it into his enemy. But, like the arrows, his sword simply got trapped in the thick coat of sticky hair. Next, the prince hurled his spear at the monster. This also just wedged in its hair.

Then he attacked with the last of his five weapons, his club. This, too, did not hurt the monster but just stayed fixed onto its gooey sticky coat of hair.

“Hey you, monster! Haven’t you ever heard of me, Prince Five-Weapons? I have more than just my five weapons. I also have the strength and the agility of a young man. I will crush you into pieces,” the prince yelled.

He hit Sticky-Hair with his right fist, just like a boxer, but his hand simply got caught in the hairy coat, and he couldn’t remove it. He tried again with his left fist, but this too just jammed fast to the gooey mess of hair. Unfazed, he kicked it with his right foot and then his left, just like a martial arts master, but they also got stuck. Finally, he head-butted against it as hard as he could, just like a wrestler, but, lo and behold, his head got trapped as well.

Even though he was glued to the hairy monster in five places and hanging down from the monster’s coat, the prince was not afraid at all.

---

Sticky-Hair thought, “This is very strange indeed. He is more like a lion than a man. Even while in the grasp of a ferocious monster like me, he does not tremble with fear. All this while that I’ve been killing people in this forest, I’ve never met anyone as great as this prince. Why isn’t he afraid of me?”

Since Prince Five-Weapons was not like any other ordinary men, Sticky-Hair was afraid to eat him right away. Instead, it asked him, “Young man, why aren’t you afraid of death?”

“Why should I be afraid of death? There is no doubt that anyone who is born will definitely die!” the prince replied.

“The five weapons given to me by my teacher have been useless. Even the lion-like strength of my youth is useless too. I must go beyond my teacher, beyond my youth and my body, to the weapon inside my mind — the only weapon I need,” thought the Bodhisattva to himself.

Then the prince continued, “There’s one small detail, oh monstrous one, that I didn’t tell you about. In my belly is my secret weapon, a diamond weapon that you cannot digest. It will cut your intestines into pieces if you are foolish enough to swallow me. So if I die — you will die too! That’s why I’m not afraid of you.”

In this way, the prince used his greatest inner strength in a manner that Sticky-Hair could easily understand. He realised that the greatest of all weapons was the precious diamond gem of his own intelligence — his mind.

“No doubt this man must be telling the truth; for in the face of danger, he is still calm and as cool as a cucumber. Even if I gobble this little pea-sized morsel of a hero, I won’t be able to digest him. In that case, I might as well let him go,” thought the monster fearing he would die if he ate the prince.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

“You are a great man. I will not eat your flesh. I shall set you free. Just like the moon that reappears after an eclipse, so may you shine pleasantly and gladden the hearts of all your friends and relatives,” said Sticky-Hair and set the prince free.

Through this encounter, the Bodhisattva realised that the only worthwhile weapon to work on was the intelligence inside us, not the weapons of the world outside. And with this diamond weapon, he also understood that destroying life brings only suffering to the killer.

In gratitude, he taught this knowledge to the unfortunate demon. “Oh Sticky-Hair, understand this. You were born as a murderous blood-sucking, flesh-eating demon because of the unwholesome deeds you had committed in your past lives. If you continue to kill, it will only lead you to greater suffering — both in this life and beyond. You can only go from darkness to darkness.

“Now that you have spared me, do not take up killing so easily again. Bear this in mind — destroying lives only leads one to misery in this life and the next. You will be reborn as a hell being, an animal or a hungry ghost! Even if you are fortunate enough to be reborn as a human being, your life would be a short one.”

Prince Five-Weapons then continued to teach Sticky-Hair. The monster listened and eventually agreed to follow the Five Precepts. Prince Five-Weapons had transformed Sticky Hair from a monster into a friendly forest fairy. When he left the forest, the prince told the local people about the change in the creature. They fed it regularly from that day onwards, and together lived in peace and harmony.

Prince Five-Weapons, on the other hand, travelled back to Benares and later became its king. When he passed away in old age, he was reborn as he justly deserved.

**THE MORAL IS** ⇒ *The only weapon you need is hidden inside you.*

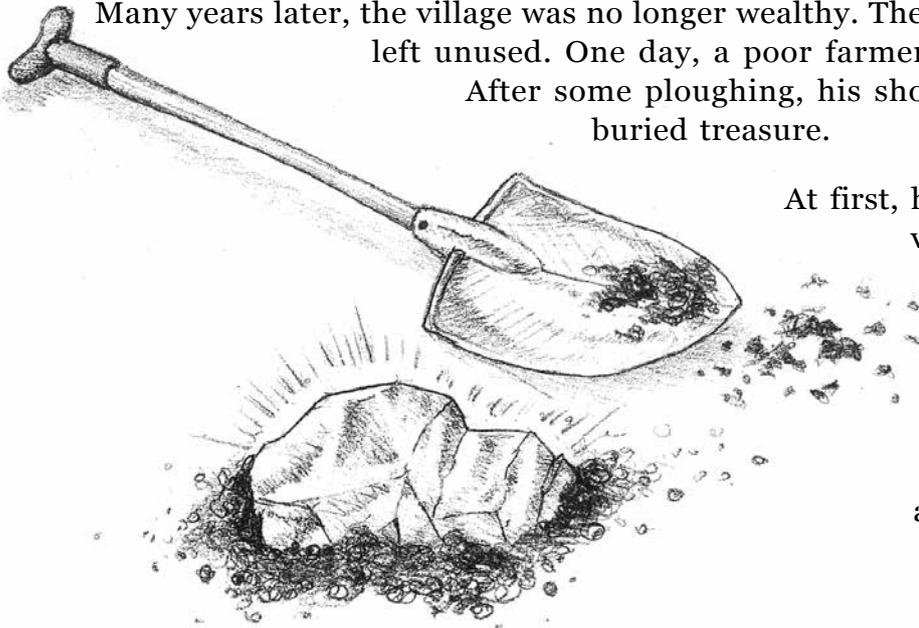
---

56

## A Huge Lump of Gold (Moderation)

Once upon a time, there was a rich village. One day, the wealthiest of all the villagers decided to bury a huge lump of gold in a nearby rice field to protect it from bandits and robbers. However, he passed away without unearthing it.

Many years later, the village was no longer wealthy. The rice field was abandoned and left unused. One day, a poor farmer decided to plough the field. After some ploughing, his shovel struck the long-forgotten buried treasure.



At first, he thought he must have hit a very tough tree root, but when he continued digging, he discovered that it was a beautiful lump of solid shiny gold. Since it was daytime, he was afraid to take it with him, so he covered it up again and waited for nightfall.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

That very night, the farmer returned to the rice field. He unearthed the treasure and tried to lift it. But it was far too heavy for him. Then he tied ropes around it and tried to drag it. But it was so huge that it wouldn't budge an inch. Frustrated, he even tried kicking the huge lump of gold, but again it wouldn't shift an inch!

He sat down and began to consider the situation. He decided that the only sensible thing to do was to break the lump of gold into four smaller lumps, so that he could carry them home, one piece at a time.

“I will use one lump to pay for my ordinary day-to-day needs, save the second piece for a rainy day, invest the third lump in my farming business, and use the last piece to help the poor and needy and for other charitable work,” he thought.

With a calm mind, he divided the huge lump of gold equally into four smaller lumps. He carried them home easily on four separate trips, and lived happily thereafter.

***THE MORAL IS*** ⇒ ***“Don't bite off more than you can chew.”***

---

# 57

## **Mr Monkey and Sir Crocodile** **(Harmlessness)**

Once upon a time, Mr Monkey was living by himself near a riverbank. He was a very strong monkey, and a great jumper.

Now, in the middle of this river was a beautiful island covered with mango trees, jackfruit trees and other fruit trees. A rock that jutted out of the water lay halfway between the bank and the island. Although it looked impossible, Mr Monkey was used to jumping from the riverbank to the rock, and from the rock to the island. He would eat fruits all day and then return home by the same route each evening.

Besides Mr Monkey, Sir Crocodile and Lady Crocodile were also staying next to this river. They were expecting their first brood of baby crocodiles. As she was pregnant, Lady Crocodile sometimes had strange food cravings. So she made unusual demands on her faithful husband.

Lady Crocodile had been amazed, just like the other animals, by the way Mr Monkey jumped back and forth from the riverbank to the island. One day, she suddenly yearned to eat the heart of Mr Monkey, and so informed her husband about her craving. To keep her happy, Sir Crocodile promised to get Mr Monkey's heart for her as dinner that night.

To trap Mr Monkey, Sir Crocodile went and laid himself down on the rock between the riverbank and the island. He waited stealthily for Mr Monkey to return that evening, and



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

planned to catch the monkey when he leapt onto the 'rock'.

As usual, Mr Monkey spent his entire day feasting on the island. When it was time to return to his home on the riverbank, he noticed that the rock seemed to have grown. It was much higher above the water than he remembered. Yet, he noticed that the river level was just the same as it was in the morning. Immediately, he suspected that the cunning Sir Crocodile might be up to no good.

To confirm his suspicions, he called out in the direction of the rock, "Hi there, Mr Rock! How are you?" He yelled this three times. Then he shouted, "You used to answer me when I'd speak to you. But, today you say nothing. What's wrong with you, Mr Rock?"

Sir Crocodile thought, "There is no doubt that on other days, this rock used to talk to the monkey. I can't wait any longer for this dumb rock to speak! I will just have to speak for the rock and trick the monkey." So he shouted, "I'm fine, Mr Monkey. What do you want?"

"Who are you?" asked Mr Monkey.



---

“I’m Sir Crocodile,” replied the reptile without thinking.

“Why are you lying there?” asked the monkey.

“I’m plotting to take your heart! There’s no escape for you, Mr Monkey,” blurted Sir Crocodile.

“Aha! He’s right — there’s no other way back to the riverbank except through that rock, so I will have to trick him,” thought the clever monkey.

Then he yelled, “Sir Crocodile, my friend, it looks like you’ve got me, so I’ll give you my heart. Open your mouth and take it when I come your way.”

When Sir Crocodile opened his mouth, he opened it so wide that his eyes were squeezed shut. When Mr Monkey saw this, he quickly jumped onto the top of Sir Crocodile’s head, and then instantly leaped to the other side.

When Sir Crocodile realised he had been outsmarted, he admired Mr Monkey for his wits and victory. Being a good sport, he praised the winner. He said, “Mr Monkey, my intentions towards you were unwholesome — I wanted to kill you and present your heart as a gift to please my wife, but you wanted only to save yourself and harm no one. I salute you!”

Then Sir Crocodile returned to Lady Crocodile. At first, she was displeased with him, but when the little crocodiles came, they forgot their troubles for a period of time.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ A good loser is a true gentleman.***



## 58

# A Prince of Monkeys (Carefulness)

Once upon a time, there was a cruel monkey king who ruled the forests of the Himalayas. All the monkeys in his troop were his own wives and children. Yet worried that one of his sons might grow up and seize his throne, he made it a rule to bite each son just after he was born. This bite would alter the male baby so that he would be too weak to ever challenge his father even when he reached adulthood.

Now, a certain wife of the monkey king was pregnant. Fearing for her child, in case the unborn one was a son, she ran away to another forest at the foot of a distant mountain. There she soon gave birth to a bright male baby monkey.

Before long, this baby grew up into a big and strong monkey. Curious about his parentage, he asked his mother one day, "Mum, who and where is my father?" "Your father is the king to a troop of monkeys staying at the foot of a far-off mountain. You are actually a prince," she answered him.

"Mum, can you take me to see my father please?" the monkey prince begged. His mother said softly, "No, my son, I am afraid I can't. Your father bites all his sons in order to weaken them for life. He is afraid of losing his royal crown to one of his sons." "Don't be afraid for me, mother," assured the prince. "I can take care of myself." This gave her confidence, so she agreed and took him to his father.

When the cruel old king saw this strong, young son of his, he thought, "I have no doubt

---

that when this son of mine grows stronger, he will steal my kingdom from me. I must get rid of him while I still can! I know, I will hug him, pretending it is out of fatherly love for him, but my true intention is to squeeze him to death!”

Pretending to welcome his son, the king said, “Ah, my long lost son! Where have you been all this time? I have missed you dearly.” Then he took him into his arms. Intending to squeeze the life out of him, he hugged him really hard! Fortunately, the monkey prince was stout and as strong as an elephant. He hugged his father right back, even harder and tighter, until he could feel the faint cracking of the old king’s rib bones!

After this incident, the monkey king was even more terrified that his son would kill him one day. So he cooked up another plan and schemed to get his son eaten by a water demon that lived in a pond nearby.

He called for the prince and said, “My dear son, it is perfect that you are home now for I am old and need an heir to take over my troop of monkeys. However I need flowers for the coronation ceremony. Go to the nearby pond and bring back two kinds of white water lilies, three kinds of blue water lilies and five types of lotuses.”

“Yes, my father, I will get them for you,” replied the prince.

When he arrived at the pond, he saw that there were many kinds of water lilies and lotuses growing all over it, but instead of jumping right in and plucking them, he investigated the pond carefully. He walked slowly along the bank. He noticed that there were footprints going into the pond, but none coming out! After careful consideration, he realised that the pond must be possessed by a water demon, and that his father must have sent him there to be killed by it.

He investigated further, until he found a narrow part of the pond where with great effort,

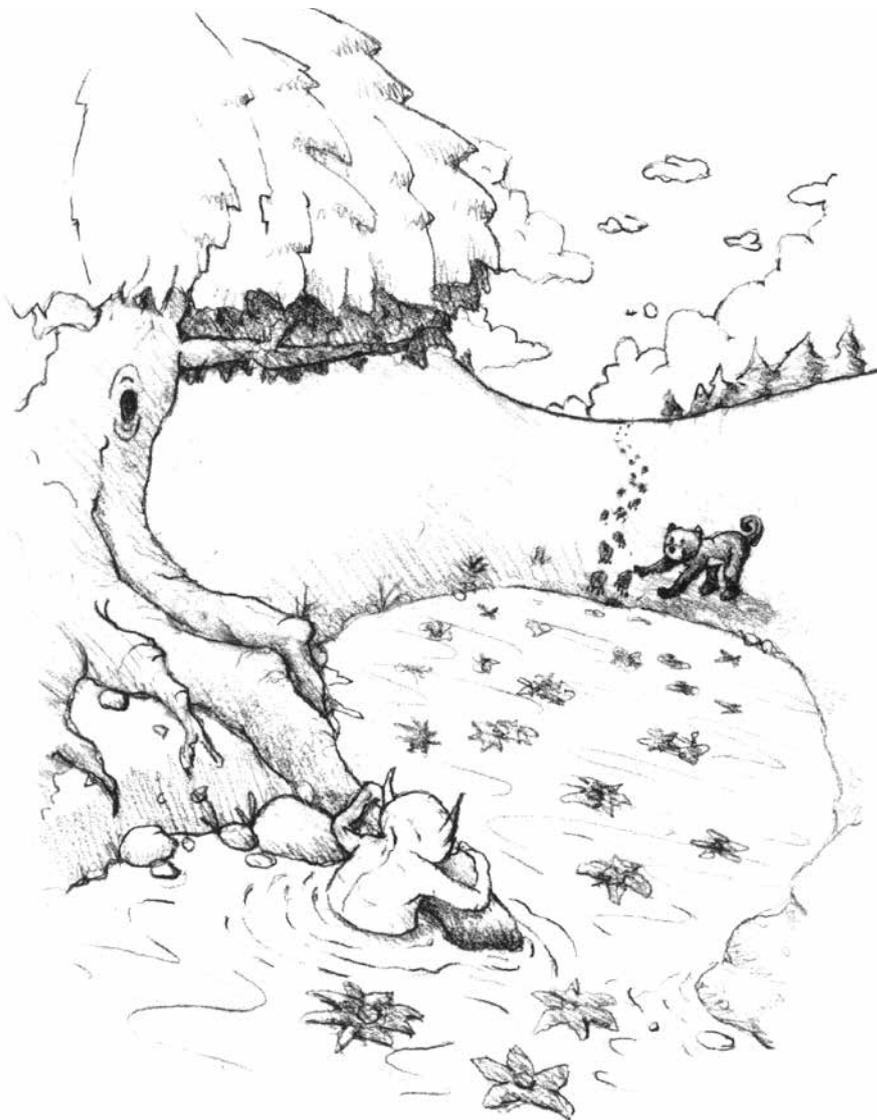


## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

he was able to jump safely across to the other side. In the midst of his leap, he reached down and plucked the lotuses and lilies, without actually getting into the pond. Then he jumped back again, picking more flowers. He continued jumping back and forth, and in this manner, collected all the required flowers.

Suddenly, the water demon popped his head up above the water, and witnessing this phenomenon thought, "In all the time that I've lived here, I have never seen anyone, man or beast, as wise as this monkey! He has gathered all the flowers that he want, without having to come within my grasp, here in my kingdom of water."

Then, the ferocious demon waddled through the water and climbed up onto the bank. Respectfully, he exclaimed, "Hail, Monkey King, there are three qualities that make one



---

unbeatable by his enemies, and it appears that you have all three — skill, courage and wisdom. You must be truly invincible! Tell me, mighty one, why have you gathered all those flowers?”

The monkey prince replied: “My father wants to make me king in his place. He sent me to gather these flowers for the coronation ceremony.”

“You are far too noble to be doing this chore. Let me carry these flowers for you instead,” The water demon said, and he picked up all the flowers and followed behind the monkey prince.

As the prince and the water demon were reaching the monkey’s palace, the monkey king caught the strange sight of the water demon carrying the flowers and following the prince. “I sent him to get flowers, thinking he would be eaten by the demon. But instead he has made the water demon his servant. I am lost,” he thought to himself.

Afraid that all his unwholesome deeds would be revealed, the monkey king went into a sudden fit of panic. This caused his heart to fail and killed him on the spot!

With the death of the old king, the monkeys voted the strong, young prince to be the new king.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ It pays to be careful.***



59, 60

## **Two Ways of Beating a Drum** **(Excess)**

Once upon a time, there was a drummer who lived in a small country village. He heard there was going to be a fair in the city of Benares, and so decided to venture there and make a living by playing his drums. As there were some music scores that were written for two sets of drums, he took his son along to help him with the performances.

The two drummers, father and son, played to the crowds of holiday makers at the fair.

---

They were very popular. Everyone liked their drum-playing and gave generously to them. When the fair was over, they packed up and proceeded to return to their little village with the earnings they made.

On their way home, they had to pass through a dark forest. It was very dangerous because the forest was notorious for being infested with robbers.

The drummer boy wanted to protect his father and himself from the muggers, so he beat his drums as loudly as he could, without stopping. “The more noise we make, the better to frighten the robbers away,” he thought.

The drummer man took his son aside. “Son, beat as if some great lord was passing by,” he said, and explained to him that when royal processions travelled, they beat drums only at regular intervals in a very dignified manner. They would beat a drum roll, pause, then beat again with flourish. He told his son to do likewise, to fool the muggers into thinking that a powerful lord was passing by.

But the boy ignored his father’s advice. He thought he knew better how to keep the robbers away.

Meanwhile, a gang of muggers heard the boy’s drumming. At first, they thought a powerful rich man must be approaching with heavy security. But they soon realised something was fishy when they discovered that the drumming continued in a wild fashion without stopping. They went back to investigate, and saw only a man and his son on the forest’s path. They beat them up, robbed all their hard-earned money and escaped into the forest.

***THE MORAL IS*** ⇨ ***Overdoing something can lead to one’s downfall.***





# 61

## **Two Mothers (Renunciation)**

Once upon a time, there was a very well-known teacher in the city of Takkasila, in northern India. He taught religion, as well as all other subjects. His knowledge was vast and he was widely renowned as a teacher.

At that time, a son was born to a rich family in Benares. The family kept a holy fire burning constantly ever since. When the boy turned 16, they gave him a choice. They said, “This holy fire has been burning since the very day you were born. If you wish to be reborn in one of the highest levels of heavens, take it into the forest and worship the fire god.

“However, if you wish to lead the life of an ordinary family man, you must learn how to manage the wealth of our family in the affairs of the world. If this is the life you choose, go and study under the world-famous teacher of Takkasila.”

The young man replied, “I don’t want to be a holy man. I would very much rather be a family man.” So he bade farewell to his parents, and with a thousand gold coins given by his father for the teacher’s fees, set out for Takkasila.

After several years, the man graduated with honours and returned to Benares.

Meanwhile, his parents had increasingly wished that he had taken the route of a holy man in the forest. This was their wish on the day that he was born. His mother wanted the best life possible for her son. “My son wants to get married and raise a family. He

---

does not realise how dangerous a wicked woman can be to a man. I must find a way to get his teacher to teach him this,” she thought.

So the wise woman asked her son, “Did you earn only the Ordinary Degree, or have you obtained both the Ordinary Degree and the higher ‘Unhappiness Degree?’”

“I have earned only the Ordinary Degree,” he replied.

“How can you be schooled in the ways of the world if you have learnt nothing about unhappiness? Return to your teacher and ask for the ‘Unhappiness Degree’,” said his mother. The son dutifully followed his good mother’s advice and returned to Takkasila.

Now, this world-famous teacher had a 120-year-old mother. She was blind and very weak. The teacher bathed, fed and cared for her with his own hands. Since it took more and more of his time, he was forced to give up teaching completely. Eventually, he and his mother moved into a forest hut, where he looked after her, day and night.

When the young student reached Takkasila, he found that his old teacher was no longer at the college. Hearing that he had retired and now lived in the forest, he went there to look for him.

“Why have you come back so soon?” asked the teacher after they had exchanged greetings. Respectfully, he replied, “Honourable professor, you did not give me the ‘Unhappiness Degree’.”

“Who told you about that degree?” asked the teacher.

“It was my mother, Sir,” he said.

“I’ve never heard of such a degree! No doubt, this wise mother wanted me to teach her son how wicked some women can be, for they bring great unhappiness to men,” contemplated the teacher.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

“All right, I will teach you so you can earn this higher degree. This course is a work-study programme. Your lessons will consist of taking care of my old mother for me. You will bathe, feed and care for her tenderly with your own hands,” said the knowledgeable teacher.

“While you are bathing and massaging her body, you must constantly compliment her beauty with words like ‘Dear lady, even in your old age, your skin remains fair and beautiful. You must have been even more beautiful when you were young!’ And if she says anything to you, you must tell me without shame, whatever it is, hiding nothing,” he instructed.

“If you do these things correctly, you will earn the ‘Unhappiness Degree’. Then your mother will be very proud of you.”

The student agreed and began attending to the 120-year-old lady. He bathed and fed her with his own hands. He massaged her arms, legs, back and head, all the while saying how beautiful she was while doing them. “Madam, it is indeed marvellous, how, even in such great old age, your arms and legs are still so very beautiful! I can guess how gorgeous and ravishing you must have been in your youth,” he repeatedly praised her. This went on for many days.



Gradually, lust and desire began to arise in the old lady’s mind. Even though she knew she was blind and her body was rotten from old age, she was happy that this young man found her attractive, and wondered if he wanted to be her husband. So she asked him, “Do you want to be my husband?”

The young man replied, “Oh yes, of course, madam, very much. But how can I? Your son is my teacher and he is very respectable. It would cause such a scandal! I will not dishonour my teacher.”

---

“Well, in that case, kill my son if you really want to be with me!” came the old lady’s reply.

“But how can I kill him when I have been studying under him for so long? How can I kill him just because of this desire for you?” answered the young man. Then the old lady said, “If you will stay with me and not desert me, I will kill him myself!”

As he had agreed earlier, the student went to his teacher and recounted to him everything that took place. Amazingly, the teacher was not surprised. Instead he said, “You have done well to tell me this, my pupil. I appreciate your good work.”

The teacher examined his mother’s horoscope and discovered that she was to breathe her last that day. “I will arrange a test for her,” he said.

The teacher carved a life-size statue from the softwood of a tree limb and made it look exactly like himself. He then laid it in his own bed and pulled the sheets up over it after attaching a long string to it. He gave one end of the string to his student and instructed him to take the string and axe to the old lady. “Tell her it is time to do the killing,” he said.

Obediently, the student returned to the blind old lady. He said, “Madam, my master is sleeping soundly in his bed. If you follow this string, it will lead you to him. Then kill him with this axe if you really can do such a thing!”

“If you will not abandon me, I will do it,” she replied.

“Why would I abandon you?” answered the young man.

Taking the axe into her hands, she trembled as she stood up and slowly followed the string into her son’s room. Standing next to his bed, she felt the statue and thought that was her son. So she pulled down the sheets from the head and raised the axe. She struck the neck as hard as she could with the axe hoping to kill him with one blow. But it only produced a thumping sound, so she knew it had struck wood.

“What are you doing, my mother?” came her son’s voice suddenly. She realised she had



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

been tricked and was caught red-handed at her crime. As the shock was too much for her feeble heart to bear, she dropped dead on the spot! The horoscope had been correct in predicting her death!

After the teacher had respectfully cremated his mother's body and offered flowers on her ashes, he said this to his student, "My son, actually the 'Unhappiness Degree' does not exist. Wicked women are the cause of unhappiness. You are fortunate to have such a good and wise mother. By sending you here to earn the 'Unhappiness Degree', she wanted you to learn how evil some women can be."

"You have seen with your own eyes and experienced yourself how my mother, filled with craving and vanity, turned wicked and came to a nasty end. She has taught you this lesson. Now return to your wise mother, who cares so much for your well-being."

When he arrived home, his mother asked again, "My dear son, have you finally earned the higher degree in the subject of Unhappiness?"

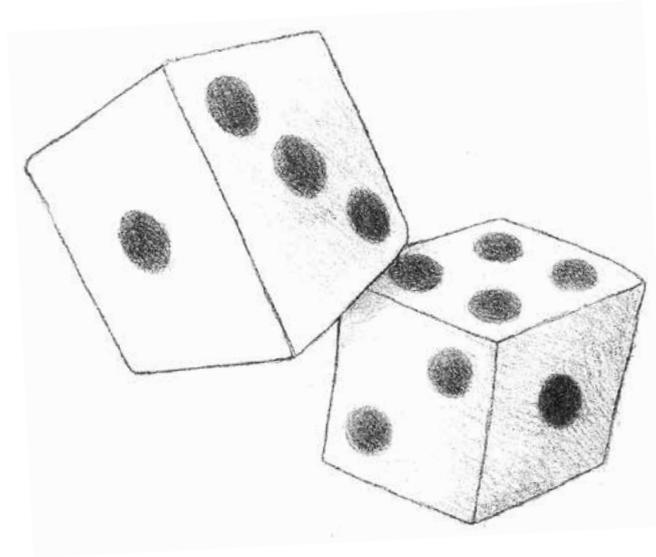
"Yes, mother," he replied.

"I ask you again, my son, do you wish to leave the worldly life and go into the forest to worship the fire god? Or do you wish to get married and lead the family life?"

To which the son replied, "I do not wish to lead the family life. I have seen with my own eyes how wicked some women can be. There is no limit to their craving and vanity. Therefore, I want nothing to do with family life. I will seek my peace as a forest monk." Having said that, the young man asked for his parents' permission to live in the forest.

After many years of peaceful meditation in the forest, he eventually died and was reborn in one of the higher heavenly worlds.

**THE MORAL IS** ⇔ ***Wickedness between women and men brings unhappiness to both.***



62

## The Priest Who Gambled With a Life

(Misguided Morality)

Once upon a time, there was a king who loved to gamble with his royal priest. When he threw the dice, he always recited this lucky charm,

“If tempted, any woman will, for sure, give up her faithfulness and act impurely.”



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Amazing as it might seem, by using this charm, the king had never lost a game! Before long, the royal priest lost almost every penny that he owned.

“I have lost almost all my wealth to the king. It must be because of his lucky charm. I need to find a way to break the spell and win back my money. I must find a pure and chaste woman who has never had any physical relations with a man. Then I will lock her up in my mansion and force her to remain faithful to me,” he thought.

This seemed like a good plan to him, until he started having doubts. He thought, “It would nearly be impossible to keep a woman pure after she has seen and become accustomed to men. Therefore, to locate the purest woman possible, I must find one who has never even seen a man before!”

Just then, he happened to see a poor pregnant woman passing by. As the royal priest was an expert in reading the meaning of marks on the body, he could tell that the unborn child was a girl. Suddenly, a thought occurred to him, “Aha! Only an unborn baby girl has never seen a man!”

The royal priest was willing to do anything to beat the king at dice, so he paid the poor woman to stay in his house and deliver her baby there. When the baby girl was born, the priest bought her from her mother. Then he made sure that she was raised only by women, and had never seen any man — except of course the royal priest himself. When the poor girl grew up, he still kept her completely under his thumb as if he owned her!

The cruel priest did all these because of his gambling habit. While the girl was growing up, he avoided playing dice with the king. Now that she was of age and still his prisoner, he challenged the king to a game of dice once more.

The king agreed. After they had made their bets, the king shook the dice and repeated his favourite lucky charm,

---

“If tempted, any woman will, for sure, give up her faithfulness and act impurely.”

But just before he threw down the dice, the priest added:

“Except my woman — who is faithful evermore!”

Lo and behold, the king’s charm didn’t work. He lost that bet, and from then on the priest won every throw of the dice.

The king was puzzled by this turn of events. “This priest must have a pure woman locked up at home, one who is forced to be faithful to him alone. That’s why my lucky charm doesn’t work anymore,” he thought after careful reflection.

He investigated and discovered what the cruel priest had done, so he sent for a man who was well-known for his playboy character. He asked him if he could win the fair lady’s heart. “No problem, my lord!” he replied. The king paid him a handsome sum of money and told him to do the job quickly.

Using some of the money, the man bought a supply of the finest perfumes and cosmetics. He set up a shop just outside the royal priest’s mansion. This mansion was seven-storey high, with seven entrance gates — one on each floor. Female servants guarded all the gates closely, and no man except the priest was allowed to enter.

However, there was one servant who was specially assigned to wait on the priest’s lady and to care for her every need. She carried everything in and out, including perfumes and cosmetics that the priest got the servant woman to buy.

The playboy saw the servant going in and out of the priest’s mansion regularly. Soon, he realised that she was the only one who could help get him inside the mansion. So he devised a plan and hired some cronies to help him.

The next morning, when the woman servant went out to do her shopping, the playboy



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

dramatically fell to the ground before her. Grabbing her knees, he tearfully cried, “Oh my dear mother, it’s so wonderful to see you again after such a long time!”

Then his cronies chimed in, “Yes, this must be her! She looks the same — from her hands, feet and face to the type of dress she wears. Yes, this must be her!” They all kept saying how amazing it was that her looks had changed so little in all that time.

The poor servant woman must have had a long-lost son, for soon she was convinced that this must be her child. She hugged the clever playboy hired by the king, and both sobbed with joy over their miraculous reunion.

In between bouts of crying, the man asked her, “Oh dear mother, where are you staying now?”

“I live next door,” she said, “in the royal priest’s mansion. I’m the personal attendant to his lady. I tell you my son, there is no other woman who is as lovely and as exquisite as my lady. Her beauty is truly peerless, like the singing mermaids that sailors love to praise.”

Seeing that she was in a hurry, he asked, “Where are you going now, mother?”

“I’m going to shop for her perfumes and cosmetics, my son,” she replied.

“There’s no need, mother,” he continued, “from now on, I will give you the best perfumes and cosmetics free-of-charge!” Saying that, he packed myriad bottles of sweet-smelling perfumes and fine cosmetics into a basket and gave these to her, along with a bouquet of delicate flowers.

When the priest’s lady saw the perfumes and cosmetics, which were of much better quality than usual, she asked why the priest was being so generous. “Why do you say that, my lady?”

“Well, this is because you bought more this time and of better quality too,” said the lady.

---

“No, my lady,” answered the servant, “these are not from the priest. I got them from my son’s shop.” From then on, she got perfumes and cosmetics from the playboy’s shop and kept the priest’s money.

After some time, the playboy decided to stage the second part of his plan. He pretended to be sick and stayed in bed.

When the servant came to the shop and couldn’t find her ‘son’, she was told that he was too ill to work, and was taken to see him. “What happened to you, my son?” she asked massaging his back.

He replied, “Even if I were about to die, I couldn’t tell you, my mother.”

“If you can’t tell me, whom can you tell?” she continued.

Then, according to his plan, he broke down and admitted to her about his infatuation with the priest’s lady. “I was fine until you told me about the dazzling beauty of your mistress — how beautiful she was and how her loveliness was equal to none. Because of your description, I have fallen in love with her. I must have her. I can’t live without her. I’m so depressed, without her, I’ll surely die!” he sighed.

“Don’t worry, my son, leave it to me,” promised the worried mother. Then with a larger and heavier bundle of perfumes and cosmetics than her previous trips, she went home to her lady and groaned, “My lady, after my son heard from me about your ravishing beauty, he fell madly in love with you! I don’t know what to do next!”

Since the priest was the only man she had ever seen, the lady was curious. And of course, she resented being locked up by force, so she said, “If you sneak him into my room, it’s all right with me!”

As the women guards at the seven gates searched everything that the servant took in and out, she had to draw up a plan. She swept and collected all the dust and dirt that she could find in the whole mansion. Each day, she took some of it out of a large



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

covered flower basket, and whenever she was searched, she made sure that some of the dust and dirt got onto the guards' faces. This made them sneeze and cough. Pretty soon, they stopped searching her when she went in and out.

Finally, one day, she hid the playboy in her covered flower basket. He was trim, fit, and wasn't heavy at all. She was able to sneak him past all seven guarded gates, and into the lady's private chamber. The two lovers stayed together for several days and nights, so the playboy was able to destroy her perfect faithfulness, which had been forced upon her by the cold-hearted priest.

Eventually, she told him that it was time to go. "I will go. But first, my dear, since the old priest has been so mean to you, let me give him one good blow on the head," he declared.

She agreed and hid him in a closet. This, too, was part of his secret plan.

When the priest arrived, his lady exclaimed, "My lord and master, I'm so happy today! I'd like to dance while you play the guitar."

"Of course, my beauty," he answered.

"But I'm too shy to dance in front of you," she added, "so please wear this blindfold while I dance."

Again, he agreed to her request and she put a blindfold over his eyes.

The priest played a pretty tune on his complicated Indian guitar, while his lady danced. After a while, she asked, "As part of my dance, won't you let me give you a tap on the head?"

"As you wish, my dear," he said.

Then she motioned to the playboy, who came out of the closet, sneaked up from behind, and hit the old priest hard on the head! His eyes nearly popped out, and a bump soon

---

began to form from the blow. He cried out and the lady quickly placed her hand in his to soothe him. “Your soft hand sure can wallop hard, my dear,” the priest said.

The playboy returned to the closet. The lady removed the priest’s blindfold and applied some ointment on his bump. When he had left, the woman servant hid the playboy in her flower basket and smuggled him out of the mansion. Immediately, he went to the king and told him the whole story, in a very boastful way, of course.

The next day, the royal priest went to the palace as usual. “Shall we have a gamble on the dice?” asked the king. The priest, expecting to win once more, agreed. Just as before, the king recited his lucky charm,

“If tempted, any woman will, for sure, give up her faithfulness and act impurely.”

As usual, the priest added:

“Except my woman — who is faithful evermore!”

But, this time, the dice fell in the king’s favour and he took the priest’s money.

Then the king quipped, “Oh priest, your woman is no exception! True faithfulness cannot be forced upon one! You snatched a newborn baby girl, locked her up in a mansion behind seven guarded gates, and forced her to be good, but you have failed. Any prisoner’s greatest wish is to be free!”

“She blindfolded you, then got her playboy lover to give you that bump on your old, bald head. This only proved that your gates and guards are useless!”

The priest returned home fuming mad. Meanwhile, the lady had thought of a plan to thwart her lord’s accusations. “No, my lord, I have been completely faithful to you. No man has ever touched me except you! And I will prove my innocence in a trial by fire. I will walk on fire without being burned to prove that I speak the truth,” she exclaimed when the priest questioned her about her fidelity.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

She ordered the old woman servant to fetch her son, the playboy. She was to tell him to take the lady by the hand and prevent her from stepping into the flames. The woman did as she was instructed.

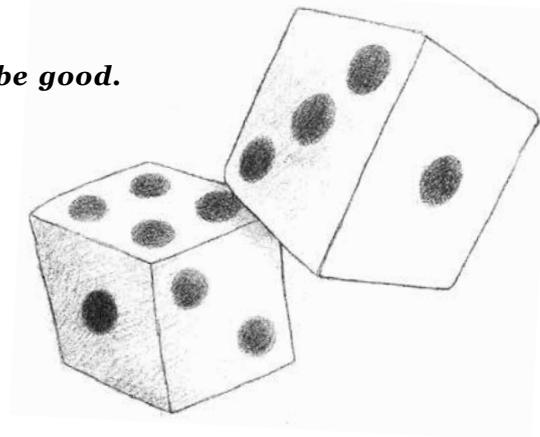
When the day arrived for the lady to walk on fire, she said to the crowd of onlookers, "I have never been touched by any man except this priest who is my master. By this truth, may the fire have no power over me."

Then, just as she was about to step into the fire, the playboy leaped from amongst the crowd and grabbed her hand. "Stop! Stop! How can this priest be so cruel as to force this tender young lady into a raging fire!" he shouted.

She shook her hand free and turned to the priest saying, "My lord, since this man has touched my hand, the trial by fire is useless, but you can see my good intention!"

The priest realised he had been tricked. He beat her and drove her out of his house. At last, she was free from his clutches and had control of her own life.

**THE MORAL IS** ➡ *You can't force someone to be good.*



---

# 63

## Lady Wicked and the Wise Buttermilk Man (Seduction)

Once upon a time, there was a very rich man who lived in Benares. He had a daughter whose beauty was unsurpassed by none. Her skin was as soft as rose petals, her complexion was like the lotus blossoms, and her hair was as silky black as midnight. Unfortunately, her beauty was only skin-deep, for she was a very cruel lady. She insulted her servants and even enjoyed beating them. Infamous for her cruelty, she was known as ‘Lady Wicked’ by all in the city.

One day, Lady Wicked went down to the river for her bath with her servants and guards. Her female servants played and splashed about in the water while she bathed in the midstream of the river. Suddenly, the skies turned dark, the winds howled and it started to pour. Most of the attendants and guards ran away for shelter. “This is a perfect chance for us to rid ourselves of Lady Wicked once and for all,” said the servants to one other. And so they abandoned her there, still bathing in the river. The rainstorm became worse as the sun set.

“Where is my precious daughter?” the rich man asked when he saw that his daughter was missing. “We saw her coming out of the river, Sir. But since then we haven’t seen her. We don’t know where she has gone to,” lied the servants. The rich man sent relatives out to search for her, but she was nowhere to be found. Meanwhile, Lady Wicked had been swept downstream by the raging flooded river.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Now, it happened that there lived a holy man in the forest next to the river. He had been meditating for a long time in the peaceful forest, until he had come to enjoy a high mental state of inner happiness. And because of this bliss, he was quite sure that he had left the ordinary desires of the world behind him.

As fate had it, Lady Wicked was carried past the holy man's hut by the furious river close to the strike of twelve that very night. She was yelling and screaming frantically for help. When he heard her, the holy man realised someone was in danger, so he took a torch down to the river and saw Lady Wicked being swept along. Without a second thought, he dived in and saved her. "Don't worry, I'll look after you," he comforted her as he got her limp body out of the water.

He carried her gently into his hut and built a fire to warm and dry her up. He also gave her fruits to eat. "Where do you live? How did you fall into the river?" he asked when her belly was filled. She told him about the rainstorm and how her servants had deserted her. Taking pity on her, he allowed her to sleep in his hut for the next couple of nights, while he himself slept under the stars.

When she had recovered her strength, he told her that it was time for her to return home. But knowing that he was the sort of holy man who vowed never to marry and have a wife, she decided to stay and seduce him into breaking his religious promise out of wilfulness. "I will not leave until he has fallen in love with me," she thought to herself. And so, Lady Wicked resorted to all her womanly grace and wiles to tempt the holy man. After a few days, she succeeded in seducing him, for the holy man was not yet strong enough to resist her beguiling ways.

Before long, they began to live together in the quiet forest as husband and wife. Entrenched in worldly ways, he lost all the inner serenity and bliss that he had gained through years of meditation.

However, Lady Wicked soon grew bored with forest life. She missed the noise and the



hustle and bustle of crowded city life, so she cooed and coaxed until she got her way, and they moved to a nearby village.

In the beginning, the holy man supported her by selling buttermilk. Later on, the villagers began to seek his advice on things big and small, for they soon realised that listening to him brought good fortune. They started calling him 'the Wise Buttermilk Man', and gave him a hut to stay.

One day, a gang of bandits attacked the village. They robbed the villagers of all their valuables and kidnapped some of the villagers, including Lady Wicked. When they got to their forest hideout, they proceeded to split their booty. When they began dividing



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

up the prisoners, the bandit chief was attracted to Lady Wicked's beauty, and took her for himself as a wife.

All the other prisoners were soon released. When they returned to the village, the Wise Buttermilk Man asked what had happened to his wife. They told him that she had been kept by the bandit chief as his wife. "She will never be able to live without me. She will find a way to escape and come back to me," he thought. Thinking that the village area was an unlucky place, the villagers decided to pack up and leave. But the Wise Buttermilk Man remained in his hut, convinced that his wife would return.

Meanwhile, Lady Wicked was enjoying the thrill and excitement of leading life as a bandit queen. However, she was worried that her husband would come and take her back. "If he comes for me, I would lose all my new-found luxuries. It would be safer for me if I got rid of him," she thought. "I know, I will send him a letter, pretending to be deeply in love with him. Just as before, I will use my power of seduction to cause his downfall, but only this time he will meet his death, and I will remain as the bandit queen," she laughed.

When the Wise Buttermilk Man received the letter, he believed every word his wife had written. Without a moment's hesitation, he rushed to the forest and to the gang's hideout to save his wife. When he called out to her, Lady Wicked sneaked out and whispered, "Oh my lord and master, I'm so happy to see you. I can hardly wait to escape with you, but it is not a good time now. Let us wait until nightfall." She took him inside, fed him and hid him in a closet.

When the chief returned that evening, he was drunk. "My lord and chief, if you see my former husband now, what would you do?" asked Lady Wicked.

"I would beat him up and kick him from one side of the room to the other!" he bragged, "Where is he now?"

"He is much closer than you think," she murmured. "In fact, he is right here in this closet!"

---

He opened the door and dragged the Wise Buttermilk Man out. He proceeded to beat him up and kick him around the room, just as he had boasted. His poor victim did not cry out. He only muttered,

“Ungrateful brute, lying traitor.”

That was all he said. It seemed the truth was finally dawning on him, and he had learnt his lesson. But, oh what a high price he had to pay!

After some time, the drunken bandit got tired of beating him. He tied him up, ate dinner, and passed out in a drunken stupor.

The next morning, the bandit chief started yet another round of beating and kicking his poor victim when he woke up sober. Still, the Wise Buttermilk Man did not cry out. He simply muttered,

“Ungrateful brute, lying traitor.”

“Why does he repeat the same statement over and over again when I hit him?” wondered the bandit. Seeing that his wife was still fast asleep, he asked him what he meant.

The Wise Buttermilk Man replied, “Listen and I will tell you. I was once a forest holy man who enjoyed a high state of inner peace and happiness, until I heard this woman crying for help one night as she was being swept down the river in a storm. I saved her life and nursed her back to health. Meanwhile, she seduced me and I lost all my inner repose. We got married, went to live in a village and led a very ordinary life. Then you kidnapped her. She sent me a letter saying that she suffered while living with you, and begged me to rescue her. So you see — she plotted to send me to my doom and put me at your mercy. That is why I say —

‘Ungrateful brute, lying traitor’.”



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

The bandit chief was not stupid. He thought, “This man was such a good provider, and yet she landed him in this plight. What would she be capable of doing to me? It would be better to finish her off!”

“Don’t worry, I’ll look after you,” comforted the bandit king as he loosened the ropes on the Wise Buttermilk Man. Then, he woke Lady Wicked up and said, “My darling, let us kill this man right next to his own village.”

He took them to the boundary of the deserted village, and instructed Lady Wicked to hold her former husband. He raised his mighty sword and brought it down, but at the last instant, he sliced Lady Wicked into half!

Then, he nursed his former rival back to health. “What are you going to do now?” asked the bandit chief after the Wise Buttermilk Man had recovered.

“I’m returning to my life as a forest monk,” replied the wise man.

Even someone as cruel as the bandit chief could change his ways for he said, “I wish to follow you, wise one, and learn meditation from you in the forest.”

After giving up all his stolen goods, he went and lived in the forest with the Wise Buttermilk Man as his teacher. After much effort, they both attained high states of inner happiness and peace.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ Seduction can be dangerous to both men and women.***

---

# 64, 65

## Country Man and City Wife

### (Unfaithfulness)

Once upon a time, there lived a well-known teacher in Benares. He had over 500 students. One of them was from the remote countryside. Knowing little about the ways of city folks, he fell in love with a Benares girl and married her. After the marriage, he resumed his studies with the famous teacher, but soon started missing classes, sometimes staying away for two or three days at a time.

His wife was accustomed to doing whatever she wanted. Even though she was now a married woman, she was not loyal and faithful. Instead, she fooled around constantly behind her husband's back.

Now, his wife had this habit of behaving very humbly towards her husband each time she came home from a secret rendezvous with a boyfriend. She spoke softly, was all demure and gentle, and tried very hard to please her husband. But on other days, when she had done nothing wrong, she was rude and domineering. She yelled at her husband and nagged at him. This drove the man crazy. He was completely confused by how differently she behaved from one day to the next.

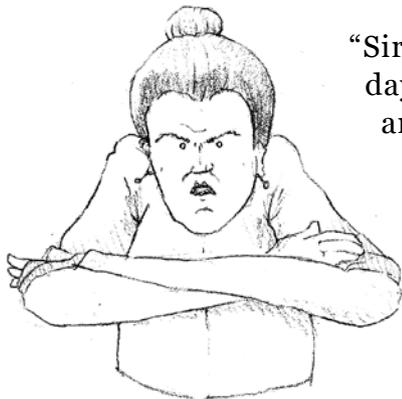
The countryman was so disturbed that he stayed away from classes. And when he stayed at home, he discovered that his wife was unfaithful to him. He was so upset that he missed school for seven or eight days.

When he finally showed up, his teacher asked, "Young man, you have been away so



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

long. What happened?”



“Sir, my wife is cheating on me. She is as meek as a mouse on days when she did something wrong, but on other days, she is arrogant, domineering, rough and rude. I can’t figure her out. I don’t know what to do or where to go for help. That’s why I couldn’t attend your classes,” he replied forlornly.

“Young man, don’t worry. Rivers can be bathed in by anyone, rich or poor. Highways too are open to all. Generous people build roadside rest houses to gain merit, and anyone can sleep there. Likewise, all are welcome to take water from the village well,” said the wise teacher.

“Similarly, there are some women who just cannot stay faithful to one man, and love to have more than one partner. That’s just the way some people are. It’s hard to understand why they act this way, but why do you get angry about things that you cannot change?”

“Your wife behaves submissively on days when she did wrong, and behaves rudely on days when she has done nothing wrong. That’s just the way some people are. So why do you get angry about things that you cannot change?”

“Accept her as she is. Treat her in the same understanding and compassionate way, whether she is kind or mean to you. Why do you get angry about things that you cannot change?”

The student took heed of his teacher’s advice. In time, his wife’s behaviour no longer upset him. The wife, on the other hand, gave up her boyfriends and amended her ways when she realised her wanton behaviour was made public.

**THE MORAL IS** ⇒ *Compassion and empathy help relieve one’s anger.*

---

# 66

## The Wisdom of Queen Tender-heart (Desire)

Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva was born into a rich, upper-class family in Kasi, in northern India. When he grew up and completed his education, he left the mundane world to become a holy man who lived alone in the Himalayan forests. After a long period of meditation, he developed strong mental powers, and was filled with inner bliss.

One day, the holy man travelled to the city of Benares when he ran out of salt and vinegar. He spent his first night in the royal garden of Benares. The next morning, after he had washed himself, tied his tangled hair into a knot on top of his head and dressed in a black antelope skin, he folded up the robe which he usually wore made of red bark, and went to the city to collect alms food.

While the ascetic was on his way to the city, King Brahmadata caught a glimpse of the holy man when he passed by the palace gate. “This man is a perfect picture of complete calmness and serenity,” thought the king when he saw the demeanour of the holy man.

He then had his servants invite the holy man into the palace, seat him on a luxurious couch and offer him an abundance of the very best foods around. When the holy man thanked the king, the king said, “You are welcome to live in my royal garden permanently. I will provide you with food, clothing, shelter and medicine. By doing this, may I gain merit leading to a good rebirth in a heavenly world.”



## Tales of the **Buddha's Former Lives**

---

The holy man accepted his kind offer. He spent the next 16 years staying in the royal garden of Benares. During that time, he taught all in the king's family, and received food, clothing, shelter and medicine from the king.

One day, King Brahmadata had to leave for the borders to quell a revolt that was arising there. Before he left, he instructed Queen Tender-Heart to care for the needs of the holy man. Diligently, the queen prepared food for the holy man everyday.

One day, the ascetic was late for his meal. While waiting for the holy man, Queen Tender-Heart decided to use the time to take a perfumed bath, refresh herself and change into fine clothes and jewellery, before resting on a couch.

Meanwhile, the Bodhisattva had been meditating in a particularly joyful mental state. When he realised how late it was, he used the powers he had acquired through meditation to transport himself back to the palace.

When Queen Tender-Heart heard the rustling sound made by his bark robe, she rose quickly from her couch. In her haste to receive him, her blouse accidentally slipped down for a moment — and the holy man caught a quick glance of this from the window as he entered. He was surprised by the sight of the queen's great beauty.

Lust, which had been subdued but not eliminated, surfaced within him. It was just like a cobra rising and spreading its hood from the basket in which it was kept. He lost his purity of mind completely. He was wounded, like a crow with its wings clipped.

The holy man could not eat his food. He took it back to his dwelling in the royal garden, and placed it under his bed. His mind was enslaved by the fleeting sight he had caught of the queen's loveliness. His heart was burning with desire. He remained on his bed, without eating or drinking, for the next seven days.

Finally, the king came back from his expedition. He circled the city and then went directly to visit the holy man. Seeing him in bed, he thought that the holy man was sick.

---

So the king ordered everyone out of the room and sat down next to him. While massaging the holy man's feet, he asked, "Reverend sir, what happened to you? Are you ill?"

The holy man replied, "Oh great king, I'm plagued by the sickness of craving and lust."

"What is it that you crave for?" asked the king.

"Queen Tender-Heart, my lord."

"Your Reverence," said the king, "I will give Tender-Heart to you. Come with me."

When they arrived at the palace, King Brahmadata had his queen dress in her finest clothes and jewellery. Then, he secretly told her to help the unfortunate holy man regain his purity.

"I know what to do, my lord, I will save him," she replied. Then the king gave her away and she left the palace with the holy man.

When they had passed through the main gate, she turned to the holy man and said, "We must have a house to live in. Go back and ask the king for one."

So he returned to the king and asked the king for a house. The king gave them a tiny run-down hut that people had been using as an outhouse. But when the holy man took the queen to their new home, she refused to enter.

"Why, my dear?" he asked.

"Can't you see it's filthy! Go back to the king and get a shovel and basket," she said.

He obeyed and when he returned, she ordered him to do all the cleaning. He even had to plaster the walls and floor with fresh cow dung!

When he had finished those chores, she commanded him to go to the palace and get her a bed, then a chair, then a lamp, bedlinen, a cooking pot and a water pot. She ordered him to get all these things one at a time, and each time he obeyed dutifully. She sent him to get water for her bath and many other things. He set out the water for her bath and



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

then made up the bed. Finally, they sat down next to each other on the bed. Suddenly, she grabbed him by the whiskers, shook him back and forth, pulled him towards her and said, “Don’t you remember that you are a holy man and a priest?”

Only then did he jolt out of his mad infatuation and realise the state he was in. “Oh, what has become of me! I have been blinded by my desire into behaving like a slave. Although it all first started with the sight of a woman, this mad craving could lead me into the pits of hells. My body was burning, as if I’d been shot in the heart with an arrow of desire, yet there was no bleeding wound! Not seeing her body for what it really is, my own foolishness caused all my suffering!”

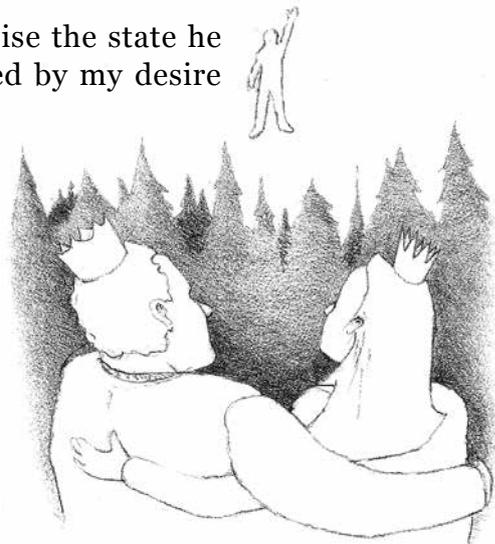
Then he spoke out loudly, “On this very day, I will return the wise Queen Tender-Heart to the noble King Brahmadata. And I will fly back to my home in the forest!”

Saying that, he took her back to the king. “Great King, I don’t want your queen anymore. Before I had her, she was my only desire. After I got her, one desire led to another, leading only to a bottomless hell.”

The wise Queen Tender-Heart, by using her intelligence, wits and knowledge of life, had given a great gift to the holy man. Rather than taking advantage of his weakness, she had restored his purity.

In perfect calmness, the holy man rose into the air, preached to the king, and then magically flew back to the Himalayan forests. He never returned to the ordinary world again. After meditating for years in peace and joy, he died and was reborn in one of the higher heavenly worlds.

**THE MORAL IS** ⇒ *Desire enslaves us, but wisdom liberates us.*



---

# 67

## **A Wife and Mother Who Was a Sister First** (An Intelligent Woman)

Once upon a time, there were some bandits who robbed a village. Some men from the village gave chase but lost the bandits when they escaped into a thick forest. The villagers surrounded and searched the forest for the robbers, but could not find them.

When they came out of the forest from the other side, they saw three farmers ploughing hard in their field. Suspecting them to be bandits in disguise, they captured them immediately. “Aha! You bandits are pretending to be innocent farmers who are interested only in ploughing! Come with us to the king, you thieves!” They tied them up and took them as prisoners to the king, who in turn, locked them up in the palace dungeon.

The next day, a woman was seen in the palace courtyard. For several days, she came and cried, as if in mourning.

One day, the king heard her cries and so he had his guards bring the woman before him. “Why are you crying?” asked the king. “I have heard that my husband, son and brother are all your prisoners, my lord,” she wept.

The king had the three men brought up from the dungeon. Being a generous ruler, he said to the woman, “I will set one of them free. Which one do you choose?”



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

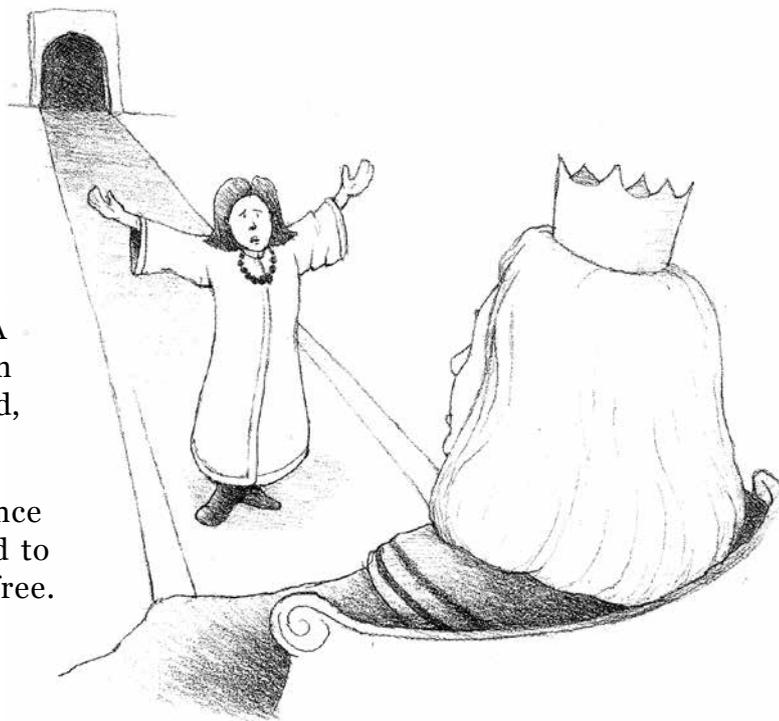
“Can’t you release all three, my lord?” the woman asked. “No, I cannot,” replied the king.

“If you cannot set all three free, then return me my brother, oh lord king,” answered the simple woman after she had considered carefully.

The king was surprised by her choice. “You should choose your husband or son. Why would you want your brother instead?” he asked.

“Oh my lord, as long as I live, it would be easy to find a new husband. And then I could easily have another son. A husband or a son is easy to come by in this world, but since my parents are dead, I can never get another brother!”

The king, impressed by her intelligence and pleased with her answer, decided to reward her, and so set all three men free.



**THE MORAL IS** ⇨ *Family ties are important.*



68

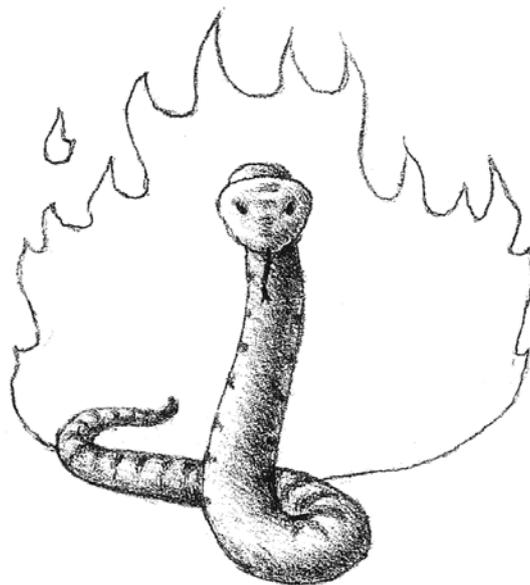
## 3,000 Births (Rebirth)

Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva was born into an ordinary family. It happened that he had the same father in his next 500 rebirths. His father was then reborn as his uncle in the next 500 rebirths, and as his grandfather in the next 500.

In the next 500 rebirths, he also had the same mother, who was reborn as the aunt in the next 500, and finally as the grandmother in the next 500.

Amazing as it may seem, after 3,000 rebirths, the man of 1,500 rebirths and the woman of 1,500 rebirths were reborn and became husband and wife, but the Bodhisattva was reborn with a different mother and a different father! However, he wisely respected everyone, not just the mother and father of his present rebirth.

***THE MORAL IS*** ⇨ *One way or another, we're all related.*



69

## The Strong-minded Snake (Determination)

Once upon a time, there lived a doctor who was an expert at treating snakebites. One day, this doctor was on a house call to treat a man who had been bitten by a deadly poisonous snake.

---

“There are two ways of treating this snakebite,” said the doctor. “You can either treat it through medication, or by capturing the snake that bit him, and forcing it to suck out its own poison,” advised the doctor to the family of the bitten man. After some discussion, the family decided to locate the culprit and make it suck its own poison out.

“Did you bite this man?” asked the doctor when the snake was caught.

“Yes, I did.” replied the snake.

“Well then,” said the doctor, “you must suck your own poison out of the wound.”

“Take back my own poison? Never! I have never done such a thing and I never will!” hissed the strong-willed snake.

Then the doctor started a camp fire and turned to the snake saying, “If you don’t suck the poison out, I’ll throw you into this fire and burn you up!”

“I’d rather die than relent!” answered the snake, and began moving towards the fire.

In all his years, the doctor had never seen anything like this! He took pity on the courageous snake, and barred its way towards the flames. Then, using medicines and magic spells, he removed the poison in the man.

The doctor admired the snake’s single-minded determination. He knew that if it used its determination in a wholesome way, it could improve itself and avoid unwholesome actions. So after teaching the snake the Five Precepts, he set it free and advised it to go in peace and harm no one again.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ Determination wins respect.***



# 70

## **The Wise Shovel Man** (Renunciation)

Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva was born into a family of vegetable gardeners. When he was old enough, he cleared a patch of land with his shovel and grew herbs, pumpkins, melons, cucumbers and other vegetables. He sold these to earn a humble living.

The shovel was his one and only possession in the whole world. As he carried it in the same way that a forest monk carries his walking staff, he became known as the 'Wise Shovel Man'.

"What good does it do me to live an ordinary life of a gardener? I will give up this life and become a forest meditator, then I will be peaceful and happy," he thought one day. So the Wise Shovel Man hid his only possession, his shovel, and became a forest meditator.

Soon, however, he started thinking about his shovel. He was so attached to this shovel that he couldn't get it out of his mind, no matter how hard he tried! So he gave up the struggle to meditate, and returned to his shovel and his ordinary life as a vegetable gardener.

But it was still the Wise Shovel Man's wish to stay peaceful and happy. Therefore, it wasn't long before he again gave up his mundane life as a gardener, hid his shovel once again and became a forest meditator. But still he could not get his shovel out of

his mind, and so he renounced his life as an ascetic for a second time. All in all, this happened six times!

When the Wise Shovel Man gave up his forest meditation the seventh time, he finally realised it was because of his old, worn-out shovel that he had gone back and forth seven times! He decided to throw it away, once and for all, into a deep river, so that he could meditate peacefully in the forest for good.



“I will not see which part of the river this shovel drops into. Otherwise, it may tempt me again to give up my quest,” he thought as he took his shovel down to the riverbank. So he closed his eyes, swung the shovel in a circle over his head three times, before throwing it out as far as he could into the middle of the river. “I have conquered! I have conquered! I have conquered,” roared the Wise Shovel Man when he realised that he had finally triumphed over his attachment to the old shovel.

Meanwhile, the King of Benares was riding past in a victory procession. He was on his way back to his palace after quashing a revolt near the border. He had



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

earlier bathed in the river, and was riding on his magnificent royal elephant when he heard the victorious shouts of the Bodhisattva.

“Listen. Who is proclaiming that he has conquered? Whom has he conquered? Bring that man to me,” he ordered his ministers. When they brought the Wise Shovel Man to him, the king said, “I am a conqueror because I have won a battle. You say that you have conquered. Whom did you conquer?”

“Your lordship, even if you conquer a hundred thousand armies, they are meaningless victories if you still have unwholesome thoughts and desires in your own mind! By conquering the craving in my mind, I know I have won the battle against unwholesome thoughts,” replied the Wise Shovel Man.

As he spoke, he meditated on the water in the river, then on water itself, and achieved a high mental state. In a sitting position, he rose into the air and preached these words of truth to the king, “Defeating an enemy who returns to fight against you again and again is no real victory. But if you defeat the unwholesomeness in your own mind, no one can take that true victory away from you!”

All unwholesome thoughts left the king’s mind when he heard these words. At that moment, he decided to give up the pleasures of the ordinary world and seek real peace and happiness. “Where are you going now, wise one?” he asked. “I am going to the Himalayas, oh King, to practise meditation,” answered the Wise Shovel Man.

“Please take me with you. I wish to give up this worldly life too,” announced the king. Saying that, the king, together with his entire army and all the royal ministers and attendants, turned northward with the Wise Shovel Man.

News travelled and soon all in Benares knew their king had renounced his kingdom to follow the Wise Shovel Man.

“What shall we do?” cried the folks. “It is better that we follow our king.” So all of

---

Benares left the city and travelled towards the northern mountains of Himalayas. Soon, Benares was as empty and quiet as a ghost town!

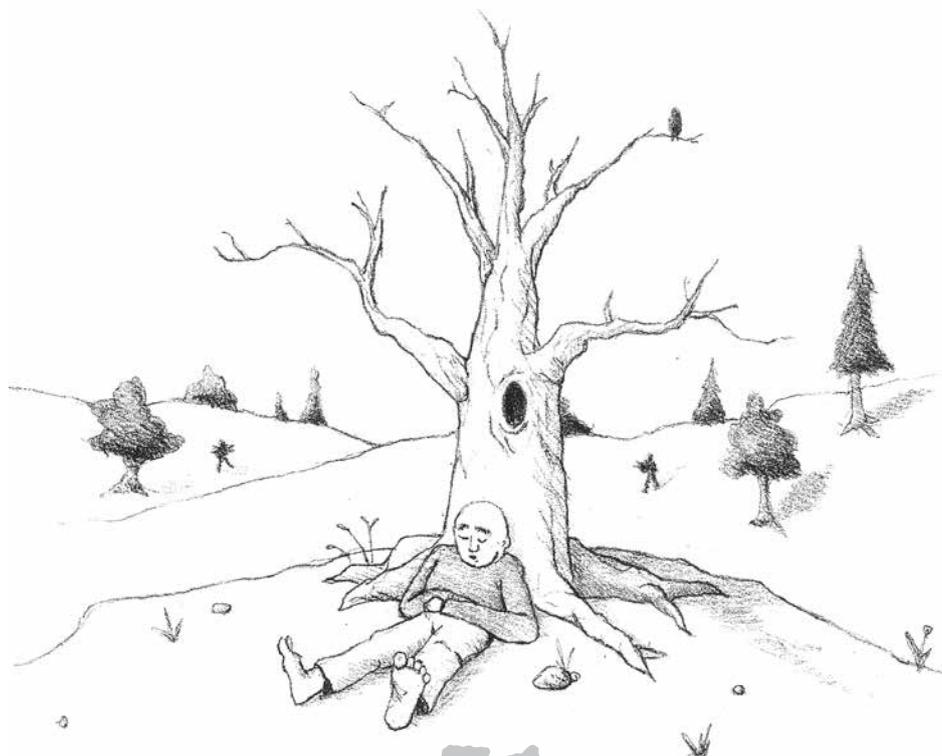
This great migration of people came to the attention of god Sakka, King of the Heaven of 33. Never had he seen so many people renouncing their worldly life for a spiritual one. He ordered the architect of the gods to build a dwelling place in the Himalayan forests for all these people.

When they arrived in the Himalayas, the Wise Shovel Man was the first to declare that he had given up the ordinary world for good. Then all those around him did the same. Never had so many people renounced their worldly life, all at the same time.

With time, the Wise Shovel Man developed the 'Four Heavenly States of Mind'. The first is loving-kindness, or tender affection for all. The second, compassion, is feeling sympathy and pity for all those who suffer. The third, appreciative joy, is a feeling of happiness for all those who are joyful, successful, good and wholesome. And the fourth state is, equanimity, or having a sense of balance and calmness, even in the face of difficulties or troubles.

He also taught the others advanced stages of meditation. With diligent effort, they all developed pure mental states, and were reborn in the heavenly worlds.

***THE MORAL IS ⇔ Only one possession is enough to prevent the mind from finding freedom.***



71

## **The Green Wood Gatherer** **(Laziness)**

Once upon a time, there lived a world-famous teacher in the city of Takkasila. He was also a holy man who had 500 students under his wing.

One day, these 500 young men went into a forest to gather firewood, and one of them

---

came upon a tree with no leaves. “How lucky I am!” he thought. “This tree must be dead and dry. It is just perfect for firewood. Now that I have located my share of the firewood, I’ll take a nap while the others are busy searching for theirs. When it’s time to return, it will be easy to climb this tree and break off the branches. So what’s the hurry?” He spread his jacket on the ground, lay down on it, and fell fast asleep — snoring loudly.

After a while, all the other students began carrying their bundles of firewood back to Takkasila. On their way, they passed by the snoring sleeper. “Wake up! Wake up! It’s time to return to our teacher,” they said and kicked him to wake him up.

The lazy student woke up from his slumber and rubbed his eyes. Still in a sleepy state, he climbed up the tree and started tearing off branches. To his surprise, he discovered that they were actually still green, and not the least bit dead or dry. What was worse, one of the branches he was breaking snapped back and poked him in the eye. He had to cup his injured eye with one hand as he finished gathering his bundle of damp wood. Huffing and puffing as he ran, he carried it back to Takkasila, trying to catch up with the others. As he was the last one to return, he threw his bundle on top of the rest.

Meanwhile, an invitation to a religious ceremony was sent to the world-famous teacher. It was to be held the next day at a remote village. “This will be good training for you,” said the holy man to his 500 students. “Have an early breakfast tomorrow. Then go to the village for the religious service. When you return, bring back my share of the offerings as well as your own.”

Obediently, the students got up early the next day. They woke the college cook up and bade her to prepare their porridge for breakfast. She went out in the dark to the woodpile, scooped up the top bundle of firewood — the lazy man’s damp wood — brought it to the kitchen and tried to start her cooking fire. But no matter how hard she blew, she couldn’t get the fire going, for the wood was too green and damp.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

She tried again and again. When the sun came up, there were still no flames in sight. “It’s too late for us to go to the village now,” discussed the students. So they decided to consult their teacher.

“Why are you still here? Why haven’t you set out for the village yet?” asked their teacher when he saw his students. The students chimed, “A lazy good-for-nothing slept while we all slogged. He climbed a tree and gathered only damp wood, which he hastily threw on top of the woodpile. Unfortunately, his bundle was picked up by the college cook. As it was green and damp, she couldn’t start a fire to cook our breakfast. And now it’s too late to go to the village.”

When the teacher heard the whole story, he said, “A fool who is lazy causes trouble for everyone. When what should be done now is put off until later, this action is soon regretted.”

**THE MORAL IS** ⇒ *“Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today.”*

---

# 72

## The Great Good Elephant King (Generosity and Ingratitude)

Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva was born as a magnificent elephant of splendid beauty. He was jade white in colour and glowed like polished silver. His feet were as smooth and bright as the finest lacquer, whilst his red mouth glistened like the best scarlet silk. His eyes — reflecting five colours of blue, yellow, red, white and crimson — shone and sparkled like precious jewels.

But, the brilliance and splendour of the elephant's physical form was only a pale reflection of his inner beauty. For the Bodhisattva had practised the Ten Perfections: energy, determination, truthfulness, wholesomeness, renouncing the ordinary world, even-mindedness, wisdom, patience, generosity, and loving-kindness for many lifetimes.

When he grew up and became an adult elephant, all other elephants in the Himalayan forests travelled to his kingdom to follow and serve him. Before long, his kingdom contained a population of 80,000 elephants. Such a large nation was crowded and filled with distractions. In order to live more quietly, he separated himself from the rest and went to live alone in a secluded part of the forest. The majestic elephant was known to all as the Great Good Elephant King because of his wholesomeness and purity.

In the meantime, a forester from Benares had travelled into these Himalayan foothills. He was searching for things of value that he could trade in Benares. But after a while,



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

he got lost in the huge forest. He ran back and forth trying to find his way home without success. Soon, he became exhausted, and thinking that he would die in the forest, started to tremble and cry.

The Great Good Elephant King heard the piteous cries of the poor lost man. He was filled with pity and compassion. Wishing to help him in any way he could, he began walking through the forest towards him.

However, the man was so terrified that he ran off when he saw the gigantic elephant approaching. When the wise elephant king saw this, he paused. Seeing this, the forester also stopped in his tracks. When the Great Good Elephant King began walking towards him again, the man started running, and once again he stopped when the elephant halted.

At that point, the man thought, “This is a noble elephant! When I run, he stops. And when I stop, he walks towards me. No doubt he has no harmful intentions towards me. He must want to help me instead!” This realisation gave him the courage to stop and wait.

“My human friend, why are you wandering about and crying in panic?” asked the elephant while he lumbered slowly closer.

“Lord elephant,” said the man, “I have lost my directions and now am hopelessly lost in this vast forest. I’m worried that I will perish here!”

To bring comfort and help to the man, the Great Good Elephant King took the forester to his own secluded dwelling place. It was there that the forester stayed for several days eating the finest fruits and nuts in all of the Himalayas. Finally, one day the great elephant king said, “It’s time you go home, my friend. Don’t be afraid. Sit on my back and I will take you to the land where people live.” Saying that, the kind elephant trudged towards the land of men with the forester on his back.

“What if people were to ask me where I was all this while. I must be able to tell everything,” thought the man when he rode comfortably on this glorious being. So he noted all the

---

landmarks he had passed by while he travelled on the virtuous elephant king.

Soon, the elephant king and the man came out of the thick forest near the highway to Benares. “My good friend, take this road to Benares. Please don’t tell anyone where I live, whether they ask you or not,” requested the Great Good Elephant King. With these parting words, the gentle elephant turned around and lumbered back to his secret dwelling.

The man had no trouble finding his way back to Benares. One day, while browsing around in a bazaar, he chanced upon some ivory carvers. These craftsmen carved ivory into delicate and beautiful statues and ornaments.

“Would you buy tusks that come from living elephants?” he asked.

“What a question! Everyone knows that the tusks from a live elephant are much more valuable than those from a dead one,” exclaimed the ivory carvers.

“In that case, I will bring you some tusks from a live elephant,” said the forester.

Greedy for money and without any gratitude towards his saviour — the kind elephant king — the man packed a sharp saw together with his other provisions, and set out for the home of the Great Good Elephant King.

“Oh, my dear human friend, what brings you back here again?” asked the elephant king kindly when he saw the forester.

“My lord elephant, I’m a poor man who makes a very humble living. As times are hard, I have come to beg from you just a little piece of your tusk. With it, I will be able to earn some money to keep my belly full.”

Pitying the man, the kind elephant king agreed to the forester’s request. “I will give you a big piece of my tusk, my friend. Did you bring a saw with you?”

“Yes, my lord,” answered the forester, “I have brought a saw.”

“All right then,” said the generous elephant king. “Cut from both my tusks!”



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

And so the gentle elephant king bent down on his knees and offered his spectacular silvery-white tusks to the man. Without the slightest tinge of regret or shame, the man lopped off big pieces of ivory from both tusks.

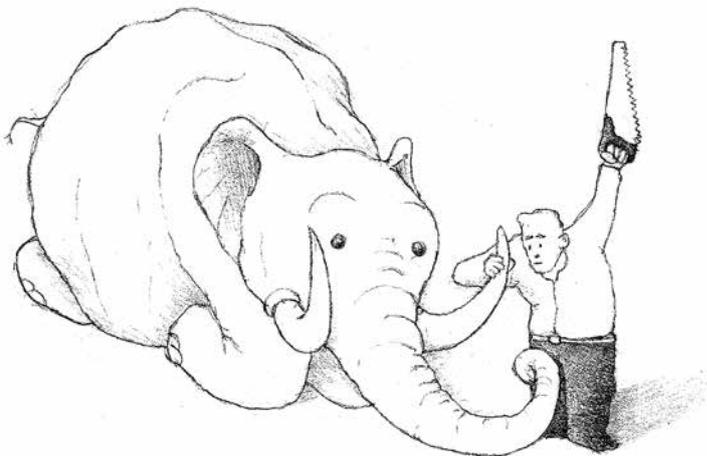
The Bodhisattva picked up both pieces with his trunk and said, “Good friend, I’m not giving you my lovely tusks because I dislike them or want to get rid of them. Nor is it because they are not valuable to me. But a thousand times, even a hundred thousand times more lovely and valuable are the tusks of wisdom, which leads to the realisation of all Truth.”

When the elephant gave his tusks to the man, he made a wish, a silent wish that his perfect generosity would eventually lead him to the greatest wisdom.

The man went home happily and sold both pieces of ivory. But it didn’t take him long to squander his money. So once again he returned to the Great Good Elephant King. “My lord, the money I got by selling your ivory was only enough to pay off my debts. I’m still a poor man who has barely enough to eat, so please oh generous one, could you give me the rest of your tusks?” he begged.

Without hesitation, the elephant king offered what was left of his tusks. The man immediately cut off the remaining tusks, right down to the sockets in the elephant’s skull and left without a word of thanks! This wonderful and kind-hearted elephant meant no more than a bank account to him! He took the precious ivory back to Benares, sold it and quickly spent all his money.

Wasting no time, the forester returned for a third time to the Himalayas to seek out the Great Good Elephant King. “Oh noble elephant king, it is very hard, indeed, to



---

make a living in Benares. Have pity on me and let me have the rest of your ivory — the roots of your tusks,” begged the forester.

As perfect generosity holds nothing back, the elephant king kindly acceded to his request yet again, and offered what little stumps of ivory he had to the man. The ungrateful betrayer did not care the least bit for the elephant. He stepped onto the magnificent trunk which was like a thick silver chain, climbed up on it and then sat between the pure white temples on top of the great head which resembled a snowy Himalayan dome. Next, he brutally dug in his heels to rub and tear away the tender flesh from the stumps of the once-glorious tusks. After that, he used his blunt worn-out saw to hack the ivory roots out of the noble skull!

It is said that there are many worlds out there — the hellish world of torture, the world of hungry ghosts, the world of animals, the world of mankind, as well as numerous heavenly worlds — from the lowest to the highest. In all these worlds, there are millions of beings who, at one time or another, have been born and lived as elephants. And some who narrated this story said that all who had lived as elephants before felt the pain of the Bodhisattva — the Great Good Elephant King — although they did not know the reason.

Getting what he had come for, the forester departed carrying the bloody ivory stumps. He was not the least bit grateful or respectful to the elephant king for what he had done. Instead, he thought, “This elephant has outlived his usefulness since he has no more ivory for me.”

It seemed the vast mighty earth, strong enough to support great mountains and bear the worst filth and stench could not bear a minute more of the forester’s ingratitude and cruelty. For when the man was out of sight of the Bodhisattva, the earth suddenly opened up beneath the man. Fire from the lowest hell leaped up, engulfed him in bright red flames and pulled him down to his doom!

***THE MORAL IS*** ➤ ***The ungrateful stops at nothing, and digs his own grave in the end.***



# 73

## **Four on a Log** (Gratitude)

Once upon a time, King Brahmadata of Benares had a son. He grew up to be a mean and cruel man, the sort who's always trying to prove that he's tougher than everyone else. He was a bully who constantly pushed people around and picked fights. Whenever he spoke to people, it was with a stream of obscenities — right out of the gutter. And he was always quick to get angry, like a hissing snake that had just been stepped on.

People inside and outside the palace avoided him like the plague and ran away from him as if he was a starving man-eating demon. Behind his back, everyone called him the 'Evil Prince'.

One day, the prince decided to go for a swim in the river and so took his servants and attendants out with him. Suddenly, the sky turned dark and gloomy, and it started to rain cats and dogs. Eager to show that he was a courageous person, he yelled at his servants to take him into the river and bathe him before taking him back to the shore again.

Following his orders, the servants took the prince out to midstream. "This is our chance! Let's kill the Evil Prince. Whatever we do here, the king will never find out," they whispered to one another. "Into the flood waters you go, you good-for-nothing!" With that, they threw him into the stormy river.

When they returned to the bank, the others asked about the prince when they found him missing. "We don't know. As the storm came, he must have swum faster than us and gone back to Benares," they replied.

---

“Where is my son?” questioned the king when the servants were back in the palace.

“We do not know, your Majesty. We thought he had returned to the palace first when the rainstorm set in.” So, King Brahmadata had a search party organised and began looking for the prince. They searched carefully, all the way down to the riverside, but could not find him.

This was what had actually happened: In the utter darkness, howling wind and pelting rain, the prince had been swept along the raging river. Luckily, he was able to grab hold of a floating dead log which he clung onto for dear life. As he was being tossed along the river like a helpless rag doll, the prince was so afraid of drowning that he bawled like a terrified, vulnerable baby!

Now, a very rich man had just died in Benares. He had buried his treasure trove of 40 million gold coins in the riverbank, along the same stretch of river. Due to his miserly ways and attachment to wealth, he was reborn as a snake at the same spot where he had buried his treasure to guard it.

Now, at a nearby spot on the same riverbank, another rich miser had also stashed away a treasure of 30 million gold coins. Likewise, due to his stinginess and craving for money, he had been reborn as a water rat at that exact same place to watch over the gold.

When the river became stormy, both the snake and the water rat were flooded out of their holes and into the raging river. Like the prince, they both happened to grasp onto the same dead log that was carrying the frightened, wailing prince. The snake climbed up on one end and the water rat on the other.

At that moment, a young parrot was washed up onto the same dead log. This parrot had been roosting in a tall tree that grew nearby the river. But when the rainstorm came, the tree was uprooted and the little parrot fell into the water. The heavy rain and the strong wind hampered the parrot when it tried to fly.

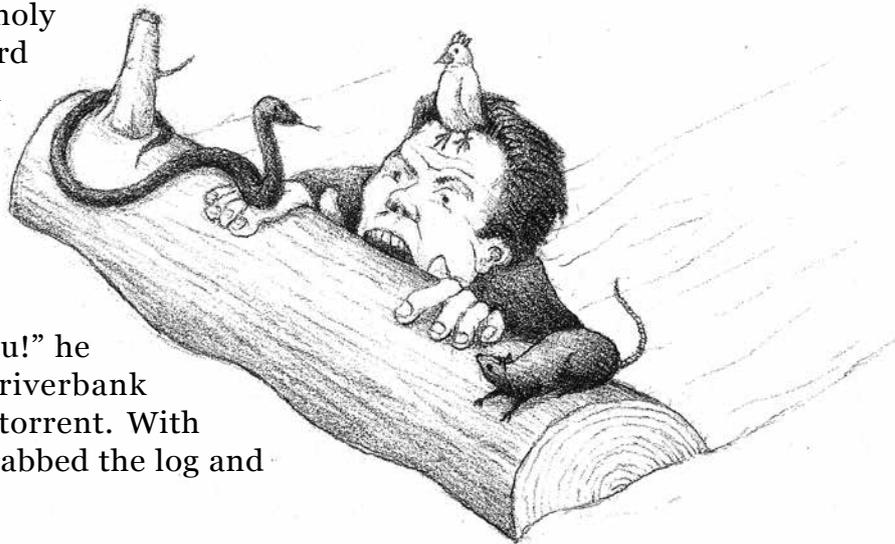


## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

So these four floated downstream together upon the log, towards a bend in the river. A holy man happened to be living humbly in a little hut nearby. This holy man was a Bodhisattva. He was born into a rich, upper-class family in Kasi. But he renounced his wealth and position when he grew up, and now lived alone next to the river.

When the log floated past the holy man's hut at midnight, he heard the panicky shrieks of the Evil Prince. "I will not let this poor frightened man perish before my eyes. I must rescue him from the water and save his life."

"Don't be afraid! I will save you!" he shouted as he ran down the riverbank and jumped into the rushing torrent. With great strength and effort, he grabbed the log and pulled it safely to shore.



When the holy man noticed the poor wet animals, he brought all three and the prince into his cosy little hut. He started a small fire, and thinking that the weaker animals were in need of drying first, gently warmed them by the fire. When they were warm and dry, he set them aside before allowing the prince to warm himself. Next, the holy man brought out some fruits and nuts. Again, he fed the more helpless animals before attending to the waiting prince.

Not surprisingly, this made the Evil Prince furious! "How dare this holy man value these dumb animals more highly than me, a great royal prince!" he thought angrily. Because of this thinking, he nursed a bitter grudge against his saviour.

---

The next day, the holy man dried the dead log in the sun. He chopped it up and used the firewood to cook their food and keep them warm. After a few days, all four recovered their strength and the waters had subsided.

It was time for them to leave. The snake came to the gentle Bodhisattva to say goodbye first. It coiled its body on the ground, arched itself up, bowed its head respectfully and said, “Venerable one, I’m grateful to you for saving my life. I have buried a treasure of 40 million gold coins in a certain place. To repay your kindness to me, I will gladly give it to you, for all lives are priceless! Whenever you are in need of money, just come down to the riverbank and look for me by calling out, ‘Snake! Snake!’ ”

The water rat was next to bid the holy man farewell. Facing the Bodhisattva, it stood up on its hind legs, bowed its head respectfully and said, “Venerable one, I cannot thank you enough for saving my life. I, too, have buried a treasure of 30 million gold coins in a certain place. To repay your kindness, I will also gladly give it to you, for all lives are priceless! Whenever you are in need of money, just look for me at the riverbank by calling out, ‘Rat! Rat!’ ”

The depth of gratitude and generosity shown by the snake and the water rat was a far cry from their previous stingy human lives!

Then came the parrot’s turn to say goodbye to the holy man. It bowed its head respectfully and said, “Venerable one, I am grateful to you for saving my life, but I do not possess any silver or gold. However, if you are ever in need of the finest rice, just look for me at the riverbank by calling out, ‘Parrot! Parrot!’ With the help of my relatives from all the forests of the Himalayas, we will bring you cart-loads of the most precious fragrant rice, for all lives are priceless!”

The Evil Prince was the last to take his leave. As his mind was bent on avenging the insults he thought he received from the holy man, he was far from feeling grateful to him for saving his life. In fact, he thought only about killing the holy man if he ever saw him



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

again. But he masked his true intent and said, “Venerable one, please come to me when I’m the king and I will provide you with the Four Necessities — food, clothing, shelter and medicine.” With that, he returned to Benares and was soon crowned as the new king.

The holy man decided to check if the gratitude of these four was real. So, he went down to the riverbank and called out, “Snake! Snake!” At the sound of the first word, the snake slithered out of its home under the ground. It bowed respectfully and said, “Holy one, under this very spot lies 40 million gold coins. Dig them up and take them with you!”

“Very well,” replied the holy man, “When I’m in need, I will come again.”

Saying goodbye to the snake, he walked along the riverbank to where the rat lived, and called out “Rat! Rat!” The water rat appeared and just like the snake, it too showed the spot where its treasure lay and offered its hoard to the holy man.

Next, he called out “Parrot! Parrot!” The parrot flew down from its home at the top of a tree, bowed respectfully and said, “Holy one, do you need fine fragrant rice? I will summon my relatives and we will bring you the best rice in all of the Himalayas.”

The holy man replied, “Very well, when I’m in need, I will come again.”

Finally, he set out to see the king. He travelled to the royal garden and slept there for the night. The next morning, in a very humble and dignified manner, he went to collect alms in the city of Benares.

That same morning, the ungrateful king happened to be leading a vast procession around the city seated on a magnificently-adorned royal elephant. When he saw the Bodhisattva coming towards him from a distance, he thought, “Aha! This lazy homeless bum is coming to sponge off me. Before he can brag to everyone how much he did for me, I must have him beheaded!”

---

“This worthless beggar must be coming to ask for something. Don’t let the lazy good-for-nothing get near me. Arrest him immediately, tie his hands behind his back, and whip him at every street corner. Take him out of the city and execute him. Then spear his body through a sharpened stake and leave it for all to see,” he instructed his servants.

The king’s men followed his cruel orders. They tied up the innocent holy man like a common criminal and whipped him mercilessly at every street corner on the way to the execution place. But no matter how hard the whip cut into his flesh, he remained dignified. After each slash of the whip, he simply exclaimed, for all to hear, “This proves that the old saying is still true — ‘It pays more to pull logs from a river than to help an ungrateful man’.”

Some of the onlookers began to wonder why he said that at each street corner. “This poor man’s pain must have been caused by an ungrateful man,” they said to one other. “Oh holy man, how have you helped an ungrateful man?” they asked.

Then he told them the whole story, and in conclusion, he said, “I rescued this king from a terrible flood, and in doing so, I brought this pain upon myself for I did not follow the saying of the wise and the old. That’s why I repeatedly say ‘It pays more to pull logs from a river than to help an ungrateful man’.”

After hearing this story, the people of Benares became enraged. “This good man saved the king’s life, but instead of repaying his kindness, he treated him so cruelly. How can such an ingrate possibly be a good king? He can only be dangerous to us. Let’s overthrow him!”

Rage turned the citizens of Benares into a mob. They pelted the king as he rode on his royal elephant, with arrows, knives, clubs and stones, killing him. They dragged his corpse and threw it into a ditch by the side of the road.

Then, they made the holy man their new king. He ruled Benares well. Then one day,



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

he decided to visit his old friends at the riverbank with a huge procession.

“Snake! Snake!” he called out. The snake came out, offered its respect and said, “My lord, if you wish, you are welcome to take the treasure.” So, the king had his servants dig up the 40 million gold coins.

Next, he went to the water rat’s home and called out its name. “My lord, if you wish, you are welcome to take my treasure,” it said after offering its respect. This time, the king’s servants dug up 30 million gold coins.

Lastly, the king called out for the parrot. The parrot flew to the king, bowed respectfully and said, “If you wish, my lord, I will collect the finest fragrant rice for you.”

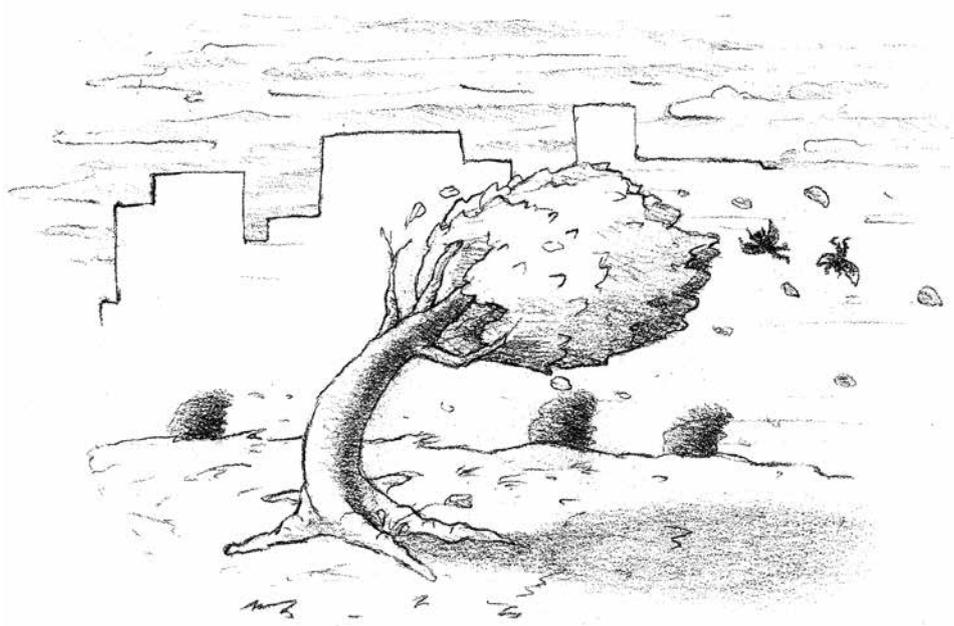
But the holy king replied, “Not now, my friend. When rice is needed, I will request it from you. Now let us all return to the city.”

When they reached the royal palace in Benares, the king had the 70 million gold coins guarded in a safe place. He had a golden bowl made for the snake to live in, and a maze produced from the best crystals to house the rat. For the kind parrot, he had a golden cage made, one with a gate that it could latch and unlatch from the inside.

Every day, the king gave rice puffs and the sweetest bees’ honey on golden plates to the snake and the parrot. And on another golden plate, he dished the most aromatic scented rice to the water rat.

The king became famous for his generosity to the poor. He and his three animal friends lived together in perfect harmony for many years. When they died, they were all reborn as they deserved.

***THE MORAL IS*** ⇨ ***Gratitude is a reward, which is itself rewarded.***



74

## New Homes for the Tree Spirits

(Wise Advice)

Once upon a time, just like all who were born had to die one day, the King of the Tree Spirits passed away. So King Sakka, the ruler of the 33 levels of Heaven appointed a new King to govern and take charge of all tree spirits. As his first official act, the new



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

king sent out a decree instructing all tree spirits to select a tree to live in. The edict also stated that every tree was to be pleased with its resident spirit.

Now, it happened in this story that there was a very wise tree spirit who was the leader of a large clan during that time. When he received the decree, he advised his clan members not to live in freestanding trees, but to live in forest trees near him as it was safer. The wise ones settled down in the forest trees near their leader.

But, just as there were wise tree spirits around, there were also some foolish and arrogant ones who refused to heed the advice of their leader. “Why should we crowd together? Let’s go to the villages, towns and cities where the humans stay. Tree spirits who live there receive the best offerings, and they are even worshipped by the superstitious people living in those places. What a life we will have there!” they laughed to one other.

And so they travelled to the villages, towns and cities, and moved into the big, freestanding trees that were looked after by people. All was fine until one day, a big storm came up. The wind blew strong and hard. The big, heavy trees with old, stiff branches did not withstand the storm well. Branches cracked and dropped, trunks broke in two and collapsed, and some were even uprooted. But the trees in the forest, which were intertwined with one other, were able to bend and support each other in the mighty wind. They did not break or fall!

The tree-homes of the tree spirits in the villages, towns and cities were utterly destroyed. Left with no choice, they gathered their children and returned to the forest. Back in the forest, they complained to the wise leader about their misfortune. “This is what happens to arrogant ones who ignore advice of the wise and go off by themselves,” said the leader finally when they had finished their stories.

***THE MORAL IS*** ⇒ ***Fools are deaf to wise words.***

---

# 75

## **The Fish That Worked a Miracle** **(The Power of Wholesomeness)**

Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva was born as a pond fish in northern India. There were all kinds of fishes, big and small, living in that pond with the Bodhisattva.

All went well until one day, a period of severe drought occurred. Somehow, the rainy season did not come as usual. Crops died and many ponds, lakes and rivers dried up from the lack of water.

The fishes and turtles, in a frantic bid to stay alive and save themselves, dug and buried themselves deep in the wet mud. The crows and other birds that were around the pond were pleased to see this. They hovered around for a while before using their beaks to pull up the frightened little muddy fishes and gobble them up.

The suffering, pain and death experienced by other fishes around the Bodhisattva greatly saddened him. It filled him with pity and compassion, and he wished he could help relieve their suffering. He realised that he was the only one who could save them, but it would take a miracle to do so.

The Bodhisattva was pure in body for he had never taken the life of any being. He was determined to use his purity to invoke rain from the sky and release his relatives from their misery and deaths.

With great determination, he pulled himself up from under the black mud. He was a



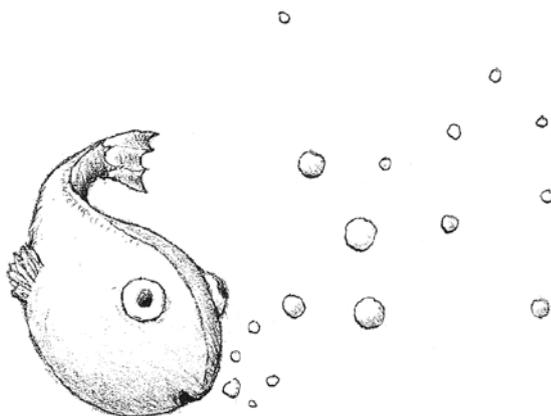
## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

huge fish, and after being stained by the dark coloured mud, he appeared as black as polished ebony. He opened his eyes, which sparkled like rubies, looked up at the sky, and beckoned the rain god Pajjunna. “Oh my friend Pajjunna, god of rain, my heart is heavy for my relatives’ sake. Why is it that you send no rain from heaven when I, one who is perfectly wholesome, am distressed for my relatives?” he exclaimed.

“Though I’m born among fishes, I have never eaten another of my kind, even one as tiny as a rice grain, for survival. In fact, I have never robbed any beings of their lives. The truth of my purity gives me the right to order you: bring forth the thunder and the rain! Relieve the suffering of my relatives!

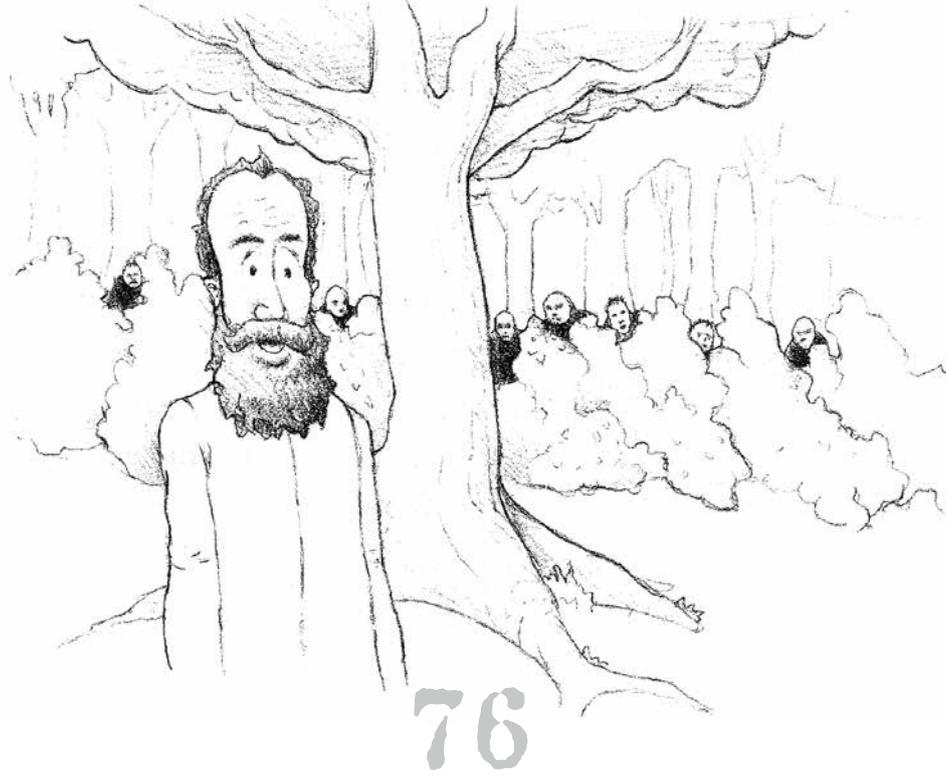
“Let the rain drops fall from the thunderclouds! Do not allow the crows to find their hidden treasures! Make them feel the sorrow of their unwholesome actions. At the same time, release me from my sorrow, for I have lived in perfect wholesomeness,”

he continued, in a commanding tone, as though he was ordering a servant, to the mighty rain god Pajjunna.



A short while later, it was as if the heavens heard the protestation, for it poured heavily, and saved many — fishes, turtles and even humans — from the fear of death. When the great fish that had worked this miracle eventually died, he was reborn as he deserved.

**THE MORAL IS** ➤ *True purity and wholesomeness relieve the suffering of many.*



## **The Meditating Watchman** **(Fearlessness)**

Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva was born into a rich and powerful family. Dissatisfied with the chase for ordinary worldly pleasures, he gave up his luxurious lifestyle, including his wealth and position, and became a holyman who resided in the foothills of the Himalayas.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

One day, he ran out of salt. So he decided to leave the foothills to collect alms. He chanced upon a caravan and decided to join them for part of the journey. As it was late, they stopped and pitched a camp.

Thus, the holy man used the time to do some walking meditation at the foot of a big tree nearby. He meditated deeply until he was experiencing the bliss of a high mental state. He remained in that state throughout the night, while continuing to walk.

Meanwhile, 500 bandits had surrounded the campsite waiting stealthily. They intended to attack the caravan when the band had taken their supper and settled down for the night. However before they could attack, they noticed the holy man who was alone. “That person must be a night watchman. If he sees us, he will warn the rest. Let’s wait until he dozes off, before we rob and loot!” they said to one another.

What the bandits didn’t realise was that the holy man was so deep in meditation he didn’t notice them at all — or anything else for that matter! They kept waiting for him to fall asleep, and he just kept walking and walking and walking, until the first rays of dawn finally began to appear. It was only then that he finished his meditation.

Having no chance to rob the caravan now, the bandits threw down their weapons in frustration. “Hey you in the caravan! If your watchman hadn’t stayed up all night, walking under that tree, we would have robbed all of you! You should reward him well!” they shouted. With that, they left in search for another victim to rob.

When dawn streamed through, the people in the caravan saw the clubs and stones abandoned by the bandits. Trembling with fear, they went over to the holy man. They greeted him respectfully and asked if he had seen the bandits. “Yes, I saw them this morning,” he said.

---

“Weren’t you scared?” they asked.

“No,” he replied, “the sight of bandits is only frightening to the rich, but I’m not a rich man. I own nothing valuable that the robbers might want, so why should I be afraid of them? I have no anxiety in a village, and no fear in the forest. Possessing only loving-kindness and compassion, I follow the straight path leading to Truth.”

In this manner, he preached the way of fearlessness to the people of the caravan. His words made them feel peaceful, and they honoured him.

After a long life that the holy man fruitfully used to develop the Four Heavenly States of Mind, he died and was reborn in the heavens.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ It is good to have a holy man around.***



# 77

## **The Nightmares**

### **(Chapter 1. The 16 Frightening Dreams)**

Once upon a time, there was a king called Brahmadata who ruled Benares, in northern India. One night, he had 16 horrifying dreams. So frightening were his dreams that he broke out in cold sweat and woke up the next day with his heart thumping loudly in his chest. The 16 nightmares had scared him to death. He was sure the dreams were ominous signs that foretold something terrible was about to happen. In a panic, he called for his official priests to seek their advice.

When the priests arrived at the king's royal bed chamber, they asked if he had slept well. He told them it had been the worst night of his life, that he had been scared out of his wits by 16 dreams, and that he was desperate to find out their meanings.

At this, the priests' eyes lit up. "Tell us your dreams, Your Majesty!" they asked. King Brahmadata related all 16 dreams to his priests, one at a time. The priests pounded their foreheads when the king finished his account and exclaimed, "Oh what horrors! It couldn't be worse, Your Majesty. Such dreams can only suggest one thing — and that is danger!"

"What is the danger, oh priests? You must tell me the meaning at once!" the king said with a furrowed brow.

"It is certain, Your Majesty, that the dreams show that one of these three disasters will

---

take place — terrible harm to your kingdom, to your life, or to your royal wealth.”

The king had feared as much. Terror gripped his heart, and his body trembled with fear and panic. His palms turned cold and sweaty. “Tell me, oh worthy royal priests, is there any way to avert this disaster?” he asked.

“Indeed, it is very dangerous,” they said. “If you do nothing, the end is certain, but we can prevent it. If we couldn’t, then all our training and learning would have been in vain. Trust us, my lord.”

“Just tell me what to do, my royal priests. I will do anything! What can you do to save me, my kingdom and my wealth?” shrieked the panic-stricken king.

“We must offer the greatest animal sacrifice that has ever been seen,” the priests advised. “We must kill, as sacrificial offerings, four of every kind of animal that lives!”

Although King Brahmadata was usually a gentle, kind and merciful ruler, he was so shocked by the impending doom foretold that he couldn’t think straight at all. Paralysed with fear, he placed all his hope and faith in his priests, and therefore gave them permission to carry out the massive slaughter.

“Have no fear, Your Majesty, we will take care of everything. We will prevent the approaching dangers!” assured his priests. Deep down, the priests’ intentions were less than noble. They knew they would be paid a handsome sum of money to perform the sacrifice. The meat from the slaughtered animals would also be theirs to feast on. “This is a great way for us to make a pile for ourselves, as well as get the best foods and drinks!” they thought merrily.

The priests started to work on organising the biggest sacrifice that Benares had ever seen. They dug a huge pit just outside town and put in it the best four of each type of land animals, birds and fishes that they could find. This sacrificial ceremony became known



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

as the 'Four-from-all' sacrifice.

Meanwhile, the king's senior royal priest had a promising young student. He was gentle, compassionate and very well-educated. "Oh master, you have taught me well the wise teachings of the old. Can you show me which teaching says that the killing of one will save the life of another?" queried the student as he wondered about the logic of performing the sacrifice.

"What kind of question is that? Open your eyes and be realistic, my boy. Can't you see that this great sacrifice, the "Four-from-all", will make us all rich? You must be trying to help the king hold onto his riches!" answered the priest.

"You have not answered my question, master. If this sacrifice is what you want, do as you will but I will be your student no more!" With these words, he departed and went to the royal garden to consider what he would do next.

It happened that in this story, the Bodhisattva was born into a rich, upper-class family. For many generations, the men in that family had been priests, just like the ones who were preparing the "Four-from-all" sacrifice. But when the Bodhisattva grew up, he chose to live the life of a humble forest monk in the Himalayas instead of a rich priest. He concentrated his mind in meditation and attained the most blissful inner tranquility and even miraculous supernatural powers.

This forest monk loved all kinds of animals. When he heard about what was happening in Benares, he was filled with tenderness and compassion for the poor beings. He decided to visit the city to teach the ignorant people and release them from the chains of superstition. So, he used his supernatural power to transport himself through the air to Benares. In an instant, he was seated on a rock in the king's garden. Due to his gentle nature, his body glowed like a golden sunrise.

---

The idealistic young student saw and recognised him as a great holy man. He bowed respectfully and sat on the ground. “Young man, do you have a good and just king reigning here in Benares?” asked the holy man.

“Yes,” said the student, “our king is kind and good, but he is being misled by the royal priests. He had 16 dreams which left him completely terrified. The priests took advantage of his fear when he told them his nightmares. They convinced him to hold a huge sacrifice and slaughter many animals. Oh holy one, please tell the king the true meanings of his dreams. Free the many helpless beings from fear and death,” he pleaded.

“If he comes and asks me, I will tell him,” said the holy man.

“I will bring him, sir,” replied the young man. “Kindly wait here for a short while until I return.”

Saying that, the student went to the king and told him there was a marvellous holy man seated in his royal garden who could interpret his dreams. Interested, the king accompanied the student to the garden with a crowd following behind.



## **(Chapter 2. Roaring Bulls That Do Not Fight)**

King Brahmadata knelt down before the Bodhisattva before sitting next to him. “Your Reverence, can you tell me the meanings of my 16 dreams?” he asked.

“Of course I can,” replied the forest monk. “Tell me about them, beginning with the first eight.”

“The first eight dreams were:

roaring bulls that do not fight,  
midget trees bearing fruits,  
cows sucking milk from calves,  
calves pulling carts with bulls trailing behind,  
a horse eating with two mouths,  
a jackal urinating into a golden bowl,  
a she-jackal eating a rope-maker's rope,  
and one overflowing pot with all remaining ones empty.”

“Tell me more about your first dream,” instructed the monk.

“Your Reverence, in my first dream I saw four pure raven bulls that had travelled from the four directions to fight in the palace courtyard. People from afar came to watch the bulls fight, but instead of fighting, these bulls only roared at one other, before going back to the places where they had come from.”

“Oh king,” answered the holy man, “this dream foretells things that will not happen in your lifetime or in mine. It tells of a far-off time when kings are unwholesome and stingy. The people, likewise, behave in an unwholesome manner. Goodness will

---

decrease while evil increases. The seasons will be chaotic — with strong sun rays on winter days and snow storms on summer days. The skies are dry, with scanty clouds and little water. Harvests are small, too, and people will starve. Though dark clouds from the four directions gather, they will depart without a single drop of rain even after much thunder clapping and lightning flashing — just like the roaring bulls that leave without fighting.

“But have no fear, there will be no harm to the people of today. The priests say this dream requires sacrifice, only because that is how they earn their money. Now tell me your second dream.”

“Your Reverence, in my second dream I saw tiny midget plants that are no more than one foot tall — flowering and bearing fruit.

“Oh king,” said the holy man, “the soil will be poor for growing crops, and humans will have short lives. The young will have strong desires, thus even very young girls will have babies — just like the midget trees bearing fruit.

“But this will not happen until the distant future when the world is in decline. What was your third dream, oh king?”

“Your Reverence, I saw cows sucking milk from their calves, calves that were born on the same day,” shuddered the king when he described his dream.

“Be calm,” said the monk, “this too will not happen in our lifetimes, but someday, people will no longer respect their parents and parents-in-law. In fact, they will take over the savings of their elderly parents and in-laws, and give everything to their own children. Then, depending on their whims, they may or may not feed and clothe their elders, so the elderly will be at the mercy of their own children — just like the cows sucking milk from their one-day-old calves.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

“But clearly, it is not like that today, oh king, so you have nothing to fear. Now tell me your fourth dream.”

Somewhat relieved, the king continued, “Your Reverence, I saw big, strong, full-grown bulls tailing behind bullock carts that were pulled by frail, awkward calves in my fourth dream. Unable to pull the heavily-loaded carts, the calves stopped and stood still. Because of that, caravans could no longer travel and goods could not be transported to the market.”

“My king, this dream heralds a time,” said the holy man, “when unwholesome, stingy kings no longer respect wise, experienced judges. Instead they will appoint young foolish judges, granting them the highest privileges. However, these young judges will not be able to make difficult decisions. They will become judges in name only, doing no real work — just like the calves that can’t pull the carts. Meanwhile, the older and wiser ones will not offer any help, thinking that it is no longer their concern — just like the bulls following behind.

“Again, you have nothing to fear, oh king, for that will take place in the far-off future when all the nations will be poorly run by the young and foolish. What was your fifth dream?”

“Your Reverence, my fifth dream was very strange indeed. I saw a horse eating with two mouths, one on each side of his head!” Again the king quivered as he spoke.

“Oh king, this dream signifies a time in the distant future when unwholesome, foolish kings appoint unwholesome, greedy judges. These judges are not the least bit concerned about upholding justice. Thus, they will accept bribes from both sides in the same case — just like a horse eating greedily with two mouths.

“Now tell me your sixth dream.”

---

“Your Reverence, I dreamed of people holding a golden plate worth a hundred thousand gold coins, and coaxing an old, skinny jackal to urinate into it, and that’s just what it did!” said the king making a face.

“Oh king, this too will take place in a far-off time when kings are not descendents of the ruling families of the countries that they rule. Wary of the experienced ministers from the native noble class, these kings will replace them with lower-class ministers whom they can control more easily. Meanwhile, the old nobles will depend on the new ruling class. Therefore, they will offer their high-society daughters in marriage to the new ministers — just like golden bowls being urinated into by the jackals.

“But this will not happen in your time, oh king. What was your seventh dream?”

“Your Reverence, I saw a man making a rope in my seventh dream. He allows the newly produced rope to pile up under his chair. And, a hungry female jackal is eating the rope as it falls, without the man knowing it.”

“A time will come in the far-off future,” said the monk, “in which women will have greater cravings. They will desire men, strong liquor, jewellery and all sorts of useless possessions. They will also spend a lot of time window-shopping, and ignore even the most important household activities. In addition, they pay more attention to their lovers than to their husbands, and will waste all the money earned by their husbands — just like the jackal devouring the rope that is produced by the rope-maker.

“But as you can see, oh king, these times are not upon us yet. Tell me about your eighth dream.”

“Your Reverence,” continued the king, “in my eighth dream, I saw one big pot filled to the brim with water, and many small, empty pots surrounding it in front of the palace gate. Warriors, priests, merchants and farmers were bringing water from all directions,



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

but were pouring it only into the big pot. As that pot was overflowing, all the water was wasted while all the little pots remained empty!” shivered the king in fear as he spoke.

“Have no fear, oh king,” said the holy man. “This dream predicts a time far off in the future when the world is in a declining state. The land is less fertile, so it will be harder to grow crops. There will be no more millionaires as the richest people will have no more than 100,000 pieces of gold! Even the kings of the future will be poor and stingy.

“The kings and the wealthy people of that time will also make all the rest work for them only. The rich and powerful will force the poor to bring all their products, grains, vegetables and fruits to their warehouses while the barns of the hardworking poor people remain empty. The situation will be like the big pot that is filled to the brim until it is overflowing, but all the little ones are empty.

“So now you understand the meanings of your first eight dreams. They have foretold:

thunderclouds that don't rain, young girls having babies,  
the elderly at the mercy of their children,  
young foolish judges getting no help from the wise,  
greedy judges taking bribes from both sides,  
lower-class ministers with upper-class wives,  
wives squandering away the earnings of their husbands,  
and the rich taking from the poor, leaving them with nothing.

“Oh king, you can be at peace now regarding these first eight dreams. Clearly such times are not upon us, and these dangers are not to be feared in the present day.”



### **(Chapter 3. The Frightening Sound of 'Munch, Munch, Munch'.)**

“Indeed,” replied King Brahmadatta to the humble forest monk, “you have set my mind at ease concerning my first eight dreams, but my last eight dreams are even more frightening. I must do something to prevent the doom that they predict.” The king shook uncontrollably with fear and panic as he thought about them.

“Calm down,” said the holy man, “and tell me these dreams, so I may relieve your distress.”



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

The king replied: “These were my last eight dreams:

a pond that’s muddy in the middle but clear at the shore,  
rice that was being cooked unequally in a pot,  
fine sandalwood traded for rancid, stale buttermilk,  
empty pumpkins sinking in water,  
solid rocks floating on water,  
giant snakes eaten up by tiny she-frogs,  
royal golden swans waiting upon a bad village crow,  
and the frightening sound of ‘munch, munch, munch’.”

“Please tell me the details of your ninth dream.”

“Your Reverence, I dreamed that I saw a pond which was deep in the middle and shallow by the shore. It had five types of lotuses in it, and there were all kinds of animals — both two-footed and four-footed ones — drinking near the shore. Yet the water remained clear at the shoreline, and became muddy only in the middle. How could this be? What does it mean?”

“Oh king,” said the forest monk, “in the distant future, only unwholesome kings will be in power. They will rule based on their will power, along with their anger and fear. They will not care about morality, wholesomeness and justice. They are more interested in increasing their wealth from all kinds of bribes than in the well-being of the citizens. The rulers will no longer have patience, loving-kindness and compassion towards the people whom they rule. Instead they will be rough and cruel, squeezing every last penny from the people in taxes — just as the last drop of sweet juice is squeezed from sugar cane.

“Unable to pay the exorbitant taxes and bribes, the citizens will flee to the land near the borders. Eventually, there will be fewer humans living in the corrupt central capitals, and the borderlands will be heavily populated — just like the pond that is muddy in the middle but clear at the shore.

---

“But obviously there is nothing for you to fear, oh good and wholesome king. What was your 10th dream?”

“Your Reverence, I dreamed of rice that wasn’t cooked uniformly in a pot. Some parts were overcooked, some parts were well-cooked, and some were still raw.”

“Don’t worry about this either,” replied the holy man. “Unlike today, this dream predicts a time in which everyone is unwholesome! Kings, officials, ministers, priests, homemakers, city and country folks, even holy men, gods, tree spirits and fairies are unwholesome and wicked too!

“The weather will be chaotic. Winds will change quickly, sometimes blowing too hard and sometimes not at all. These winds will shake the heavenly homes of the sky gods. Likewise, it will rain just right in some areas, but terrible droughts and floods will besiege other places. The situation is very much like the unevenly cooked rice in your dream — some parts were overcooked, some were well-cooked, and some still raw.

“Now tell me your 11th dream, oh king.”

“Your Reverence, I dreamed of the finest sandalwood, the type that is worth 100,000 gold coins, being traded for stale, rancid buttermilk. What is the meaning of this?”

“This dream, too, indicates a far-off time in the future, when the knowledge of Truth is disappearing. There will be many greedy and shameless preachers who distort the Four Necessities — food, clothing, shelter and medicine. They will turn these into luxuries, having much more in excess than what they really need.

“They will teach the worthlessness of luxuries and the unwholesomeness of greed, by preaching the Truth of non-attachment. But in return for preaching, they will require money and luxuries. The money and luxuries only fuel an increase in craving, rather than show the way towards liberation from craving. They will preach the Truth only because they can then obtain worthless things — just like priceless sandalwood that



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

was traded for spoiled buttermilk.

“Now, let’s hear your 12th dream.”

“Your Reverence, in my 12th dream, I saw empty pumpkins sinking to the bottom of the water.”

“Oh king, once again you have nothing to fear for this dream portends a distant future in which the world will be in chaos. Unwholesome kings will grant high-ranking positions to the lower-class rather than the upper-class. The lower-class will quickly become rich and the upper-class will become poor. In all departments and functions, the ignorant words of the uneducated, lower-class officials will be greatly respected.

“Even among the religious people, humble, wholesome monks will lose respect, while the unwholesome teachings of shameless monks will be followed and adored — just like empty pumpkins sinking to the depths of the water.

“What was your 13th dream about?”

“Your Reverence, I dreamed of solid rocks floating on top of the water. This is so bizarre. What does it mean, wise one?”

“In the future era, the world is in complete chaos. The wise words of the well-educated nobles are ignored in all departments and functions, due to their births alone.

“Likewise, among the religious community, the words of Truth spoken by humble, wholesome monks are also ignored — just like solid rocks that float on the surface of the water.

“Now, tell me about your 14th dream.”

“Your Reverence, it was horrendous. I saw tiny female frogs chasing after huge, long black snakes. When the frogs caught hold of the snakes, they cut them up, broke them

---

into pieces like water lily stumps, and then gobbled them up!”

“There is nothing for you to fear in this dream either, oh king. This represents a time in the far-off future when the world is in decline. People of that time are no longer as wholesome as those of today. Their desires will have such strong hold over them that they are enslaved by their cravings. Men will take orders from their youngest, prettiest wives. Due to the uncontrolled desires of men, the servants, bulls, buffaloes and all other household wealth will be managed by their youngest wives.

“These wives will treat their husbands like slaves, keeping them under their thumbs. If the men ask about family affairs, their wives will say, ‘There’s no need for you to ask. Everything in my home belongs to me, not you!’ It will be like huge, long snakes being gobbled up by tiny female frogs.

“Now tell me about your 15th dream.”

“Your Reverence, I saw a village crow, one filled with the ‘Ten Bad Qualities’, being followed and served by golden swans — swans that are usually seen as kings by other birds.”

“There is nothing for you to fear, mighty king. This too indicates a distant time when all kings are weaklings. They are not skilful nor competent at riding elephants or horses, or in fighting battles. Afraid of being overthrown, these weak kings will be wary of appointing worthy, well-educated nobles in powerful high-ranking positions. Instead, they will be appointed as foot servants, bath attendants, barbers and so forth. The nobles will thus become the lowest servants of the untrained new officials — just like royal golden swans that served on a bad village crow.

“Finally, we have reached your 16th dream, oh king. Describe your last dream to me.”

“Your Reverence, this dream still frightens me. Normally, leopards hunt goats as prey, but in my 16th dream, I saw goats chasing after and eating leopards! The goats gave



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

out a munching sound that goes ‘munch, munch, munch!’ when eating the leopards. The other animals ran and hid in the forest when they heard the awful sound and saw the carnivorous goats approaching. The memory of this dream still chills me to my very bones, oh holy one.”

“Dear king, do not worry. For even this dream applies only to a far-off time when the world is ruled by unwholesome kings.

“The lower-class, who are unaccustomed to power, will become closest to the kings. They will gain power while the nobles will lose theirs and become poor.

“The lower-class newcomers will also confiscate all the lands, homes, possessions and inherited wealth from the nobles. When the nobles protest in the courts of law, the newcomers will threaten to have their hands and feet cut off. Thus, the nobles will run away and hide in fear.

“Likewise, bad monks will rule the day. They will hurt the good ones as much as they please. With no one to support and defend them, the good and pure monks will leave the cities and villages. They will live in the jungle in fear of the unwholesome monks, just like the rest of the animals that heard the alarming munching sound and live in fear of the meat-eating goats.

“Oh king, now you know the meanings of all 16 dreams. The last eight have foretold:  
overtaxed people fleeing to the borderlands,  
an unwholesome world with chaotic weather and rains,  
Truth being taught by preachers greedy for money,  
ignorant and unwholesome words gaining respect,  
wise words and Truth losing respect,  
husbands enslaved by desires for their youngest wives,  
educated nobles in the service of untrained newcomers,  
and lastly, the noble and good living in fear of the powerful and bad.”



## **(Chapter 4. Teaching)**

King Brahmadata bowed down on the ground before the holy man and said, “Your wisdom has removed my fear and panic. Your compassion has also kept me from committing terrible unwholesome deeds to many helpless beings. Thank you so much. My gratitude to you is endless, oh holy monk.”

“Your royal priests wanted to have a sacrificial ceremony not because they understand the Truth or that they cared for you and your well-being. Rather, it was proposed out of greed. They wanted only to get rich, eat good food, and keep their jobs at your court.

“Your 16 nightmares have indicated disasters in the distant future. What you do now will have no effect on them. These events will unfold when the world is declining, when the unreal is seen as real, when the unreasonable is treated as reasonable, and when the non-existent seems to exist. It will be a time when many will be unwholesome without shame, and few will be ashamed of their own wrongdoings.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

“Therefore, to prevent it from taking place by performing a sacrificial ceremony now is impossible!”

Still in a seated position, the Bodhisattva rose into air miraculously and preached these words, “Oh king, it was fear that gave your mind no peace and brought you close to killing so many helpless ones. Real freedom from fear comes from a pure mind, and the way to begin purifying your mind is to practise the five precepts. You will benefit tremendously if you mindfully abide by these training guidelines of conduct. They are to avoid:

destroying life, for this is not compassion;  
taking what is not given, for this is not generosity;  
doing wrong in sexual ways, for this is not loving-kindness;  
speaking falsely, for this is not the Truth;  
losing your mind by consuming alcohol,  
for this will lead you to break the first four precepts.

“Oh king, from now on, do not join the priests in killing animals for sacrifice.”

In this way, the Bodhisattva taught the Truth, freed many people from bondage to false beliefs, and released many animals from fear and death. In an instant, he returned through the air to his home in the Himalayas.

King Brahmadata practised the Five Precepts. He gave alms and did many other good deeds. At the end of a long life, he died and was reborn as he deserved.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ Beware of the man whose heart is gripped by panic and fear. What he can do out of fear is more dangerous than what scared him in the first place.***

---

# 78

## Illisa the Cheap (Miserliness)

Once upon a time, there was a billionaire in northern India who was an adviser to a king. Although he was very rich, he was not good-looking at all. He was lame, had crooked feet and deformed hands. Even his eyes were crooked too, for he was cross-eyed. Some said he had a crooked mind as well, for he had no religion whatsoever. You might think that people would call him 'Illisa the Crooked', but that was not the case.

Illisa also happened to be a miser. He refused to give anything to anybody. He was so stingy that he could not even bear to spend a single cent for his own enjoyment. Because of that, it was said that his home was just like a pond possessed by demons, where no one could quench his thirst.

Interestingly enough, Illisa's ancestors, of the past seven generations, were philanthropists. They were the most generous of gift givers who gave away the very best of their possessions. But when Illisa inherited the family fortune, he put a halt to that great family tradition.

For instance, the family had always maintained a charity dining hall, where anyone in need could come for a free hot meal. But Illisa had that razed to the ground. He also forced the poor and hungry away from his home, hitting them as they left. He felt they were a burden and only incurred extra expenses for him. Because of his stinginess, people soon started calling him 'Illisa the Cheap'.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

One day, Illisa was on his way home from the palace when he saw a tired, worn-out villager by the side of the road. The man had obviously walked a great distance. He was sitting on the ground, pouring some cheap wine into a cup. As he was drinking it, he ate some smelly dried fish for snacks.

Seeing the villager savour his drink made Illisa thirsty for some liquor too. "I would love to have a drink! But if I do, others may want to drink with me, and that would cost me money!" he thought. Unwilling to share with others, he suppressed his craving for alcohol.

Alas, his craving did not disappear. Suppressing it and thinking about it constantly made him sick instead. As time passed, his skin turned yellow, and he grew so thin that his veins protruded out from his flesh. He fought a constant battle against his desire for liquor. At night, he slept fitfully with his face down.

His wife noticed the changes in him. "Are you sick, my husband?" she asked one day while massaging his back to comfort him.

"No," he replied.

"Was the king cross with you?" she asked again.

"No," said Illisa. "Perhaps our children or the servants have done something to upset you?" continued his wife. Again his answer was negative.

"Or do you have a strong craving for something?" she tried again.

Illisa the Cheap kept quiet. He was afraid if he told her, it might end up costing him money! But his wife pleaded with him to reveal what was bothering him. "Tell me, please tell me," she said.

Finally, swallowing hard and clearing his throat, he said, "Yes, I do have a strong craving."

"A craving for what?" she asked.

"For a sip of liquor," he admitted at last.

---

“Oh, is that all?” answered his wife. “Why didn’t you tell me earlier? You are not a poor man. In fact, you are so rich that you can easily buy a drink for yourself and the whole city as well if you like! Shall I brew a big batch of liquor for everyone?” she asked.

Of course, this wasn’t what Illisa the Cheap wanted to hear. “Why should we give free liquor to others? Let them earn their own!” he blurted out.

“Well then, what about just us and our neighbours?” his wife asked.

“I didn’t know that you have become so rich all of a sudden!” he shot back at her.

“How about just our household then?” she asked again. “How generous you are with my money!”

“All right then,” she said, “I will brew just enough liquor for you and me, my husband.”

“Why should you be included? Women should not drink liquor!” came Illisa’s swift reply.

“Okay, I understand perfectly well now!” said Illisa’s wife. “I will brew only enough liquor for you alone.”

“If you prepare liquor here, people will know of it sooner or later and come begging for some. Even if I buy from a liquor store and bring it back to drink, others will still find out and want some. There will be no liquor given away in this house!” he said strongly.

Illisa decided the best course of action was to give the smallest coin he had to a servant boy, and sent him running to the liquor store. When he returned, Illisa took him to the riverside, got the small bottle of liquor from the boy, set him to stand guard nearby before hiding himself in the underbush. Next, he poured some liquor into a cup and began to drink secretly.

In this story, it happened that Illisa’s father had been reborn as King Sakka, the god king of the 33 levels of Heaven. He had this fortunate rebirth because he was generous



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

and charitable throughout his life.

At this particular moment, King Sakka was wondering whether his free food kitchen was still dishing out food to the needy. He discovered that it no longer existed, that his son had abandoned this family tradition and had even chased the poor and hungry out onto the streets! With his magic powers, he saw his miserly son hiding in the bushes drinking by himself as he was afraid that he might have to share the drink with others.

King Sakka decided to teach Illisa a lesson, a lesson about the effects of both good and bad actions. He decided to transform stingy Illisa into a generous person so that he too could be reborn in a heavenly world.

With this thought, King Sakka changed his own appearance and became the spitting image of Illisa the Cheap with all his physical deformities. He entered the city, went to the palace, and asked for an audience with the king.

“Let my adviser Illisa come in,” said the king. “Why have you come at this hour?”

“My lord,” said King Sakka, “I have come to give you all my wealth. You can then fill the treasury to the brim.”

“No, no. I have enough, much more than is needed,” replied the king.

“If you do not want it, my lord, kindly permit me to give it away as I wish,” answered the disguised King Sakka.

“Do as you wish then,” replied the king.

King Sakka left the palace and went to Illisa’s house. As the god was the exact likeness of Illisa, the servants greeted him as if he were indeed their master. He entered the house and sat down. He summoned the gatekeeper and instructed him to chase anyone out who looked like him and wanted to come into the house.

Then he went upstairs and looked for Illisa’s wife. “My love, let us be generous!” he said smilingly when he saw her.

Illisa's wife, children and servants were surprised. "He has never given anything to anybody before. It must be the alcohol that is causing him to behave so abnormally," they said to one other.

"As you wish, my lord, give away as much as you like," replied Illisa's wife.

"Call for the drummer then," said King Sakka, "and order him to go beat his drum in the city. Let him announce that all who desire gold, silver, pearls, jewels, lapis lazuli, diamonds and corals are to come to the residence of Illisa the billionaire."

She did what he said. Soon, a large crowd began to arrive carrying baskets, buckets and bags of all sizes. King Sakka opened up the storerooms containing Illisa's wealth and said, "I give you all these riches. Take as much as you want and go." So the people took it all outside and piled it up. They filled up their containers and carried them away.

One clever man from the countryside even made use of Illisa's bullock cart to carry off Illisa's wealth. First, he harnessed Illisa's bullocks to the bullock cart. Then he filled it to the brim with Illisa's seven treasures, and rode out of the city by the main road.



Without knowing it, he passed by the bushes where the real Illisa was hiding, still drinking his liquor. He was so happy about becoming rich overnight that he shouted, "May Lord Illisa the billionaire live a hundred years! Because of you, I have struck the jackpot. I won't have to work another day in my life! These were your bullocks, your cart and your seven treasures. They were not given to me by my father and mother — but by you, Illisa the generous!"

Illisa was shocked to hear this. "This man is talking about me! How can it be! Has the



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

king confiscated my wealth and given it away?” he thought. He jumped out from the bushes and shouted, “Hey you, what are you doing with my bullock cart?” He grabbed the reins and stopped the cart.

The villager got down and said, “What’s wrong with you? The billionaire Lord Illisa is giving away his wealth to all the people of the city. What do you think you are doing?”

As he said this, he hit Illisa hard on the head and rode away on the cart filled with treasures.

Illisa the Cheap bounced to his feet and chased after the cart. He grabbed the reins a second time. Again the villager got down from the cart, seized Illisa by the hair and struck him hard several times on the head before grabbing him by the neck and throwing him onto the ground. Then he drove off.

Thoroughly sobered by now, Illisa ran home as fast as he could. He saw crowds of people carting off his precious jewels. He tried to stop them, but they just pushed him out of the way and knocked him down. He nearly fainted from the scuffle. Covered with bruises, he tried to get into his house only to be stopped by his gatekeeper. “Where do you think you’re going?” said the gatekeeper roughly. He hit him with a cane, then grabbed him by the throat and threw him out.

“The king would be able to help me,” thought Illisa. So he quickly ran to the palace to see the king. “My lord, why do you allow my house to be looted?” he asked the king.

“This is not my doing. You, yourself, came to me and said if I would not accept your wealth, you would give it all to the citizens of the country. I applaud your generosity! Next, you sent a drummer out onto the streets to announce that you are giving your wealth away to anyone and everyone.”

“My lord, you must be joking! I did not do such a thing. People don’t call me ‘Illisa the Cheap’ for nothing! I don’t give anything to anybody if I can help it! Please, my lord, summon whoever is giving my treasures away and clear up this matter.”

---

After being summoned by the king, King Sakka came to the palace. “Who do you think is the real billionaire, my king?” Illisa asked. Neither the king nor his ministers could tell the difference between them.

“We cannot tell. Do you know someone who can recognise you for sure?”

“Yes, my lord, my wife can recognise me,” said Illisa. But when she was summoned and asked to decide, she stood next to King Sakka and said, “This is my husband, my lord.” When Illisa’s children and servants were called upon, they too chose King Sakka.

“I have a wart on my head that is covered up by my hair. Only my barber knows this,” Illisa thought. “Please summon my barber. He knows me very well,” he then said to the king.

The barber was called up. “Can you tell us which of these two men is Illisa the billionaire?” asked the king.

“I must examine their heads,” he said, “then I will be able to determine who the real Illisa is.”

“Do so,” replied the king.

Immediately, King Sakka used his magic to conjure up a wart on his head. When the barber examined them, he found warts on both heads. “Oh king, I cannot recognise which is the real Illisa. Both have crooked feet, hands and eyes, and both have warts on the same spots on their heads! I can’t tell the difference!” he exclaimed.

When Illisa heard this, he began to tremble. He was so terrified and fearful of losing his last hope of regaining his wealth that he fainted on the spot.

At that very moment, King Sakka manifested his true form and declared, “I’m not Illisa. I’m King Sakka, the god king of the 33 levels of Heaven.” As he said this, he levitated into the air and stayed there.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

To wake Illisa from his fainting spell, the attendants splashed cold water on his face. Illisa then knelt down in respect before King Sakka, the King of Gods.

“Illisa, this wealth came from me, not from you. When I was your father, I performed many meritorious deeds. I was glad to give to the poor and needy. That is why, when I died, I was reborn as King Sakka, the King of Gods,” spoke King Sakka to Illisa.

“However, you have violated our family tradition,” he continued. “You live the life of a miser, burned my charity dining hall to the ground, and chased the homeless beggars out onto the streets. You kept all the family wealth to yourself. You are so stingy that you are even unwilling to spend it for your own enjoyment! The family fortune is completely useless in your hands. It would be better if you were dead!

“Illisa, son of my former life, if you change your ways and become generous, you will be the one to benefit most. If you rebuild my free food kitchen and give hot meals to all who ask, you will earn both merit and peace of mind. But if you persist in being stingy, I will make all your wealth disappear into thin air, and I will split your crooked skull with my divine diamond dagger!”

Fearing for his life, Illisa promised King Sakka that he would give generously from then onwards. King Sakka accepted his promise. Still floating in the air, he preached the true value of generosity and of giving. He also convinced Illisa to practise the Five Precepts for the benefit of himself and others. Killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying or speaking falsely, and losing control of one's mind from the consumption of alcohol were to be given up entirely.

Then King Sakka vanished and returned to his home in the heavens above.

As for Illisa, he did indeed change for the better. He gave alms generously, performed many other good deeds, and became much happier. When he died, he was reborn in a heavenly world.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ Poor indeed is the rich man who won't part with a penny.***

---

# 79

## The Treacherous Headman (Betrayal)

Once upon a time, when King Brahmadata ruled Benares, in northern India, he had a clever minister who pleased him very much. To show his appreciation, the king appointed him as the headman of a remote border village. His duty was to represent the king and collect taxes from the villagers.

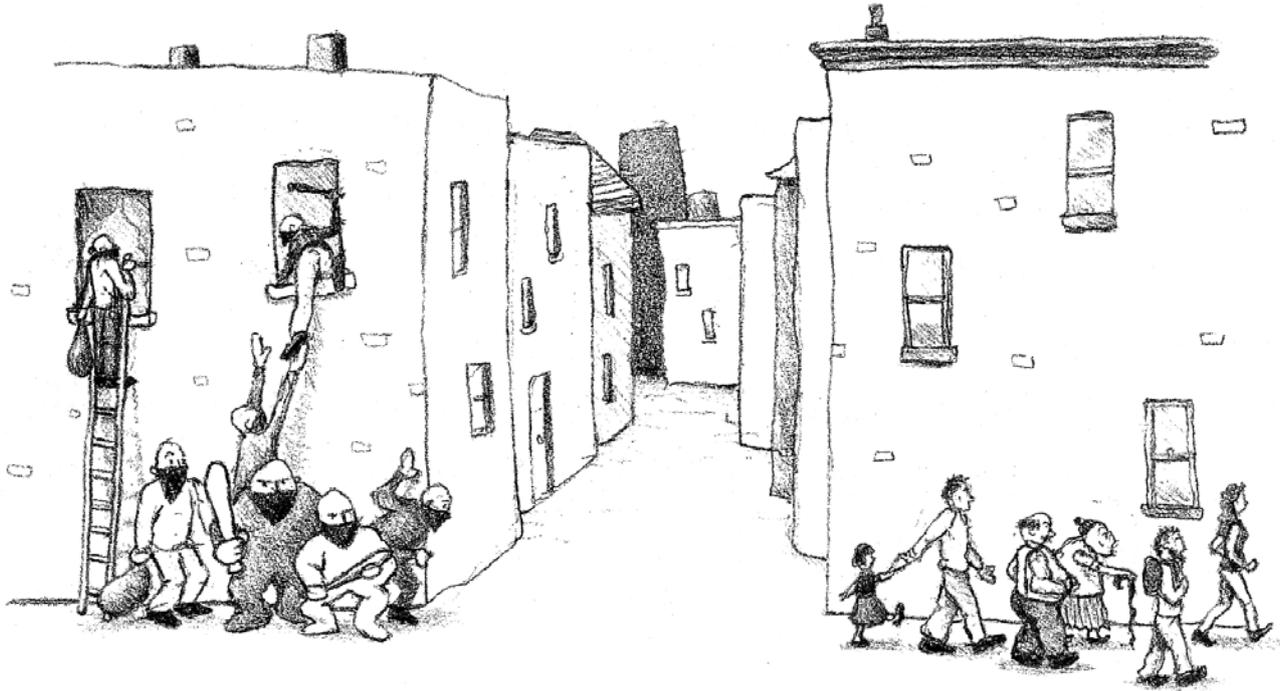
It wasn't long before the headman was completely accepted by the villagers. They respected him highly since he had been sent by King Brahmadata, who was known to be an impartial ruler, and came to trust him greatly as if he was one of their own.

Though the headman was an intelligent fellow, he was also a very greedy man. Working for the king and collecting his taxes were not enough for him. So he cooked up a plan to turn himself into a rich man after becoming friendly with a gang of bandits.

"I will find excuses and reasons to lead all the villagers into the jungle. This will be easy for me since they trust me as one of their own. While I keep them busy in the jungle, you invade the village and rob everything that is of value," he suggested to his robber friends. "Carry everything away before I bring the people home. But in return for my help, you must give me half of all the booty!" The bandits agreed and a date was set.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives



When the day arrived, the headman assembled all the villagers and led them into the jungle. According to plan, the bandits entered the unprotected village and pillaged anything valuable they saw. They also killed all the defenceless village cows, cooked them and ate their meat. When their bellies were full, the gang then carted away all the stolen goods and went back to their hideout at the end of the day.

Coincidentally, on that very same day, a travelling merchant had come to the village to trade his goods. When he saw the bandits, he stayed out of sight.

---

That evening, the headman brought all the villagers home. While on their way back, he ordered them to beat their drums and create a lot of noise as they marched towards the village. Actually, his true intention was to use the noise as a signal to inform the bandits that the villagers were approaching home.

The villagers were very sad when they realised they had been robbed, and that all their cows were dead and eaten. At that moment, the travelling merchant appeared and said to them, “This treacherous village headman has betrayed your trust in him. He must be an accomplice of the bandits. For only after they had left with all your valuables did he lead you home, and accompanied by such loud drumming!”

“This man feigns ignorance about what has happened, and pretends to be as innocent as a newborn lamb! But the fact is if ever a son did something as shameful, his mother would denounce and sever all ties with him,” he continued.

Before long, news of the crime reached the ears of the king. He summoned the treacherous headman and punished him as he deserved.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ No one defends a deceitful man and a betrayer of trust.***



# 80

## **Fear Maker and the Little Archer** (Self-deception)

Some say that the world was formed, destroyed, and formed again... over and over, throughout time. In one of these previous worlds, countless eons ago, the Truth wasn't uncovered yet and the Five Precepts were practised by only a few. Even the Bodhisattva did not know the Truth, and had yet to discover the Five Precepts.

Once upon a time in such a world, there was a king named Brahmadata, who ruled a place that is known today as Benares. At that time, the Bodhisattva was born into a rich, upper-class family in a market town situated in northern India. He also happened to be a hunchbacked dwarf. He remained short with a stooped back even when he became a young man. Many found him unpleasant to look at.

But he had a very good teacher. He learned all there was to know at that time, about the two great branches of knowledge — religion and science — from this outstanding teacher of his. He also mastered the skill of archery. He was so skilful that he was better than anyone else in India in this craft. For this reason, his teacher nicknamed him the 'Little Archer'.

"Many people judge by appearances alone. The king would probably look down on me if I go directly to him and ask for a job. He might doubt my abilities because of my deformity. It would be better if I can team up with someone who is handsome in appearance, tall and well-built with a strong personality. I will provide the brains

---

working behind-the-scene, but stay out-of-sight in his shadow. In this way, we can earn a good living together,” he thought when he had finished his education.

One day, he was strolling along the district where the weavers live and work when he saw a sturdy-looking man. He greeted the big strapping fellow and asked for his name. “People call me the ‘Fear-maker’ because of my burly appearance,” replied the weaver.

“You are so big-sized and robust, and have such an impressive name, why are you working in such a low-paying job?” asked the Little Archer.

“Because life is hard,” he replied.

“I have an idea,” said the Little Archer. “There is nobody in the whole of India who is as skilful as I am in archery. But I don’t look like your typical archer at all! If I asked the king for work, he would either laugh his head off or get angry with me. He would not believe that a hunchbacked little dwarf could be the greatest archer in India!”

“But you look perfect, and your name helps too,” continued the Little Archer. “We can go to the king and ask for a job. You stay in front and do all the talking while I remain hidden in your shadow. The king will hire you immediately. I will be the real archer and we will prosper and be happy. You just have to do whatever I tell you.”

Thinking that he had nothing to lose, the Fear-maker agreed. “It’s a deal, my friend!” he exclaimed.

The two partners then travelled to Benares to see the king. When they entered the throne room, they bowed respectfully to the king. “Why have you come here?” the king asked.

As planned, the Fear-maker stood in front and did all the talking. “I am the great archer known as the Fear-maker, Your Majesty. There is no one in all India who understands the art of archery better than I do. I wish to render my service to you, Your Majesty,” he answered.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Pretty impressed, the king asked, "How shall I pay you?"

"I will serve you for 500 pieces of gold per week, Your Majesty," he replied.

The king nodded. Suddenly, he noticed the silent dwarf who was stooping behind the Fear-maker almost out-of-sight all this while. "Who is this little man?" he asked. "What does he do for you?"

"He's my little assistant," answered the Fear-maker.

"Very well, then," said King Brahmadata, "the job is yours."

From that day onwards, the Fear-maker was accepted into the king's service, but it was the Little Archer who did all the work.

Before long, news journeyed to the palace that there was a ferocious tiger that lived in the jungle next to the king's highway. It attacked, killed and ate travellers who used that highway. Fearing for their safety, many began to avoid the king's highway.

"Can you capture this rampaging tiger, young man?" the king asked the Fear-maker one day when he was summoned to his presence.

"Your Majesty," he answered, "I am well-known to be your best archer. Why can't I capture it?" Hearing this, the king gave him an extra sum of money and bade him to catch the tiger.

The Fear-maker went home and reported this assignment to his partner. "All right," said the Little Archer, "be on your way!"

"Aren't you coming too?" asked the surprised Fear-maker.

"No, I won't go," he replied. "But I will give you a perfect plan. You must do exactly as I say."

---

“I will, my little friend. Please tell me,” said the big man.

“First, go to the tiger’s territory. But don’t rush straight to its lair by yourself. Instead, gather a thousand local villagers and give bows and arrows to all of them. Then, take them directly to the tiger’s hideout. Let them go ahead first while you hide in the underbush.

“The local villagers will be terrified of the tiger. They will be so afraid that they will surround and beat the tiger up upon setting eyes on it. And they won’t stop hitting it until it’s dead!

“Meanwhile, you are to cut a piece of vine with your teeth. Then, reappear and approach the dead tiger, holding the vine in your hand. When you see the carcass of the tiger, yell, ‘Hey! Who killed the tiger? I was going to capture it with this vine and lead it like a bull to the king. That’s why I have been searching for one in the jungle. Now tell me who was the one who killed the tiger before I could get here with my vine.’

“The villagers will be alarmed when they hear this. They will bribe you and ask you not to report this matter to the king. On the other hand, King Brahmadata will also reward you handsomely thinking that you are the hero who had slain the dangerous tiger.” This was the clever plan plotted by the smart Little Archer.

The Fear-maker did exactly as he was told. The frightening tiger was killed and once again the king’s highway was safe for travellers to use. Followed by a huge crowd, the Fear-maker returned to the king’s palace in Benares. “Your Majesty, I have killed the tiger and made the jungle safe for people again,” he told the king. Pleased with his performance, the king rewarded him handsomely.

However, it wasn’t long before there were reports of a buffalo threatening travellers on another road. Again, the king sent for the Fear-maker. He repeated the same trick

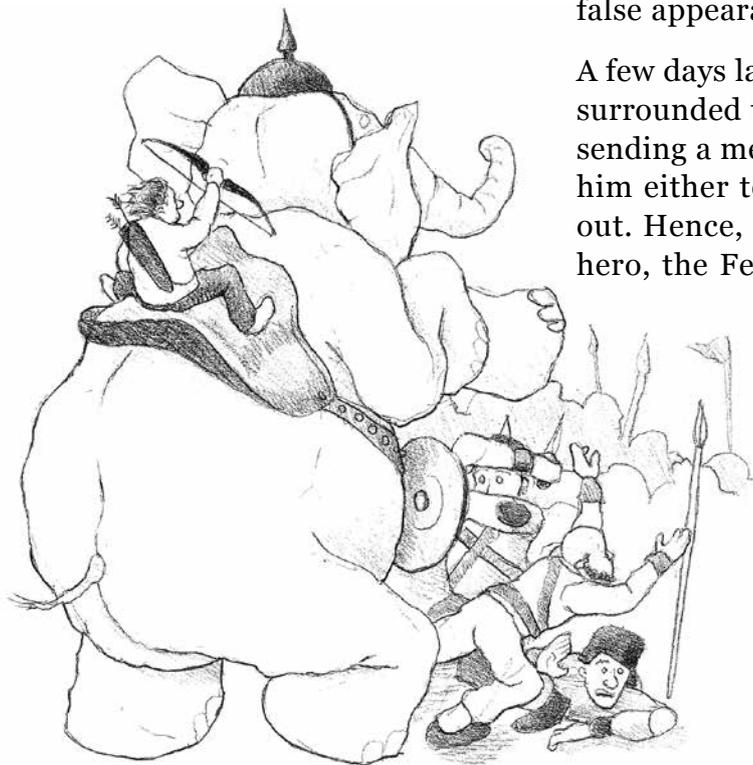


## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

taught by the Little Archer. Once again, credited for killing the buffalo, he was heaped with rewards bestowed by the grateful king.

By this time, the Fear-maker had become a very rich and powerful nobleman. All the wealth and praise, which he didn't really deserve, soon went to his head and he started to think that he was a 'big man' in his own right. In fact, he became so intoxicated with conceit, that he even looked down on the Little Archer and ignored his advice. "You think I am able to achieve all this because of you. Well, I don't need you. I can do all this without you!" The Fear-maker had come to believe the false appearance created by the Little Archer's plan.

A few days later an enemy king attacked Benares. He surrounded the city of Benares with his army before sending a message to King Brahmadatta summoning him either to surrender his kingdom or to battle it out. Hence, King Brahmadatta ordered his greatest hero, the Fear-maker, to fight his enemy.



Decked in full military gear, the Fear-maker mounted on the mightiest armoured war elephant in Benares. The Little Archer went along too. He was worried that the Fear-maker would get himself killed. So, dressed in his armour, he mounted the elephant and sat behind the Fear-maker. The mighty elephant marched through the city gates towards the battlefield, with a large crowd following behind.

---

When the Fear-maker heard the booming noise made by the war drums, he trembled with fear. “If you fall off now, you will get killed,” said the Little Archer. So he fastened a rope around the Fear-maker. The Little Archer clenched the rope tight in his palms to keep the Fear-maker from falling off the elephant.

Still, the Fear-maker was so overwhelmed by the sight of the battlefield and gripped by the icy fear of death that he urinated and defecated at the same time, all over the back of the poor brave war elephant!

“Ah, you bragged and spoke brashly like a courageous man earlier, but now, all you can do is to make a filthy mess all over this elephant’s back! Your present actions only prove that you are nothing but an empty vessel,” said the Bodhisattva.

“But don’t be afraid, my friend,” continued the Little Archer. “With me to protect you, you will be safe. Climb down from this elephant, go home and take a bath.”

“Now is the time to show the prowess of this hunchbacked little dwarf!” thought the Bodhisattva as he rode alone on top of the great elephant. Shouting mightily, he charged bravely into the battlefield and crashed through the enemy’s defences without killing any men or animals. He broke into the king’s camp, captured him, and took him back as prisoner to King Brahmadata.

Delighted with the Little Archer’s great victory, King Brahmadata rewarded him with wealth and fame. From that day onwards, he was renowned throughout India as ‘Little Archer the Wise’. The Bodhisattva sent his friend, the Fear-maker, back to his home village and supported him with monthly payments.

Little Archer the Wise practised generosity and other meritorious deeds. When he died, he was reborn as he deserved.

**THE MORAL IS** ⇨ ***“Appearances can be deceiving. Don’t judge a book by its cover.”***



# 81

## **Forest Monks in a King's Garden** **(Students Without a Teacher)**

Once upon a time, there was a rich man who gave up his wealth and his lavish, upper-class lifestyle to live in the Himalayan forests as a homeless holy man. Through the practice of meditation, he developed his mind and gained the highest knowledge. He also enjoyed great inner happiness and peace of mind. Soon, he had 500 students learning under him.

One day at the start of the rainy season, his students said to him, “Oh wise master, may we venture out to where men dwell? We would like to get some salt and other seasonings.”

“Very well. I shall stay here but you may go. It will be good for your health. Return when the rainy season is over,” replied their master.

Thus, with the permission of their teacher, the students travelled to Benares after they had paid their respects. They stayed at the royal garden while in Benares. The next day, they collected alms in the village just outside the city gates. They had plenty to eat as the villagers gave generously. On the following day, they went inside the city. The city people too were generous with their gifts.

The king was soon informed of the monks' presence at his royal garden. “My lord, 500

---

forest monks have come from the Himalayas to live in your garden. They are people of great virtue for they control their senses and live a simple life without luxuries,” people told the king.

Hearing such favourable comments, the king went to visit them. He knelt down, paid his respects and invited them to stay in his garden throughout the four months of the rainy season. They accepted, and from then on, took their meals at the king’s palace.

One day, a drinking festival was held in the city to celebrate a certain holiday. “Monks who live in the forests don’t normally get to drink good wine. I will treat them to some as a special gift,” thought the king. So he gave the 500 forest monks a large supply of the very best wines.

The monks drank the liquor and soon got drunk as they walked back to the garden. In their drunken stupor, some danced, some sang while others messed up their belongings when they were usually neat and tidy. In a short while, all passed out in a drunken sleep.

When they woke up sober the next morning and saw the mess they had created, they felt ashamed and sad. “We have done something that we shouldn’t, and conducted ourselves in a manner which was not proper for holy men like us.” Their embarrassment and shame made them weep with regret. “We have conducted ourselves in such an unwholesome manner only because we are away from our holy teacher,” they lamented.

At that very instant, the 500 forest monks left the royal garden and returned to the Himalayas. When they arrived, they put away their bowls and other belongings neatly — as was their custom — before paying respects to their beloved master.

“How are you, my children? Were you comfortable in the city? Did you find enough food? Were all of you happy and united?” he asked them.

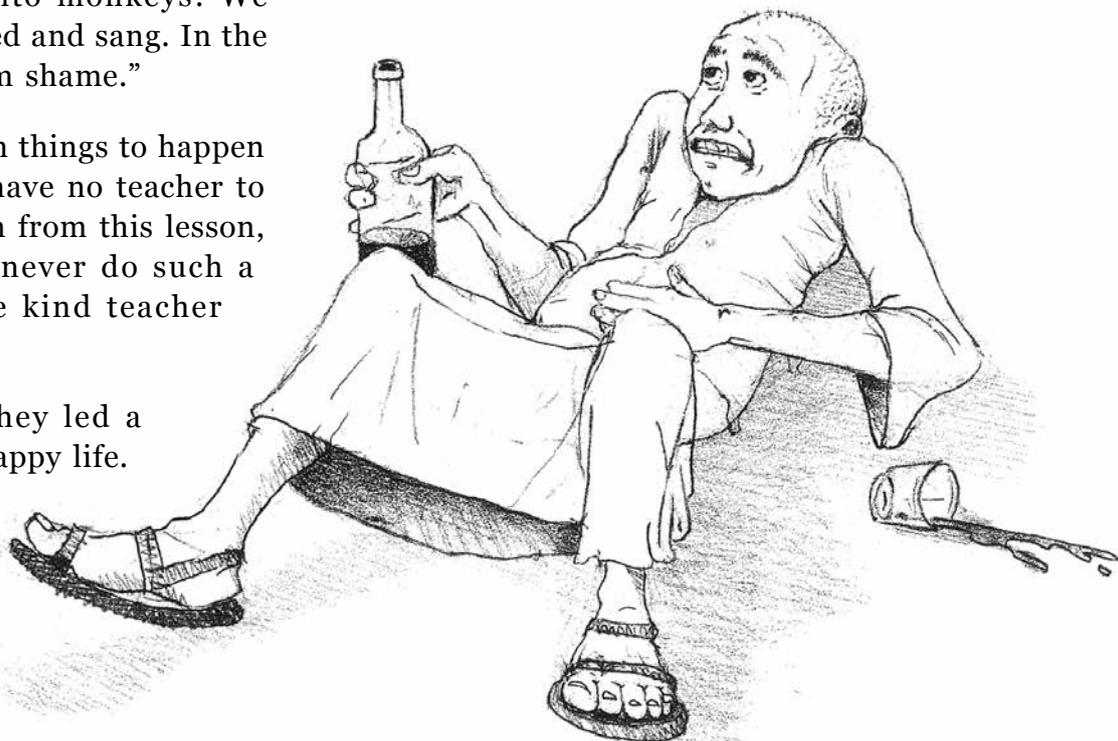


## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

“Yes, Master, we were comfortable, happy and united. But we drank what we were not supposed to drink. We lost all our common sense and self-control. We danced and sang like silly monkeys. It’s fortunate that we didn’t turn into monkeys! We drank wine, danced and sang. In the end, we cried from shame.”

“It is easy for such things to happen to students who have no teacher to guide them. Learn from this lesson, and henceforth, never do such a thing again,” the kind teacher preached.

From then on, they led a wholesome and happy life.



**THE MORAL IS** ⇒ *A student without a teacher to guide him goes astray easily.*

---

# 82

## **The Curse of Mittavinda** **(Chapter 1. Jealousy)**

Once upon a time, there was a monk who lived in a tiny monastery in a little village. He was very fortunate as he had the support of the richest man in that village. He never had to worry about anything, as his alms were always provided without fail by the rich man.

Because the monk did not have any worries regarding his meals or daily living, he was always calm and peaceful. There was no desire for greater comforts and pleasures of the world. He could spend his time cultivating the correct conduct of a monk, by being constantly mindful of his faults and performing only wholesome deeds. He was very fortunate indeed. But he didn't realise just how lucky he was!

One day, an elder monk arrived at the little village. He had been such a diligent practitioner that he was perfect and faultless.

When the rich man saw this unknown monk, he was very pleased by the monk's gentle manner and calm attitude. So he invited the monk into his house. He offered the monk a meal, and was very happy to receive a short teaching from the Venerable. He then invited the monk to take shelter at the village's monastery. "I will visit you this evening at the monastery to make sure that all is well," he said.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

When the impeccable monk arrived at the monastery, he met the village monk. They greeted each other pleasantly. “Have you taken your lunch today?” asked the village monk.

“Yes, the supporter of this monastery gave me my meal. He also invited me to stay here,” replied the elder monk.

Then, the village monk took him to a room and left him there, and the elder monk passed his time in meditation.

That evening, the rich man came. He brought fruit drinks, flowers and lamp oil to honour the visiting holy man. “Where is our guest?” he asked the village monk. After the younger monk had told him which room the elder one was staying in, the rich man went to the room, bowed respectfully, and greeted the elder monk. Once again, he was elated to hear another teaching of Truth taught by the rare and faultless one.

When the skies turned dark, he lit the lamps and offered flowers at the lovely temple shrine. He also invited both monks to lunch at his house the next day before he left the monastery.

But that night, a terrible thing happened. The village monk, who was always contented and peaceful, had allowed jealousy to poison his mind. “The rich man has always provided for me, giving me my alms food once a day and a roof over my head. But I’m afraid all this will change because he respects this new monk so much. If this new monk continues to stay here, he may stop providing for me. Therefore, I must make sure that the new monk leaves,” he thought.

Consumed by jealousy, the village monk lost his former inner bliss and peace. He was so worried about losing his comfortable shelter and his daily alms food, that he resented the elder monk more and more! His resentment grew so much that he started to plot and scheme to get rid of the perfect one.

---

Later that night, as was the custom, the monks got together to end the day. The faultless monk spoke in his usual friendly way, but the village monk would not speak to him at all. From his actions, the wise monk understood that the village monk was jealous and resentful.

“This monk does not understand my freedom from attachment to families, people and comfort. I am free of any desire to remain here. I am also free of any desire to leave here. It makes no difference. It is sad that this other monk cannot understand non-attachment. I pity him for the price that he must pay for his ignorance,” he thought.

He returned to his room, closed the door, and meditated throughout the night in a high level of mental state.

The next day, when it was time to collect alms food from the supporter of the monastery, the village monk rang the temple gong. But he rang it by tapping it lightly with his fingernail. It was so soft that even the birds in the temple courtyard could not hear it!

Next, he went to the elder monk’s room and knocked on the door. But again he only tapped on the door lightly with his fingernail. Even the little mice inside the walls could not hear the silent tapping.

Having done his courteous duty in such a devious manner, he set off for the rich man’s house. The man bowed respectfully to the monk, took his alms bowl and asked, “Where is our visitor, the elder monk?”

“I have not seen him. I rang the gong and knocked on his door, but he did not appear. Perhaps he is not used to the rich food that you gave him yesterday. Maybe he is still asleep, digesting the food he ate yesterday and dreaming of his next feast!” the village monk replied.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Meanwhile, back at the monastery, the perfect monk got up. He cleaned himself and put on his robe. Then he calmly left the temple to collect alms food from the villagers.

That day, the rich man fed the village monk with a meal of really scrumptious food. Made from rice, milk, butter, sugar and honey, it was sweet and luscious. When the monk had eaten his fill, the man took his bowl, scrubbed it clean, and sweetened it with perfumed water before refilling it with the same delectable food. “Honorable monk, our holy visitor must be worn out from all that travelling. Could you please bring my humble alms to him?” he asked and gave the bowl back to the monk. Saying nothing, the village monk accepted the generous gift meant for the elder monk.

But by now the village monk’s mind was trapped by its own plotting and jealousy of the elder monk. “If that monk ever so much as tastes this fantastic meal, even if I grab him by the throat and kick him out, he still would never leave! I must get rid of this alms secretly. But if I give it to a stranger, it will become the talking point of the village. If I throw it into a pond, the butter will float on the surface and be discovered. If I toss it on the ground, crows will come from miles around to feast on it, and that too would be noticed. So how can I get rid of it?”

At that moment, he saw a field that had just been razed by farmers to enrich the soil. It was covered with hot, glowing coals. So he cast the rich man’s generous gift onto the coals, and the food quickly burned to a crisp!

When he returned to the monastery, he found that the visitor was gone. “He must be a perfectly wise monk indeed. He must have known that I was jealous of him and afraid of losing my favoured position here in the village. He realised that I resented him and tried to trick him into leaving. I even wasted alms food that was meant for him, and all for the sake of keeping my own belly full! What have I done? I’m afraid that something terrible will happen to me!” he thought. The monk had sadly lost all peace of mind in the course of worrying about losing his meals and comfort.

---

The rich man continued to support the village monk and the monastery for the rest of his life, but the monk was never truly at peace ever again. His mind was constantly filled with torment and suffering for the unwholesome actions he had committed against the perfect monk.

When he died, his torment continued, for he was reborn in the hells, where he suffered for hundreds of thousands of years.

And when his life as a hell-being ended, he was reborn for 500 times as a demon! This happened because, even though he had suffered in hells for hundreds of thousands of years, the effects of his past actions were only partly completed.

In those 500 lives as a demon, he was constantly plagued by hunger. Only once did he have enough to eat, and that was a meal of afterbirth dropped by a deer in the forest!

Then, he was reborn as a starving stray dog for his next 500 lifetimes! Likewise, these 500 lives were also filled with constant hunger and quarrelling over food. In those 500 lifetimes as a stray dog, only once did he have enough to eat, and that was a meal of vomit that he found in a gutter!





## Tales of the **Buddha's Former Lives**

---

Only when most of his negative karma had ripened was he fortunate enough to be reborn as a human being. But even then, in that lifetime, he was born into the poorest of the poor beggar families in the city of Kasi, in northern India. His name was “Mittavinda”.

From the day he was born, his poverty-stricken family became even poorer and more miserable, until one day, the condition got so bad and the pain of hunger became so great that his parents chased him away for good. “Be gone forever! You are nothing but a curse!” they shouted.

Poor Mittavinda! Not realising how fortunate he was to live the carefree and contented life of a humble village monk a long time ago, he had sadly allowed the poison of jealousy to corrupt his mind out of fear of losing his own meals. Because of his fear and resentment, he lost his peace of mind and even resorted to committing an unwholesome action of trickery by denying a generous gift of alms food to a blameless one.

Ironically, what he had feared most, he had sowed for himself, the conditions of it taking place through his own unwholesome actions. Actions which cost him comfort and daily food for a thousand and one lives!

---

## (Chapter 2. Greed)

Having been kicked out of his family, poor Mittavinda wandered around and eventually ended up in Benares.

At that time, the Bodhisattva was a world-famous teacher in Benares who had 500 students. All these students were supported by the charitable people of the city. They provided them with food and even paid the teacher's fees.

Mittavinda was permitted to join them. He started studying under the tutelage of the great teacher, and finally, his days of constant hunger came to an end as he now enjoyed regular meals.

But sadly, he paid no attention to the teachings of the wise master. He was often disobedient and violent. Having been reborn as a hungry dog in his past 500 lives, quarrelling had become such a strong habit for him that he was often quarrelsome and constantly got into fist fights with the other students.

It became so bad that many of the students quit, and the income of the world-famous teacher dwindled down to almost nothing. Because of his quarrelsome nature and all that fighting, Mittavinda was forced to flee from Benares one day.

He ran away and found his way to a small remote village. There, he worked as a labourer, and married a very poor woman with whom he had two children.

News spread among the villagers that he had once studied under the world-famous teacher of Benares. Thus, the villagers often asked him for advice whenever questions arose. They also provided a hut near the entrance of the village for him and his family.

But things did not go well. First, the village was fined seven times by the king. Then their houses were razed to the ground seven times, and lastly their town pond dried up seven times!



## Tales of the **Buddha's Former Lives**

---

The villagers soon realised that all their troubles began when they started taking Mittavinda's advice. So they chased him and his family out of the village. "Be gone forever! You are nothing but a curse!" they yelled.

But Mittavinda's troubles did not end there. He and his family passed through a haunted forest while they were on the run. Demons appeared out of the shadows, killed and ate his wife and children. Mittavinda was the only one who managed to escape and make his way to a seaport city. But he was also now all alone, miserable and penniless.

A kind, generous and rich merchant who lived in the city happened to hear of Mittavinda's misfortunes. Since he and his wife had no children of their own, they adopted Mittavinda. For better or worse, they treated him like their own child.

The rich merchant and his wife were also very religious people who often tried to do wholesome acts. But Mittavinda hadn't learned his lesson yet. He did not accept any religion, and ended up behaving unwholesomely most of the time.

Some time later, Mittavinda's foster father passed away. His foster mother decided to try to turn him into a more religious person. "You have this life and you have the next life too. If you commit bad and unwholesome actions, you will suffer painful results in both lives," she said.

"I don't care about such things! I will do as I like and become even happier. There is no point in considering whether what I do is wholesome or unwholesome," replied the foolish Mittavinda.

When the next holy full moon day came, Mittavinda's mother advised him to go to the temple and listen all night long to the wise words of the monks. "I wouldn't waste my time!" he said. To entice him, she said, "When you return, I will give you 1000 gold coins."

After pondering for a while, Mittavinda agreed. He felt that with enough money, he could enjoy himself constantly and be happy all the time, so he agreed to go to the temple. However, at the temple, he simply sat in a corner, paid no attention and slept

---

through the night. Early the next morning, he went home to collect his reward.

Meanwhile, his mother, thinking that he would appreciate the teachings of the wise monks and bring the oldest monk home with him, had prepared delicious food for the expected guest. When she saw him returning alone, she asked, “Oh my son, why didn’t you invite the senior monk home for breakfast?”

“I did not go to the temple to listen to a monk or to bring him home with me. I went only for the sake of your 1000 gold coins!” he said.

“Never mind the money. Since I have prepared so much delicious food, just feast well and have a good sleep later!” answered his disappointed mother.

“Unless you give me the money, I refuse to eat!” replied the wilful son. So she gave him the money. Only then did Mittavinda touch his food. He ate until he was so full that he soon fell asleep after the meal.

Though Mittavinda had 1000 gold coins, he did not think that they were enough for him to enjoy himself forever. So he used the money to start a business, and before long, he was filthy rich. But that did not stop him from wanting more. One day, he came home and said, “Mother, I now have 120,000 gold coins, but still I am not satisfied. Therefore I will embark on the next ship to journey beyond this seaport city and make even more money!”

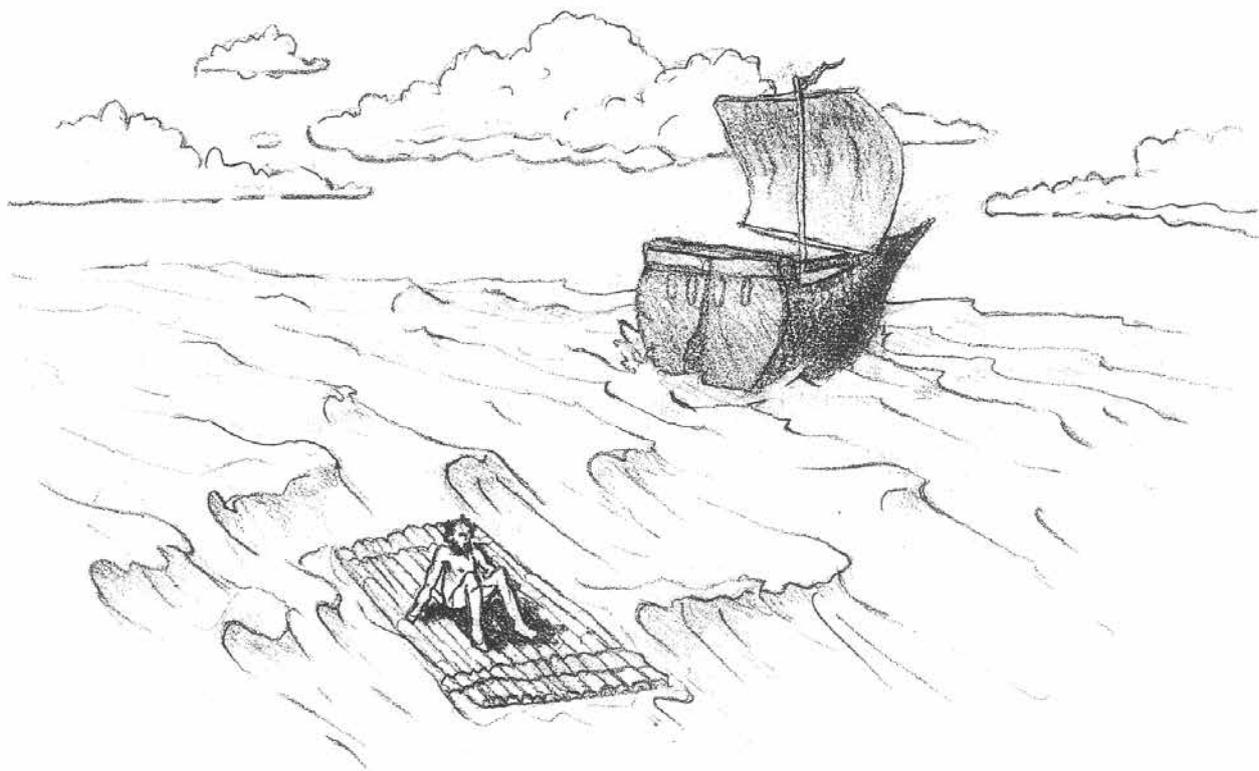
“Oh my son, why do you want to go abroad? The ocean is dangerous and it is very risky to do business in a strange land. I still have 80,000 gold coins right here in the house. That should be enough for you. Please don’t go, my only son!” she pleaded.

Then she clung onto him to keep him from leaving, but Mittavinda was so crazy with greed that he pushed his mother’s hand away and slapped her face. She fell to the floor with a thud. She was so hurt and shocked that she screamed at him, “Be gone forever! You are nothing but a curse!”

Without looking back, Mittavinda rushed to the harbour and boarded the first departing ship.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives



### **(Chapter 3. Pleasure)**

After seven days in the Indian Ocean, all winds and currents stopped suddenly. The ship was trapped in the middle of nowhere! After being stalled in the water for seven days, all the people on board decided to draw straws to find out who was the cause of their bad luck and frightening misfortune. They were terrified that they would all die in the oceans. Seven times, the shortest straw was drawn by Mittavinda!

---

Convinced that he was jinxed, they forced him onto a tiny bamboo raft, and set him adrift on the open seas. “Be gone forever! You are nothing but a curse!” they shouted. And just as suddenly a strong wind blew and sent the ship on its way.

Fortunately, due to Mittavinda’s wholesome actions as a monk many lifetimes ago, his life was spared. No matter how long it takes, you will always reap what you sow. Sometimes, an action can cause more than one result. Some results are pleasant while others are nasty.

It is said that there are Asuras who live through such mixed results in an unusual way. Asuras are unfortunate, ugly gods. Some of them are lucky enough to change their form into beautiful, young dancing goddesses. These are called Apsaras.

They enjoy the greatest pleasures for the first seven days, but for the next seven days, you would find them in hells suffering in torment as hungry ghosts. Then, they become Apsara goddesses once again for the next seven days. This takes place until both kinds of good and bad results are completed.

In this story, it happened that Mittavinda met four very pretty Apsaras when he chanced upon an exquisite Glass Palace while floating on the tiny bamboo raft. They enjoyed their time together for seven days immersed in the intoxicating joy of heavenly pleasures.

But the bliss was short-lived, for it was soon time for the goddesses to become hungry ghosts. “Wait for us just seven short days, and we will return and continue our pleasure,” they said to Mittavinda.

Then the Glass Palace and the four Apsaras disappeared. Since Mittavinda had not regained the peace of mind that he had lost a long time ago as a village monk, seven days of pleasure did not satisfy him. He could not wait for the lovely goddesses



## Tales of the **Buddha's Former Lives**

---

to return. He wanted more and more immediately, so he continued on in his little bamboo raft.

Next, he came upon a gleaming Silver Palace with eight stunning Apsara goddesses. Once again, he enjoyed seven days of the greatest pleasure with the Apsaras. These goddesses also requested him to wait for them the next seven days and disappeared into hells.

Amazing as it may seem, the greedy Mittavinda ventured on in his little raft, and for the next seven days, immersed himself in pleasure with 16 gorgeous Apsaras in a glittery Jewel Palace. But they too disappeared. Next, he spent seven days in a resplendent Golden Palace with 32 of the most dazzling Apsara goddesses of all.

However, he was still not satisfied! When all 32 Apsaras asked him to wait for seven days, he once again departed on his raft.

Before long, he entered into a hellish world which was filled with tortured beings in pain and agony. These suffering beings were there due to the results of their own unwholesome actions committed in the past. However, his desire for pleasure was so strong that Mittavinda thought he saw a magnificent city surrounded by a wall with four fabulous gates. "I shall go and appoint myself king to this fabulous place!" he thought.

Upon entering, Mittavinda met one of the victims of this hellish world. He had a collar around his neck that spun like a wheel, with five sharp blades cutting into his face, head, chest and back. But Mittavinda was so blinded by his greed for pleasure that he could not see the pain right before his eyes. Instead of the spinning collar of cutting blades, he saw a lovely lotus blossom. And instead of dripping blood, he saw the red powder of perfumed sandalwood. Even screams of pain from the poor victim sounded like the sweetest of songs!

---

“You have had that lovely lotus crown long enough! Give it to me, for I deserve to wear it now,” demanded Mittavinda.

“This is a cutting collar; a wheel of blades,” warned the poor, condemned man.

But Mittavinda replied, “You only say that because you don’t want to give it up.”

“Alas, the results of my past unwholesome deeds must be completed. This poor fool must be here for striking his mother just like me. I will give him the wheel of pain,” the victim thought. So he said, “Since you want it so badly, take the lotus crown!”

With these words, the wheel of blades spun off the former victim’s neck and began spinning around the head of Mittavinda. Suddenly, all his illusions disappeared. Mittavinda saw things as they really were. He finally saw the cutting wheel of blades and realised that he was not the king but a prisoner in hell. Groaning in pain, he cried out desperately, “Take back your wheel! Take back your wheel!” But the other victim had disappeared.

Just then the king of gods arrived at the hellish world for a teaching visit. “Oh king of gods, what have I done to deserve this torment?” Mittavinda asked him. “First, you refused to listen to the words of monks. Second, you were not satisfied with 1000, not even 120,000 gold coins! Blinded by greed, you struck your mother when she tried to stop you from achieving greater wealth,” the god replied.

“Later on, even the pleasure of being with four Apsaras in their Glass Palace and eight Apsaras in a Silver Palace could not satisfy you. Neither were the 16 Apsaras in a Jewel Palace nor the pleasure of 32 lovely goddesses in a Golden Palace enough for you! Blinded by greed for pleasure, you wished to be king. Now, at last, you see your crown is only a wheel of torture, and your kingdom is a hellish world.

“Learn this, Mittavinda — all who follow their greed no matter where it leads are left



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

unsatisfied. For it is the nature of greed to be dissatisfied with what one has, whether a little or a lot. When more is obtained, more is desired — until the circle of greed becomes the circle of pain,” taught the god.

Having said that, the god returned to his home in the heavenly world. At the same time, the rotating wheel left Mittavinda. With his head spinning in pain, he found himself adrift on his tiny bamboo raft.

Soon he came to an island inhabited by a powerful she-devil. She happened to be wearing the disguise of a goat. Being hungry, Mittavinda thought nothing of grabbing the goat by her hind leg. So the she-devil kicked him way up into the air. He finally landed in a thorn bush on the outskirts of Benares!

After he disentangled himself from the thorns, he saw some goats grazing nearby. He wanted very badly to return to the palaces and the beautiful dancing Apsaras. Remembering that a goat had kicked him here, he grabbed the leg of one of the goats, hoping that it would kick him back to the island.

But that goat bleated instead. The shepherds came and captured Mittavinda for trying to steal one of the king's goats.

As he was being taken to the king, they passed by the world-famous teacher of Benares. He recognised his student immediately and asked the shepherds where they were going with Mittavinda.

“He is a thief! We are taking him to the king for punishment!” answered the shepherds.

“Please don't do so. He is one of my students. Release him to me, so that he can be a servant in my school,” the teacher requested. The shepherds kindly agreed and left him there.

---

“Tell me what has happened to you since the day you left me?” the teacher asked of Mittavinda.

So Mittavinda gave a long account to his teacher. He told him how he was first respected and then cursed by the people of the remote village, and how he married a village woman and had two kids only to see them killed and eaten by demons in the haunted forest. He also told him how he had slapped his generous foster mother when he was overpowered by greed, and how he was cursed by his shipmates and left adrift on a bamboo raft. Then, he recounted to his teacher of the four palaces with their beautiful goddesses, and how each time when his pleasure ended, he was left discontented. Next, he related his experience with the cutting wheel of torture in the hell realm — his retribution for being greedy — and his hunger for goat meat that only got him kicked back to Benares without even a bite to eat!

“It is clear that your past actions have caused both unpleasant and pleasant results, and that both were eventually completed. You fail to understand that pleasures always come to an end. Instead, you allow them to feed your greed. You crave for more only to be left exhausted and discontented! Calm down, my friend, and understand this: trying to hold water in a tight fist will always leave you thirsty!”

Hearing this, Mittavinda bowed respectfully to the great teacher. He begged to be his student once again, and the Bodhisattva welcomed him with open arms.

***THE MORAL IS*** ⇒ ***There is neither loss nor gain for the person with a tranquil mind.***



# 83

## **A Hero Named Jinx** **(Friendship)**

Once upon a time, there lived a very rich man who was famous for being a wholesome person. He had a good friend who had a somewhat strange name, Jinx. They had been the best of friends ever since they were little kids. They made mud-pies together, went to the same schools and always helped each other.

However, Jinx fell on hard times after he graduated from school. He couldn't find a job and earn a living. So he visited his lifelong friend, the prosperous and successful rich man, to see if he could help him. The rich man was kind and comforting, and was more than happy to hire him to manage his property and business.

Soon after Jinx started working in the rich man's mansion, his strange name became a household word. It was common to hear people say, "Wait a minute, Jinx," "Hurry up, Jinx," "Do this, Jinx," "Do that, Jinx."

After a while, some of the rich man's neighbours were very concerned. "Dear friend and neighbour, we are concerned that misfortune may strike you. Your mansion manager has a very strange and unlucky name," they told him.

"You should not let him live with you any longer. His name, Jinx, fills your house. People only use the word 'jinx' when they are experiencing bad luck or misfortune.

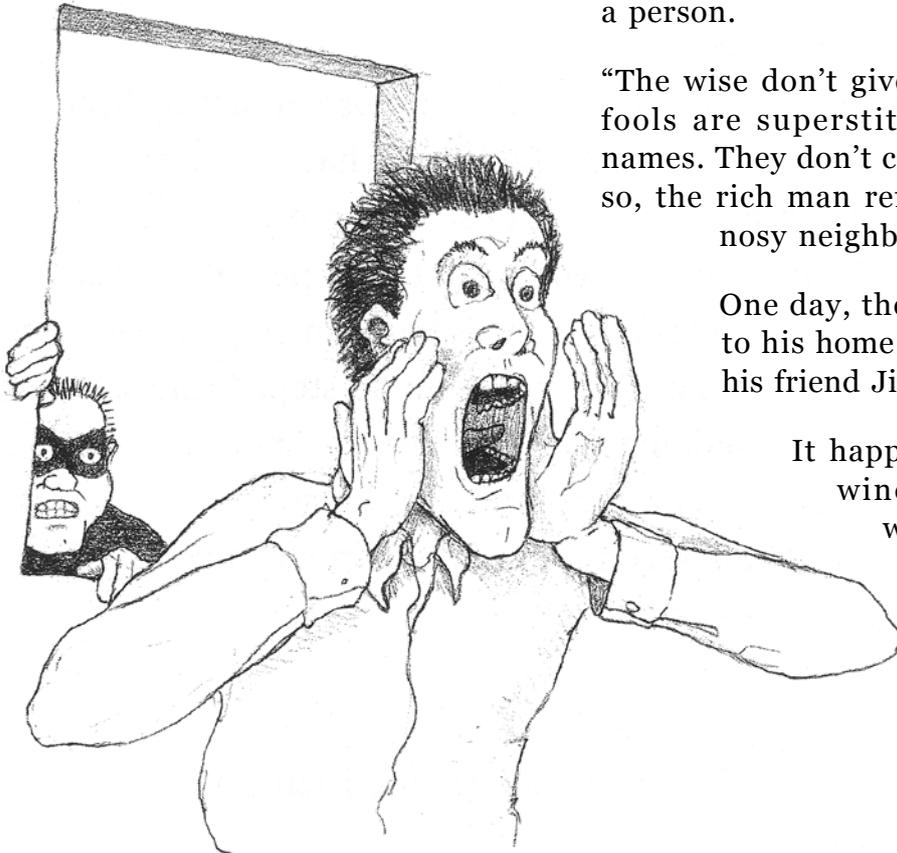
Even house spirits and fairies would be frightened to hear it constantly and would run away. This can only bring disaster to your household. The man named Jinx is also inferior to you. He is miserable and ugly. What advantage can you possibly get by keeping such a fellow around?”

“Jinx is my best friend! We have supported and cared for each other ever since we were little tots making mud-pies together. A lifelong trustworthy friend is of great value indeed! I will not reject him and destroy our friendship just because of his name. After all, the only purpose of having a name is to identify a person.

“The wise don’t give names a second thought. Only fools are superstitious about sounds, words and names. They don’t cause good luck or bad luck!” And so, the rich man refused to follow the advice of his nosy neighbours.

One day, the rich man went off on a journey to his home village. While he was away, he left his friend Jinx in charge of his mansion.

It happened that a gang of robbers got wind of this. They decided that it would be the perfect time to rob the mansion. So they armed themselves with various weapons and surrounded the rich man’s home that night.





## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Meanwhile, suspecting that robbers might plunder the house, the faithful Jinx stayed up all night to guard his friend's possessions. When he caught sight of the gang near the mansion's surroundings, he woke everybody up, and got them to create as much noise as possible blowing shell horns and beating drums.

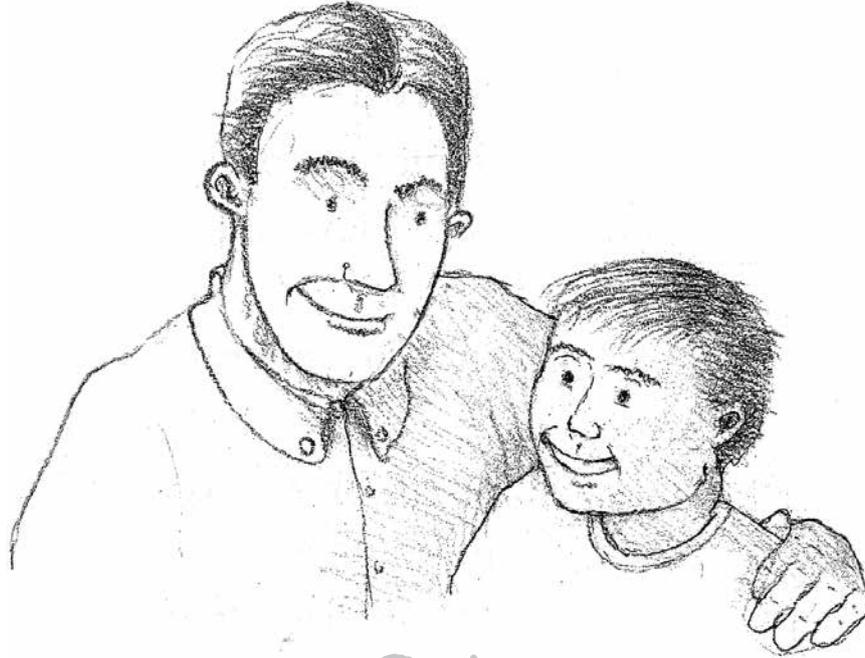
“We must have been given incorrect information. The rich man must still be in for there seem to be many people inside,” thought the bandits when they heard the noise. So they abandoned their clubs and other weapons and ran away.

The next morning, the people from the mansion were surprised to see the discarded weapons outside their building. “If we didn't have such a wise house protector, all the wealth in the mansion would certainly have been stolen. Jinx turned out to be a hero! Instead of being a bringer of bad luck, such a loyal friend has been a blessing to the rich man,” they said to one other.

When the master of the house returned, his neighbours told him what had happened. “You all advised against letting my friend stay with me. If I had done as you said, I would be penniless today!” he exclaimed.

“Walking together for just seven steps is enough to start a friendship. Continuing for 12 steps forms a bond of loyalty. Remaining together for a month brings the closeness of relatives. And for longer still, the friend becomes like a second self, so my friend Jinx is not a jinx — but a great blessing!”

***THE MORAL IS*** ⇨ ***A longer friendship brings greater rewards. For a true and loyal friend is a blessing indeed.***



84

**A Question**  
**From a Seven-year-old Child**  
(Six Worthy Ways)

Once upon a time, there was a rich man who lived in Benares, in northern India. He had a son who was intelligent, curious and eager to learn. Even though he was only seven years old, he was determined to find out what was really valuable.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

One day, the little boy asked his father, “What are the ways to gain the most valuable things in life, father?”

“Only worthy ways lead to worthwhile goals,” replied his father. “These are the six worthy ways:

- keep yourself healthy and fit,
- be wholesome in every way,
- listen to those with more experience,
- learn from those with more knowledge,
- live according to the Truth,
- act with sincerity, not just energy.”

The boy paid close attention to his father’s words. He tried hard to practise these ways from then on. As he grew older and wiser, he realised that the six worthy ways and the most valuable things in life could not be separated.

***THE MORAL IS*** ⇒ ***“A serious question deserves a serious answer.”***

---

# 86

## Lesson From a Snake (The Value of Goodness)

Once upon a time, King Brahmadata of Benares had a very valuable adviser. He was a priest who came from a rich, noble family and was an intelligent, knowledgeable man. He was also very generous, and very giving with his wealth and knowledge. People thought of him as a kind and good person.

The priest trained his mind to avoid the five unwholesome actions by practising the Five Precepts. He discovered that refraining from these unwholesome actions made him a better person. To practise the Five Precepts, you avoid:

- destroying life, since you have to kill part of yourself in order to kill someone else,
- taking what is not given, since this makes the owner angry at you,
- doing wrong in sexual ways, since this leads to the pain of jealousy and envy,
- speaking falsely, since you can't be true to yourself and false to another at the same time,
- losing your mind from drinking alcohol, as you might hurt yourself by committing the other four unwholesome actions while in an intoxicated state.

“This is a truly good man,” thought King Brahmadata when he saw how his adviser lived.

The priest was curious to learn more about the value of goodness. “The king honours and respects me more than his other priests, but I wonder what it is about me that he really respects most. Is it my nationality? My noble birth? Or my family wealth?”



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Is it my great learning and vast knowledge? Or is it because of my goodness? I must find the answer to this,” he thought. Therefore, he decided to carry out an experiment in order to get an answer. He would pretend to be a thief!

The next day, when he was leaving the palace, he stopped by the royal coin-maker. The coin-maker was stamping out coins from gold. The good priest, not intending to keep it, took a coin and continued walking out of the palace. As the money-maker admired the famous priest highly, he kept quiet and said nothing.

The following day, the priest took two more gold coins. Again, the royal coin-maker did not protest.

Finally, on the third day, the king's favourite priest grabbed a whole handful of gold coins. This time, the money-maker didn't care about the priest's position or reputation. “This is the third time you have stolen from His Majesty, the king.” he cried out. Holding onto him, he shouted for all to hear, “I have caught the thief who robs the king! I have caught the thief who robs the king! I have caught the thief who robs the king!”

“Aha! You only pretended to be better than us! What an example of goodness,” yelled the crowd that suddenly appeared. They slapped him, tied his hands behind his back and hauled him off to the king.

However, on their way to the palace, they happened to pass by a few snake charmers who were entertaining some bystanders from the king's court with a poisonous cobra. They held it by the tail and neck, and coiled the snake around their own necks to show how brave they were.

“Please be careful! Don't grab that cobra by the tail. Don't grip it by its neck, and don't coil that poisonous snake around your own necks. It may bite you and bring your lives

---

to a sudden end!” warned the priest who was tightly bound.

“You ignorant priest, you don’t understand this cobra at all. This is a good and very well-behaved snake. It is not wicked like you! You are a thief who stole from the king, and because of your misconduct and criminal behaviour, you are being carried off with your hands bound behind your back. But there is no need to tie up a snake that is good!” the snake charmers said.

“So, even a poisonous cobra that doesn’t bite or harm anyone is termed as ‘good’. Goodness is the quality that people admire most in the world!” thought the priest silently.

“Your Majesty, this is the thief who stole from your royal treasury,” said the crowd to the king when they arrived at the royal palace.

“Then punish him according to the law,” answered the king.

“Your Majesty, I am not a thief!” exclaimed the priest.

“Then why did you take the gold coins without permission?” asked the king.

The priest explained, “I have done this only as an experiment. I carried out this experiment to find out why you honoured and respected me more than the others. Was it because of my family background and wealth? Or my great knowledge? Or did you respect my goodness most of all? I was able to get away with taking one or two gold coins because of my reputation and background. But it is clear that by grabbing a handful of coins, I am no longer seen as a good and wholesome person. This alone turns respect into disgrace!

“Even a poisonous cobra that doesn’t harm anyone is seen as ‘good’. There is no need for any other title!”



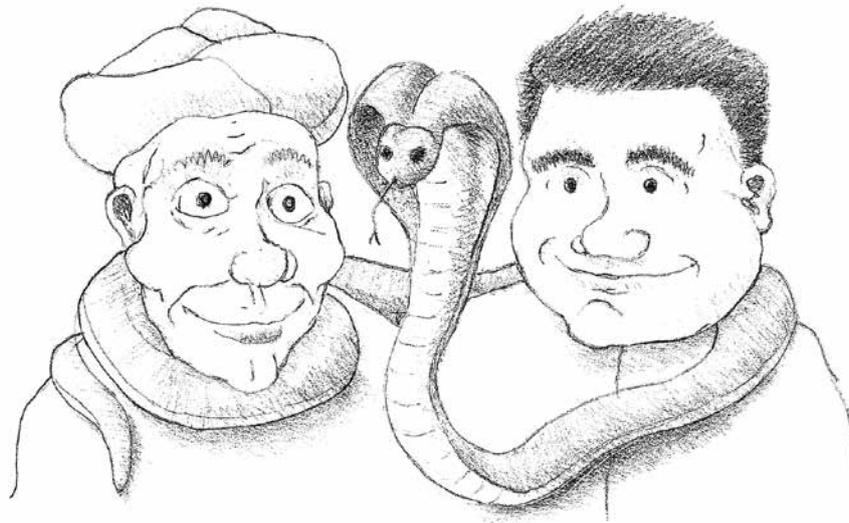
## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

To emphasise the lesson that he had learnt, the wise priest recited,

“A good birth, wealth and even vast knowledge, I find,  
Are less admired, by humankind, than goodness is.”

Hearing that, the king pardoned his most valuable adviser. Still, the priest asked for the king's permission to leave his service and become a forest monk. After refusing several times, the king eventually relented, and the priest left for the Himalayas where he meditated peacefully. When he died, he was reborn in a heavenly world.

***THE MORAL IS ⇨ People prize goodness of heart most of all.***



---

87

## **A Priest Who Worshipped Luck** **(Superstition)**

Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva was born into an upper-class family in north-western India. When he grew up, he realised that the pleasures of the ordinary life could not give him lasting happiness. So he renounced his worldly life and became a forest monk in the Himalayas. With intensive meditation, he gained wisdom, insight and peace-of-mind.

One day, he decided to leave the forests for the city of Rajagaha. When he arrived, he stayed over at the king's pleasure garden. And when dawn came, walked into the city to collect alms food.

It happened that the king saw him when he was on his way to collect alms. The king was exceedingly pleased with his humble and dignified attitude, and so invited the holy man to his palace. The king offered him a seat and gave him the best foods to eat. Then the king invited him to live in his royal garden for good. The holy man agreed, and from that very day onwards, lived in the king's pleasure garden and took his meals in the palace.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

At that time, there lived a priest called 'Lucky Cloth' in the city. He had the habit of examining cloth to predict if it brought good or bad luck.

One day, after his bath, he asked his servant to bring out from his chest a new suit. The servant found that the clothes had been slightly chewed by mice, and quickly informed the priest about it.

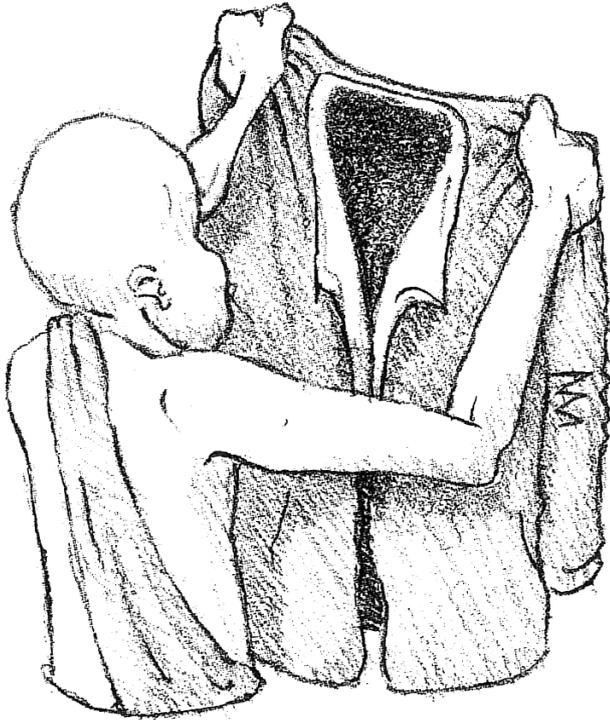
"This isn't good. It is dangerous to keep clothes that have been chewed by mice in the house. This is a foreboding sign that a curse would destroy my home. I can't even give them to my children or servants, for that means the curse would still lurk around in my house!" thought Lucky Cloth.

"In fact, I can't give these jinxed clothes to anyone. The best thing I can do is get rid of them once and for all by throwing them away where corpses are placed for wild animals to eat."

"But how can I do that? If I tell a servant to do it, he might keep these new clothes secretly, and the curse will remain in my household. I can only entrust this task to my son."

He called his son to him and told him all about the curse of the clothes that were slightly chewed by mice. He even told his son not to touch the garment with his hand but to carry them on a stick and fling them where the corpses lay. Then he must wash himself clean from head-to-toe before returning home.

The son obeyed his father. When he arrived at the corpse grounds, carrying the clothes on a stick, he found the holy man sitting by the gate. When the boy threw away the cursed suit, the holy man picked it up. He examined it and saw the tiny teeth marks made by the mice, but since they were hardly noticeable, he took the suit with him back to the royal garden.



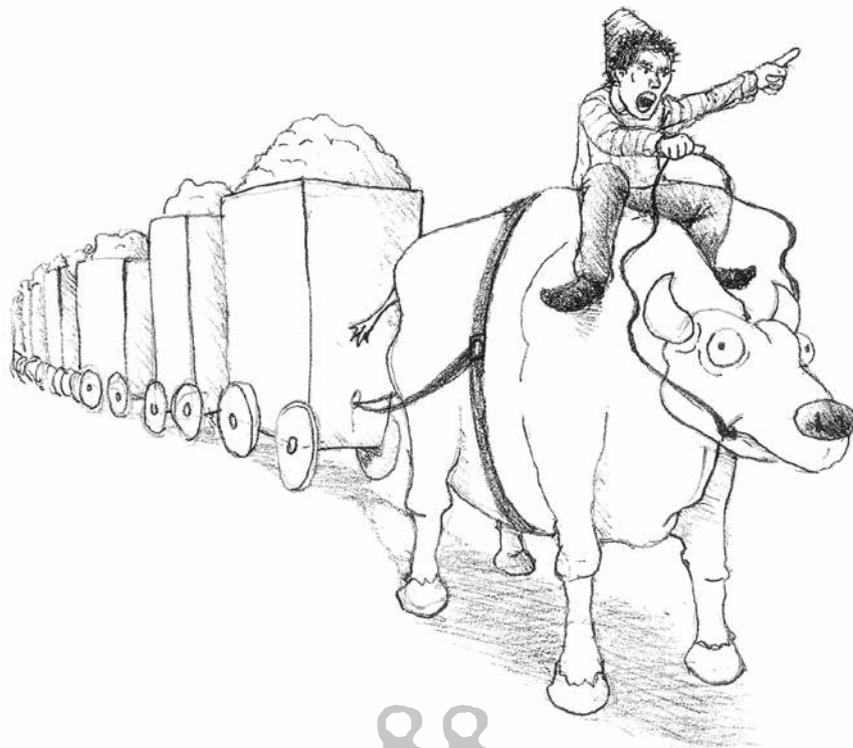
After he had his bath, the boy told his father what had happened. “This cursed suit will bring great harm to the king’s favourite holy man. I must warn him,” thought the priest.

With that, he quickly left his house and went to look for the holy man at the royal garden. “Holy one, please throw away the unlucky clothes that you have taken! It is cursed and will bring harm to you!” he said.

However, the holy man only calmly replied, “No, no, what others throw away is a blessing to me! As forest meditators, we are not seers of good and bad luck. All Buddhas and Enlightened Beings have given up superstitions about luck. Anyone who is wise should do the same. No one knows the future for sure!”

Hearing about the truly wise and Enlightened Ones made the priest realise just how foolish he had been. From then on, he gave up his many superstitions and followed the teachings of the humble holy man.

***THE MORAL IS*** ⇨ ***A fool’s curse can be a wise man’s blessing.***



88

## The Bull Called Delightful (All Deserve Respect)

Once upon a time, in the country of Gandhara, in northern India, there was a city called Takkasila. In that city, the Bodhisattva was born as a calf. Since it was well-bred and strong, a rich man bought it. He became very fond of the gentle animal and called it 'Delightful'. He took good care of it, and fed it only the best food.

---

“I was brought up by this generous man who gave me such good food and constant care, even when times were hard. Now that I am a big, full-grown bull and there are no other bulls that can pull as heavy a load as I can, I would like to repay my master by virtue of my strength,” thought Delightful one day.

So one day, Delightful suggested to his rich master to find a wealthy merchant who’s proud of having many strong bulls. “Challenge him to a contest by saying that your bull can pull 100 heavily-loaded bullock carts.”

Following Delightful’s advice, the rich man went to such a merchant and struck up a conversation. After a while, he broached the issue of who had the strongest bull in the city.

“Many have bulls, but none has any as strong as mine,” laughed the merchant.

“That may not be true, sir, for I have a bull that can pull 100 heavily-loaded bullock carts,” answered the rich man.

“No, friend, how can there be such a bull? This is unbelievable!” replied the merchant.

“I do have such a bull, and I am willing to make a bet,” said the rich man.

“Okay then. I will bet 1000 gold coins that your bull cannot pull 100 loaded bullock carts,” the merchant replied. So the bet was made and a date and time for the challenge were fixed.

The merchant went home and connected 100 big bullock carts together. He also filled them with sand and gravel so as to make them really heavy.

The rich man, on the other hand, fed the finest rice to Delightful, bathed and decorated the bull and hung a beautiful garland of flowers around its neck.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Then he harnessed it to the first cart and climbed onto it. Being a member of the upper-class, he could not resist the urge to make himself appear very important. So he cracked a whip in the air, and yelled at the faithful bull, “Pull, you dumb animal! I command you to pull, you big dummy!”

“This challenge was my idea! I have never misbehaved nor done anything bad to my master, yet he insults me with such harsh words!” thought Delightful. So in protest, the animal remained in its place and refused to pull the carts.

The merchant laughed and demanded his winnings from the bet, for the rich man had lost. After paying him 1000 gold coins, the rich man returned home and sat down with a heavy heart. He was upset over the loss and embarrassed by the blow to his pride.

Delightful grazed peacefully on its way home. When the bull arrived, it saw its master lying sadly on his side. “Sir, why are you lying there like that? Are you asleep? You look sad,” it said.

“I have lost 1000 gold coins because of you. How can I sleep with such a loss?”

“Sir, you called me ‘dummy’. You even cracked a whip in the air over my head. In all my life, did I ever break anything, step on anything, make a mess in the wrong place, or behave like a ‘dummy’ in any way?” asked the bull.

“No, my pet,” answered the rich man.

“Then sir, why did you call me a ‘dumb animal’ ? Why did you insult me in the presence of others? The fault is yours. I have done nothing wrong, but since I feel sorry for you, go to the merchant again and make the same bet for 2000 gold coins. And remember to use only the respectful words that I deserve so well.”

---

So the rich man went right back to the merchant and made a bet for 2000 gold coins. The merchant, having won the first time, thought that it would be easy to win his money again. Like the first time, he went about and set up 100 heavily-loaded bullock carts. The rich man, too, fed and bathed the bull, and hung a garland of flowers around its neck once again.

When all were ready, the rich man touched Delightful's forehead with a lotus blossom instead of holding a whip in his hands. "My son, please do me the honour of pulling these 100 bullock carts," he said gently as if to his own child.

Lo and behold, the wonderful bull pulled with all its might and dragged the heavy carts, until amazingly the last one stood in the place of the first.

The merchant, with his mouth wide open in disbelief, had to pay 2000 gold coins to the rich man. The onlookers were so impressed that they honoured Delightful with gifts. But even more important to the rich man than his winnings, was the valuable lesson that he had learnt in humility and respect.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ Harsh words bring no reward. Respectful words benefit and bring honour to all.***



## 89

# **The Phoney Holy Man (Hypocrisy)**

Once upon a time, there was a man who looked and acted just like a holy man. He wore nothing but rags, had long matted hair, and relied on a little village to support him. But he was actually a sneaky and dishonest man who only pretended to give up attachment for the worldly life. He was, what you would call, a phoney holy man.

A wealthy man who lived in the village wanted to gain merit by doing good deeds. So he had a simple little temple built in a nearby forest for the holy man to live in. He also offered his finest foods to the phoney holy man.

He mistakenly thought that the phoney holy man was a sincere, good, pure and upright spiritual teacher who would not do anything that was unwholesome. Since he was afraid of bandits, he took his family fortune of 100 gold coins to the little temple. He buried it under the ground and said to the holy man, "Venerable one, please look after my family fortune."

"You do not have to worry. As the holy ones, we have given up attachment to the ordinary world. We have no greed or desire to obtain the possessions of others," replied the holy man.

"Very well, Venerable one," said the man, who left thinking that he was wise indeed to trust such a good holy man.

“Aha! These 100 gold coins are enough to support me for the rest of my life! I will never have to work or beg again!” thought the wicked holy man. So he dug up the gold a few days later and secretly buried it near the roadside.

The next day, as usual, the phoney holy man had his lunch at the home of the wealthy villager. After eating his fill, he said, “Most honourable gentleman, I have lived here, and have been supported by you for a long time, but the holy ones who have given up the worldly life are not supposed to become too attached to any one village or supporter. It would make a holy man like me impure! Therefore, kindly permit me to humbly go on my way.”

“Venerable sir, please do not leave,” the rich man pleaded with him. But it was futile. Finally, the rich man agreed and said, “Go then, Venerable sir if that is your wish.” He accompanied him to as far as the boundary of the village to send him off.

But after walking for a while by himself, the fake holy man thought, “I must make absolutely sure that stupid villager does not suspect me. He trusts me so much that he will believe anything, so I will deceive him with a clever trick!” He then stuck a blade of dry grass in his matted hair and went back.





## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

“Dear Venerable, why have you come back?” asked the wealthy villager when he saw the phoney holy man in the village again.

“Dear friend, this blade of grass from the thatched roof of your house got stuck in my hair. It is most unwholesome and impure for a holy one such as myself to ‘take what is not given,’” replied the phoney holy man. “So, I came back to return it to you.”

“Think nothing of it, Your Reverence. Please put it down and continue on your way. Venerable ones such as your good self do not even take a blade of grass that belongs to another. How marvellous! How exalted you are, the purest of the holy ones. How lucky I am to have been able to support you!” exclaimed the villager in amazement. More trusting than ever, he bowed respectfully and sent the phoney holy man on his way again.

It happened that the Bodhisattva who was reborn as a trader in that life had stopped by the village in the midst of a trading trip. He had overheard the entire conversation between the villager and the phoney holy man and thought it ridiculous. “This man must have stolen something far more valuable than the blade of dry grass that he would make such a big show of returning the grass to its rightful owner,” thought the trader.

“Friend, did you give something to this holy-looking man for safekeeping?” asked the trader to the wealthy villager.

“Yes, friend. I did. I trusted him to guard my family fortune of 100 gold coins,” he replied.

“Then, I advise you to go and check if they are still at the place where you left them,” said the trader.

---

Worried, the wealthy villager ran to the forest temple immediately, dug up the ground, and found his treasure gone. He rushed back to the trader and said, “It has been stolen!”

“Friend,” he replied, “No one but that so-called holy man could have taken it. Let’s catch him and get your treasure back.”

They both chased after him as fast as they could. When they caught up with him, they made him tell them where he had kept the money. They went to the hiding place by the roadside and dug up the buried treasure.

Looking at the gleaming gold, the Bodhisattva said, “You are a hypocritical holy man. You spoke beautiful words — that one is not to ‘take what is not given’ — so well and admirably. You hesitated to leave with even a blade of grass that didn’t belong to you, yet it was so easy for you to steal a hundred gold coins!” After the trader had lectured the phoney holy man on his misbehaviour, he advised him to change his ways for his own good.

***THE MORAL IS*** ➡ ***Be careful of a holy man who puts on a big show.***



## 90

# **One-Way Hospitality (Ingratitude)**

Once upon a time, there were two merchants who wrote letters back and forth to each other. They had never met each other, as one lived in Benares and the other lived in a remote village near the borders.

One day, the country merchant sent a large caravan to Benares. It had 500 carts loaded with fruits, vegetables and other products. He told his workers to trade all these goods with the help of the Benares merchant.

When they arrived at the big city, they went directly to the Benares merchant. They gave him the gifts they had brought. He was pleased and invited them to stay in his own home. He even gave them money for their living expenses and treated them with the very best hospitality. He also enquired about the well-being of the country merchant and gave them gifts to bring back to him. Since it was easier for a local person to get a good price, he ensured that all their goods were fairly traded. They returned home and told their master of the kindness and the hospitality that the Benares merchant had shown them.

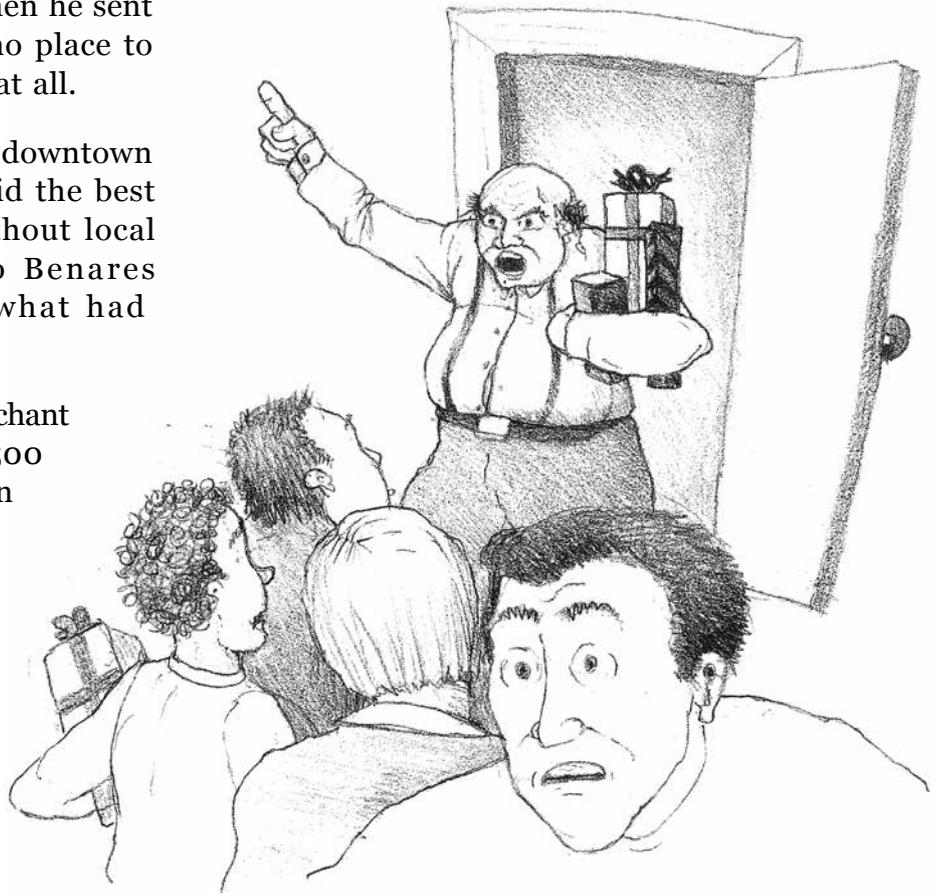
Some time later, the Benares merchant, too, sent a caravan of 500 carts to the border village. His workers also brought gifts to the country merchant.

“Where do you come from?” asked the country merchant when the caravan had arrived. They replied that they had been sent by the Benares merchant, the one who wrote him letters.

Taking the gifts, the country merchant laughed in a very discourteous way and sneered, “Anyone can say that they come from the Benares merchant!” Then he sent them away, giving them no place to stay, no gifts and no help at all.

The caravan workers went downtown to the marketplace and did the best they could in trading without local help. They returned to Benares and told their master what had happened.

Before long, the country merchant sent another caravan of 500 carts to Benares. Again his workers took gifts to the Benares merchant. When the workers of the Benares merchant saw them coming, they said to him, “We know just how to be hospitable to these people.”





## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

The Benares workers took the country workers outside the city walls to a good place to camp for the night. They told them they would return to Benares, prepare food and get money for them.

Instead, they rounded up all their fellow workers and returned to the campsite in the middle of the night. They robbed all 500 carts, including the workers' outer garments. They chased away the bullocks, removed and carried off the cart wheels.

The country workers were terrified. They ran back home as fast as their legs could carry them.

The city merchant's workers, on the other hand, told their boss what they had done. "Those who forget gratitude and ignore simple hospitality end up getting what they deserve. Those who do not appreciate the help that they have received soon find that no one will help them anymore," said the Benares merchant.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ If you don't help others, you can't expect them to help you.***



91

## Poisoned Dice (Deception)

Once upon a time, there was a rich man in Benares who was a gambling addict. One day, he had a game of dice with another gambler. While the rich gambler was very honest and ingenuous, the other was deceitful. When the devious gambler was on a winning streak, he continued playing and never faltered. But when he was at the



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

losing end, he resorted to tricks like secretly swallowing a die and then claiming that it was lost to stop the game.

As the days passed, the rich gambler began to notice his trick. One day, he decided to teach the dishonest gambler a lesson. He smeared poison on the dice, dried them so that the poison was invisible before bringing them to the their usual meeting point and said, "Let's play dice!"

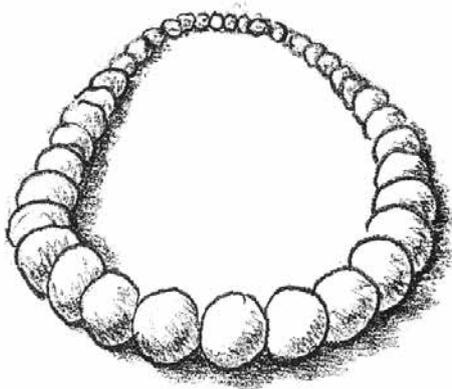
The shifty gambler agreed. They set up the gambling board and started playing. As usual, the sly one continued playing normally when he was on a winning streak. But the very minute he started to lose, he sneaked the dice into his mouth.

"Swallow the dice, and something you have never expected will happen. Your dishonesty will bring about your own downfall and make you suffer much," warned the rich gambler when he caught him in the act.

After swallowing the poisoned dice, the sneaky gambler suddenly turned pale and fainted. "Enough is enough. Now I must save his life," thought the rich gambler who was basically kind at heart. He force-fed a medical mixture to the trickster to induce purging. The tricky gambler threw up the poisoned dice, and the rich gambler then gave the trickster a drink made of clear butter, thick palm syrup, honey and cane sugar to soothe him. This made the trickster feel better.

When the trickster was fine once again, he advised him not to deceive a trusting friend anymore. Eventually both gamblers died and were reborn as they deserved.

***THE MORAL IS*** ➤ ***It is wrong to deceive a friend who trusts you.***



92

## **The Mystery of the Missing Necklace** **(Chap 1. One Crime Leads to Another)**

Once upon a time, when King Brahmadata ruled Benares, in northern India, the Bodhisattva became one of his ministers when he had completed his education.

One day, the king took his harem and the ladies-in-waiting on an excursion to his pleasure garden. They toured many parts of the lovely park before they chanced upon a beautiful clear pond that was located near a cool forest. Seeing the inviting sparkling waters, the king decided to go for a swim. So he dived into the pond. He also invited all the ladies of his harem to join him in the refreshing pond.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Giggling, the ladies took off all their ornaments and jewellery, starting from their heads, necks, ears, then their wrists, fingers, waists, ankles and toes. They handed these over, along with their outer garments, to their girl servants for safekeeping before joining King Brahmadata in the pond.

It happened that the king had given a very valuable pearl necklace to one of his favourite queens as a gift. She was so fond of that particular necklace that she gave it a pet name — ‘Most Precious’.

Meanwhile, from the branch of a nearby tree, a curious she-monkey was observing King Brahmadata and his royal ladies as they enjoyed a dip in the cool waters. Peering between the luscious green leaves, she caught sight of the ‘Most Precious’ pearl necklace. Her eyes almost popped out of her head when she glimpsed the necklace!

Never had she seen such a magnificent necklace! Imagining how grand she would look wearing the queen’s beautiful necklace, she patiently watched the servant who was guarding it, for the she-monkey hoped to have a chance of snatching away the necklace. In the beginning, the girl guarded it very carefully, but the heat of the day soon made her drowsy. When the she-monkey saw that the servant was dozing off, she swung down from the tree as quick as lightning. In a flash, she grabbed the necklace, put it around her neck, and ran back up the tree.

Afraid that the other monkeys would see it, the little thief hid the gleaming pearl necklace in the hollow of a tree. Then she sat guarding her loot silently and looking as innocent as a baby!

A minute or two later, the servant woke up from her nap. When she realised that the necklace was missing, she yelled out in terror, “Help! Help! Someone has taken the queen’s pearl necklace — the one called ‘Most Precious’!”

---

After hearing what the servant had to say, the guards went and reported the theft to the king. “Catch the thief,” ordered the king. Frightened of the king’s wrath, the guards dashed madly around the pleasure garden, searching high and low for the thief.

A poor man happened to walk by outside the garden at the same time the commotion inside the garden started. He was on his way back to his remote home village after paying his meagre taxes to the royal treasury. The frenzy and upheaval inside the garden scared him and he started running.

Unfortunately, the guards saw him running. “That must be the thief!” they shouted to one another, and so rushed through the garden gate and captured the innocent man easily after a short chase. “You are a bad thief! Confess that you robbed the queen’s pearl necklace, the one that she calls ‘Most Precious’,” they yelled as they beat up the poor man.

“If I say that I didn’t take it, these men will beat me to death for sure. But if I confess, they will have to take me to the king,” thought the poor man. So he confessed to the ‘crime’ and the guards handcuffed him and hauled him off to the king.

After being told of the man’s confession, the king asked, “So where is the ‘Most Precious’ necklace now? What have you done with it?”

“My Majesty, I’m a very poor man indeed. I have never owned anything of value, not a ‘Most Precious’ bed or a ‘Most Precious’ chair, and certainly not a ‘Most Precious’ pearl necklace in all my life. It was Your Majesty’s own Chief Financial Adviser who made me steal the necklace. And I have given it to him. He alone knows where it is now,” replied the prisoner who was somewhat of a clever fellow.

Hearing this, King Brahmadata summoned his Chief Financial Adviser and asked, “Did you take the ‘Most Precious’ necklace from this man?”



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

“Yes, my lord,” he answered.

“Where is it now?” asked the king.

“I gave it to the Royal Teacher Priest.”

So the king summoned the Royal Teacher Priest and asked him about the stolen necklace.

“I gave it to the Official Court Musician,” claimed the priest.

Next, the Official Court Musician was summoned and questioned.

“I gave it to a high-class prostitute.”

When she was identified and brought to the king's presence, he demanded to know what she had done with the queen's pearl necklace, but only she alone replied honestly, “Your Majesty, I don't know anything about a pearl necklace!”

“Let us continue this investigation tomorrow,” said the king when he noticed that the sun was setting. He handed the five suspects over to his ministers and returned to his palace for the night.

---

## (Chap 2. The Mystery is Solved)

Meanwhile, the royal minister who happened to be the reborn Bodhisattva had seen and heard all that had taken place in the pleasure garden. He realised that the mystery of the stolen necklace could only be solved by careful investigation. Jumping to conclusions would only lead to the wrong answers, so he started examining and analysing the situation in his mind.

“The necklace disappeared from inside the pleasure garden, but the poor villager was captured outside the garden. There were strong guards at each gate. Therefore, the villager couldn’t have entered the garden to steal the necklace. Likewise, no one inside the garden could have gone out through the guarded gates with the stolen necklace. So it couldn’t have been anyone from inside or outside who went away with the necklace!

“The villager who was accused first must have named the Chief Financial Adviser to save himself. And the Chief Financial Adviser must have thought that it would be easier for him if the Royal Teacher Priest was involved. The priest, on the other hand, must have put the blame on the Official Court Musician thinking that music would allow their time in the palace dungeon to pass more pleasantly, and the Official Court Musician probably pointed his finger at the prostitute as he thought that she would remove the misery of prison life if she was locked up with him.

“After careful analysis, it is easy to see that all five suspects must be innocent. Besides, the garden is full of monkeys that are known to cause mischief. The necklace must have fallen into the hands of one of the female monkeys.”

So he went to the king and said, “Your Majesty, if you hand the suspects over to me, I will do the investigation for you.”



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

“By all means, my wise minister,” replied the king, “conduct the investigation.”

With the king’s approval, the minister called for his servants and instructed them to keep the five suspects together in one place. “Keep a close watch over them, listen to everything they say and report it all to me.”

When the five prisoners thought they were alone, they began to talk freely to one another. “You little crook! We have never met, so how could you have given me the stolen necklace?” the Chief Financial Adviser scolded the poor villager.

“My lord and most exalted adviser to the great king, I have never owned anything valuable, not even a broken-down bed or chair. And I certainly have not seen the necklace nicknamed ‘Most Precious’! I don’t know what you people were talking about, but out of fear, I mentioned you in the hope that a person who is as important as you could free both of us. Please, my lord, don’t be angry with me.”

“You see, this man admits that he has not given it to you, so how could you have given it to me?” snapped the Royal Teacher Priest to the Chief Financial Adviser.

“We are both high-ranking officials. I thought if we got together and backed each other up, we could settle this matter,” answered the Adviser.

“Oh Royal Teacher Priest, why did you drag me into this whole fiasco? When did you ever give the queen’s pearl necklace to me?” cried the Official Court Musician.

“I thought that if you were imprisoned with me,” explained the priest, “your music would make life in prison much more pleasant. That’s why I lied.”

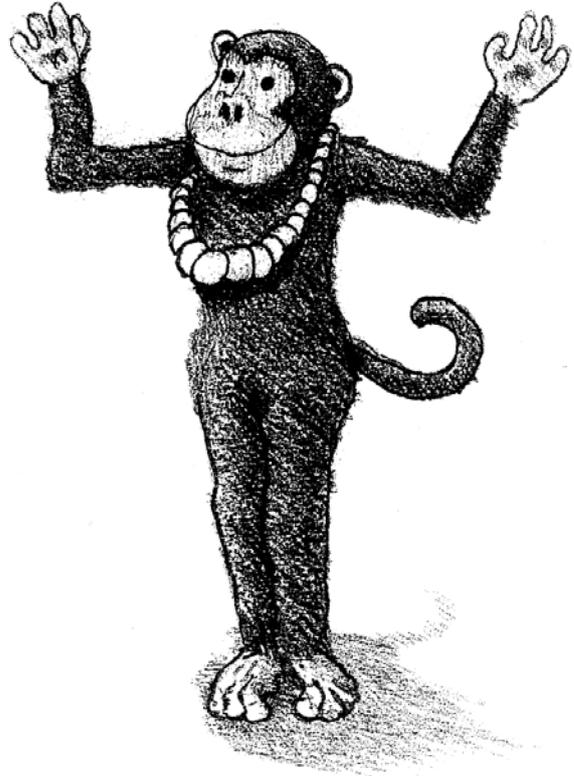
Then the woman yelled at the Official Court Musician, “You miserable wretch! We have never met each other before, so how could you possibly have given me the stolen ‘Most Precious’?”

“Oh dear young lady, please don’t be mad at me. I only accused you so that when five of us are imprisoned together, your presence would cheer us up and make all of us happy,” pacified the Musician.

As the prostitute was the only one who had answered the king’s question truthfully, there was no one to accuse her of shifting the blame.

As instructed, the wise minister’s servants had been eavesdropping on the entire conversation all this while. When they reported what they had heard to him, he realised that his suspicion was confirmed — some female monkey must have taken the necklace. “I must come up with a plan to get it back,” he thought.

First, he had a bunch of cheap imitation jewel ornaments made. Then he had several she-monkeys captured from the royal pleasure garden, and decorated them with the imitation ornaments — necklaces on their necks, and bracelets on their wrists and ankles. Only when the monkeys were fully bedecked were they released back into the garden. The minister then ordered his servants to keep a close watch on all the she-monkeys. “When you catch sight of any monkey with the missing pearl necklace, frighten her into dropping it,” he instructed.





## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

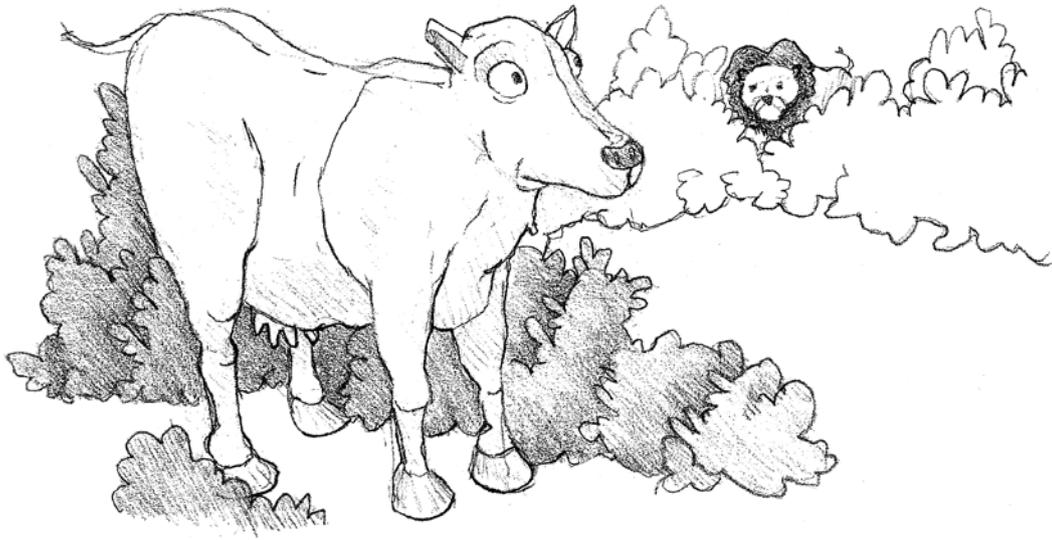
The she-monkey that had taken 'Most Precious' was still guarding it in the hollow of the tree when the other female monkeys strutted back and forth taunting her. "See how fine we look with all these beautiful necklaces and bracelets," they flaunted. She couldn't stand seeing how proud the other she-monkeys were. "Those are nothing but worthless beads," she exclaimed. And to show them that hers was even more beautiful, she put on the 'Most Precious' necklace of real pearls on her own neck.

Immediately, the servants frightened her into dropping it. Then they took the necklace to their master, the wise minister. "Your Majesty, here is the missing pearl necklace," he said as he returned the necklace to the king. "None of the five who admitted to the crime was really the thief. Instead, it was taken by a greedy little she-monkey residing in your pleasure garden," he continued.

"How did you know that it was taken by a she-monkey? And how did you get it back?" asked the king in amazement. So the minister related the whole story to the king.

"You were certainly the right person for the job. In times of need, it is the wise ones who are most appreciated," nodded the king. Then the king rewarded him immensely by showering him with a heavy rain of the seven valuables – gold, silver, pearls, jewels, lapis lazuli, diamonds and coral.

**THE MORAL IS** ⇒ *Theft is committed through greed, lies are spoken out of fear, but with careful investigation, the truth can be revealed.*



93

## The Careless Lion (Circumspection)

Once upon a time, when the world had yet to hear and understand about the Five Precepts, there lived a very wealthy man in Benares who owned a large herd of cattle. These cows were looked after by a herdsman hired by the wealthy man.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

As the rice paddies were overfilled with budding rice plants, the herdsman took the cattle to the forest to graze. In addition, he was also responsible for bringing milk, butter and cheese to the rich man in Benares from time to time.

In this story, a ferocious lion happened to live near the forest that the herdsman went to. The presence of the predator kept the cattle in constant fear. The poor frightened cows were so tense and high-strung that they barely gave any milk.

One day, the owner of the cattle questioned the herdsman over the small quantities of milk, butter and cheese that he was bringing to him. "Sir, cows need to be calm and contented before they can produce plenty of milk. As there is a lion that stays near the forest, your cows are always tense and afraid. So they hardly produce any milk," he explained.

"I see," replied the rich man. "Is there a particular animal that the lion is especially fond of?" he asked.

"Yes Sir, there is a certain doe that the lion is fond of," answered the herdsman.

"Capture that deer and rub poison all over its body. Keep it a day or two before releasing it," instructed the rich man. "Out of love for the doe, the lion will lick her and be poisoned. When the lion dies, bring its body to me. Then my cows will be safe and happy again to give their usual amount of milk," the rich man said.

The herdsman carried out his boss's orders. As predicted by the rich man, the lion was so overjoyed when it saw its favourite female minideer that it threw all caution to the wind and began licking her excitedly. Due to its carelessness and passion, the poor lion fell into the poisonous trap and died on the spot.

**THE MORAL IS** ⇨ *It is good to be cautious at all times.*

---

# 94

## **The Holy Man Who Tried To Be Extremely Holy (Extremism)**

Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva lived in a world where most religions were very similar. They taught that the way to remove suffering from the mind was to make the body suffer instead. As strange as it might seem, most people thought that the holiest of the holy ones were those who tortured their bodies the most! Since everyone seemed to agree with this, the Bodhisattva decided to find out for himself if it was true.

He renounced his lifestyle as an ordinary, mundane person and instead became a holy man according to the custom of his times. This meant that he had to give up everything, even his clothes. So he went around naked, with his body caked only by dust and dirt. He also forced himself to eat only garbage such as dirt, ashes, urine and cow dung.

In order not to be interrupted by anyone so that he could concentrate on his practice, he lived alone in the most dangerous part of the forest. If he bumped into any human being, he ran away like a timid deer.

In the winter, he spent his days under the trees and his nights out in the open. Hence, he was soaked wet by the cold water dripping from the icicles hanging from the tree branches during the day and was covered by falling snow at night. In this way, he made his body suffer the most extreme cold day in and out during winter.



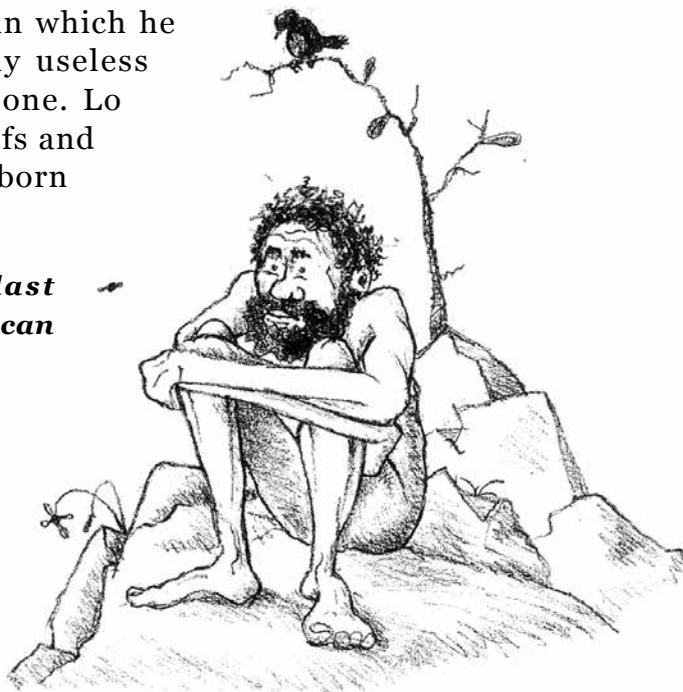
## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

In the summer, he spent his days out in the open and his nights under the trees. Thus in the daytime, he was sunburned by the most severe rays, and at night, he was blocked by the trees from the few cooling breezes of the open air. In this way, he made his body endure the most extreme heat both day and night in the summer.

That was how he struggled, trying to bring peace to his mind. He was so determined that he lived his entire life in this way.

Then, just as he was about to die, he saw a vision of himself being reborn in the realm of hells. The vision struck him like a bolt of lightning! He realised that very instant that all the extreme ways in which he had tortured his body were completely useless and could not bring peace of mind to one. Lo and behold, as he gave up his false beliefs and held on to the truth, he died and was reborn in a heavenly world!

**THE MORAL IS** ➤ *Even at the very last moment, “the truth can set you free”.*



---

# 95

## **Clear-sighted the Great, King of the World (Impermanence)**

It is said that there are two ways to practise religion. One is to live apart from the ordinary, everyday world as a monk, a nun or a holy one. Those who are earnest in this way have, as their highest goal, the direct experience of complete Truth or full Enlightenment.

The second is to practise it within the ordinary world. Those who are sincere in this way have, as their highest goal, the harmony of an undivided world, in which people live peacefully under a perfectly wholesome ruler — a ‘King of the World’.

Long, long ago, the Bodhisattva was born and given the name ‘Clear-sighted’. When he grew up, he developed ten rules of good government. They were absence of hidden ill-will, absence of open hostility, harmlessness, self-control, patience, gentleness, charity, generosity, straightforwardness and goodness.

Soon, the people of the world began to notice the wholesomeness and fairness of Clear-sighted, for he lived strictly according to these rules. Gradually those in his vicinity volunteered to live under his authority as the king, rather than under the dishonest politicians of that time.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

As his good name spread far and wide, every king in the world came to Clear-sighted and said, “Come, oh lord. You are welcome to my kingdom, for my kingdom is your kingdom. Please advise me how to rule in your name.”

And Clear-sighted would always reply, “Do not destroy life. Do not take what is not given. Do not behave wrongly in sexual desires. Do not speak falsely. Do not take alcohol that clouds the mind. My commands to the world are only these five. As long as these five are obeyed, my sixth rule is freedom for all to follow local customs and religions.”

Eventually all the people on earth came to live under his peaceful rule, and he was known as Clear-sighted the Great, King of the World. His royal city, the capital of the whole world, was called Kusavati. It was a beautiful and prosperous city with four magnificent gates — a golden gate, a silver gate, a jade gate and a crystal gate.

Outside these gates, Kusavati was surrounded by seven rows of palm trees — the first, a row with golden trunks and silver leaves and fruits, the second, a row with silver trunks and golden leaves and fruits, the third, a row with cat’s-eye trunks and crystal leaves and fruits, the fourth, a row with crystal trunks and cat’s-eye leaves and fruits, the fifth, a row with agate trunks and coral leaves and fruits, the sixth, a row with coral trunks and agate leaves and fruits, and finally a row with trunks and leaves and fruits of every kind of jewel found in the world!

When breezes blew through these marvellous trees, the sweet sounds of gentle music could be heard throughout the city. This music was so enticing and pleasant that some of the citizens were enchanted into stopping their work to dance joyously!

Clear-sighted the Great, King of the World, had a couch encrusted with jewels from these wonderful trees. After a long, righteous and peaceful reign, he lay on the magnificent couch for the last time. He knew that his end was near.

---

Of all his 84,000 queens, the one who loved him most was called 'Most Pleasant'. Sensing his state of mind, she said, "You rule over all the cities of the world, including this beautiful Kusavati with its four wondrous gates and seven rows of astonishing palms trees. Think about this and be happy!"

"No, my dear queen, don't say that. Instead you should advise me to give up attachment to the cities of the world and all that they contain," replied the King of the World. Surprised, she asked, "Why do you say this, my lord?"

"Because today, I will die," he said.

When Queen Most Pleasant heard this, she started crying, wiping away the tears as they flowed. All the other 84,000 queens also broke into tears. Even the king's ministers and his whole court of both men and women wept and sobbed. All eyes were filled with tears.





## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

However, King Clear-sighted the Great said, “Your tears are useless. Be at peace.” Hearing this, the wailing subsided and his subjects became silent. Then he turned to Queen Most Pleasant with these words, “Oh my queen, do not cry, do not lament. Anything that comes into being, be it a kingdom including the whole world, or just a tiny sesame seed, cannot last forever. Anyone who is born, no matter who he is — whether he is the King of the World, or the poorest petty thief — must die and decay one day. Whatever is compounded would fall apart. Whatever comes into being would decay. The only true happiness is in the moment when there is no birth and death.”

In this way, the Bodhisattva led them to contemplate what most people avoided — that all things invariably come to an end. He advised them to be generous and wholesome. Then the King of the World, like everyone else, passed away. For all his meritorious acts, he was reborn as a god in a heavenly world.

***THE MORAL IS*** ⇨ ***All things, good or bad, come to an end eventually.***

---

# 96

## **The Prince and the She-devils** **(Chap. 1. Five Meals in the Forest)**

Once upon a time, when King Brahmadata ruled Benares, in northern India, the Bodhisattva was born the last of his 100 sons. He grew up into a wise young man.

In those days, there were Silent Buddhas who came to the palace to receive alms. They were called Buddhas because they were enlightened — they knew the Truth and experienced life as it really was, in every present moment; but were called Silent as they did not preach the Truth. They knew that even if they did, no one would be able to understand the teachings. However, filled with sympathy for the unhappiness of all beings, the Silent Buddhas wished to help anyone who asked them.

One day, the young prince was thinking about his 99 older brothers and wondering if he had any chance to become the King of Benares. He decided to ask the Silent Buddhas about it.

The next day, the Silent Buddhas came as usual to collect alms in the palace. The prince brought purified water and washed their feet. When they had taken their seat, he gave them appetisers to eat. Before giving the next course, he asked, “I am 100th in line to the throne. What are the odds that I will become King of Benares?”

“Oh prince, with so many older brothers, there is almost no chance that you will ever be the king in Benares,” they replied. “However, you might become King of Takkasila



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

if you can get there in seven days. But there is a dangerous forest on your way to that city. Since it would take twice as long to go around it, you have to take the road passing through it.

“That forest is nicknamed ‘Devils Woods’ because it is filled with all kinds of devils — he-devils, she-devils, and even little children-devils! The she-devils spend most of their time by the roadside. They use magic to conjure buildings and entire cities along the way.

“The buildings have ceilings decorated with stars, and gorgeous, rich couches surrounded by silk curtains of many colours. Sitting on these couches, the she-devils use their magic to appear as the sweetest and loveliest goddesses. They attract weary travellers with honeyed words like, ‘You look tired. Come in, sit down, have something to drink and then be on your way.’

“Those who are persuaded to come in are invited to sit down. Then the she-devils use their lovely womanly charms to seduce their visitors until they are burning with lust and desire. Shortly after giving in to their desires, the strangers are killed and eaten by the she-devils while their blood is still warm!

“The she-devils also trap and seduce men through the five senses. They captivate the strangers’ sight with their alluring beauty and fair maiden forms, their sound with their melodious singing voices and music, their smell with the divine perfumes they wear, their taste with the scrumptious, heavenly-tasting delicacies that they offer, and their sense of touch with their soft, luxurious beds and velvet couches.

“However, if you, fair prince, can subdue and control all five senses, and avoid looking at those beautiful, enticing she-devils, you can then become the King of Takkasila in seven days.”

The grateful Bodhisattva replied, “Thank you, Venerable ones, I will follow your advice. After hearing such warnings, how could I risk looking at them?”

---

Then he asked the Silent Buddhas for special charms to protect him on this dangerous journey. They chanted protective blessings onto a string and some sand. He accepted the charms and then bade farewell to the Silent Buddhas and his royal parents.

“I am going to Takkasila to become the king there. You are to remain here,” he announced to his household servants when he returned to his own home.

“We also wish to go with you,” replied five of them.

“No,” he said. “You can’t come with me. I have been warned that on the way to Takkasila, there are beautiful she-devils who kill and eat people who can’t resist their desires arising from their senses. It is far too dangerous for you. I will rely only on myself and travel alone.”

However, the five servants would not listen to the prince. “If we go with you, oh prince, we will force ourselves not to look at those beautiful she-devils. We will accompany you to Takkasila,” they answered.

“If you insist, then so be it,” said the prince, “but keep your determination strong.”

The she-devils were waiting for them in the Devils Woods. They had already magically conjured beautiful villages and cities with lovely houses and palaces along the way.

It happened that one of the prince’s five servants was easily mesmerised by the charming curves of women’s bodies, and he began to lag behind in order to admire them. “Why are you lagging behind, my friend?” asked the worried prince. “My feet ache,” said the man. “Let me sit and rest a while in one of these mansions. Then I will catch up with you.”

“My good friend, those are she-devils. Don’t chase after them!” warned the prince.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

Nevertheless, blinded by the temptations of such loveliness, the man replied, “My lord, I can’t turn away. Whatever will happen, let it happen!” Giving him one last warning, the prince continued on the way with the other four.

The one who stayed behind went closer to the dazzling ‘goddesses’ that he was so attracted to. After enjoying themselves fully with the man, the she-devils killed and ate him on the spot!

As the group travelled further into the woods, they saw another mirage of a beautiful mansion created by the she-devils. Strains of the sweetest melodies, accompanied by the pleasing sound of all kinds of musical instruments drifted from that mansion. One of the prince’s



followers who was enchanted with the sound of the blissful music soon lagged behind and, like the first man, was gobbled up by the famished she-devils.

Further down the road, the prince and his remaining followers saw another magic mansion. It was filled with all kinds of divine perfumes and scents. This time, the man who succumbed to the temptation of the sweet-smelling scents left the group and was devoured as well.

Next, the she-devils created a fabulous restaurant filled with the most mouth-watering gourmet foods. The lover for the finest delicacies wandered in and was gobbled down quickly by the ravenous she-devils.

---

Lastly, the she-devils conjured soft, luxurious beds and velvet couches and sat on them. The last of the prince's followers could not resist the touch of the softest fabrics and the most luxurious comfort. He slowed down his pace and eventually met his death too.

With his five followers gone, the Bodhisattva was all alone in the forest. "Aha! This man is very strong-minded indeed. But I'm even more determined. I will not stop until I have tasted his flesh!" thought a certain she-devil. With that, she alone stubbornly trailed him, even though the other devils had given up their chase.

As she came closer to the edge of Devils Woods, some woodsmen saw her and asked, "Lovely maiden, who is that man who walks on ahead of you?"

"We are newlyweds," lied the she-devil. "My husband is extremely pure, so pure is he that he ran away from me on our wedding night. That's why I'm chasing after him."

"Noble sir, your sweet, delicate young wife who is as lovely as the flowers has left her family to live with you. Why don't you walk with her, instead of making her chase after you?" asked the woodsmen when they caught up with the prince.

"Good people, she is not my wife," answered the prince. "She is a devil who has killed five of my men. She ate them while their blood was still warm in their veins!"

"See how, gentlemen, anger can make husbands call their own wives devils and hungry ghosts! This is the way of the world," sighed the ravishing she-devil.

As she continued to follow the prince, the determined she-devil used her magic to appear as a pregnant woman who was having her baby for the very first time. Whoever saw the pair questioned them just as the woodsmen had. Each time, the Bodhisattva repeated that she was a man-eating she-devil who had killed and eaten five of his men.



## **A Feast in the Palace (Chapter 2.)**

Finally, the prince reached Takkasila. When they arrived there, the she-devil made her 'baby bump' disappear and followed alone.

At the city gate, the prince stopped his journey and went into a rest house. Due to the magic power of the charmed sand and string that he had received from the Silent Buddhas, the she-devil was not able to follow him inside. So she remained outside and transformed herself to appear as charming and divine-looking as a goddess.

The King of Takkasila happened to catch a glimpse of her as he was going to his pleasure garden. Struck by her loveliness and overwhelmed with desire for her, he decided that he must have her. Thus, he sent a servant to ask if she was married. "Yes, my husband is inside this rest house," she replied when asked of her marital status.

Hearing this, the prince called out from within, "She is a devil who has killed five of my men. She ate them while their blood was still warm in their veins!"

"See how, sir, anger can make husbands call their own wives devils and hungry ghosts! This is the way of the world," she said once again.

The servant returned to the king and told him what both had said. "Unowned goods belong to the king," declared the king. And he sent a royal elephant to receive the she-devil. When the procession returned to the palace with her seated on the royal elephant, he made her his favourite queen.

That evening, after the king had his bath, he ate his supper, and lay down on his royal

---

bed. Likewise, after the demon had taken her supper, she made herself look even more gorgeous than before and followed the king to his bed. After pleasing him, she turned on her side and began to weep.

“Why are you crying, my sweetheart?” asked the king.

“Your Majesty,” she replied, “you picked me up from the roadside. I will be crushed if the women in the harem question my background and say that it is dubious. But if Your Majesty could confer me power and authority over the whole kingdom, nobody would dare taunt or make fun of me.”

“My lovely,” replied the king, “I have no such power over the whole kingdom. My authority is only over rebels and law-breakers. So I can’t give you power and authority over the whole kingdom.”

“Then, my lord, at least grant me complete authority over all who dwell within the palace if you cannot bestow me authority over the kingdom or the city,” continued the sweet-looking demon.

Completely bowled over by her alluring beauty, the king agreed. Satisfied, the new queen waited until the king was asleep before she secretly returned to her home in the city of devils. She gathered all the she-devils, he-devils, and even the hungry little children-devils and took them back to the palace with her. She killed her new husband, the king, and devoured him, flesh and all! The other devils ate the rest who lived in the palace, even the dogs and chickens! Only piles of bones were left behind.

The next morning, the people found the palace doors locked. Worried, they broke the windows with axes, and went in only to find mountains of human and animal bones scattered all around. Only then did they realise that the man in the rest house was indeed telling the truth — that the king’s new queen was actually a man-eating devil.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Meanwhile, the prince had protected himself from the vicious she-devil during the night the king was murdered. He had sprinkled the charmed sand on the roof of the rest house and wound the charmed string around its exterior. He stood alertly inside, sword in hand, waiting for dawn.

After cleaning up the mess in the palace, the citizens discussed the situation among themselves. “The man in the rest house must be a noble, determined wise man indeed for he was able to subdue and control his senses in not succumbing to the dangerous beauty of the she-devil. If such a noble and wise man rules our country, all of us would prosper. Let us make him our new king,” they said to one another.

In unanimous agreement, they went to the rest house and invited the prince to be their king. When he accepted, they escorted him to the palace, decked him in jewels and crowned him as the king.

He ruled righteously, abiding by the ten rules of good government. He also avoided the four unwholesome states — prejudice, anger, fearfulness and foolishness, and always remembered the advice of the Silent Buddhas, that had led him to becoming king of Takkasila. Unlike his five unfortunate followers, he had resisted the cravings for the pleasures of the five senses. Only then could he become a wise ruler and benefit all his subjects.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ Living only for pleasures of the senses causes the downfall and untimely death of one.***

---

97

## **A Man Named Bad (Self-Acceptance)**



Once upon a time, there was a world-famous teacher in Takkasila, in northwestern India. He had 500 students, all of upper-class upbringing, who learned the sacred teachings from him.

It happened that one of these students had been given the name ‘Bad’ by his parents. “When I’m told, ‘Come, Bad’, ‘Go, Bad’, ‘Do this, Bad’, it is not nice for me or others. It even sounds disgraceful and unlucky,” Bad thought one day.

So he went to his teacher and asked him to help change his name to something that was more pleasant and would bring him good fortune. “Go, my son, go wherever you like and find a more fortunate name. When you return, I will officially give you your new name,” said the teacher.

Taking the advice of his teacher, Bad left the city and travelled from village to village until he came to a big city. A man had just died and Bad asked what his name was. “His name was Alive,” replied the people who lived in that city.

“What, Alive is dead?” asked Bad.

And the people answered, “Whether a person is called Dead or Alive, he will still have to die someday. A name is merely a word used to identify a person. Only a fool would not know this!”

When Bad heard this, he no longer thought badly about his own name, but he didn’t feel good about it either.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

As he continued on his way, he saw a slave girl being beaten by her masters. “Why is she being beaten?” he asked. “She is a slave until she pays a debt to her masters,” the others replied. “She did not bring her wages home from work to pay as interest on her debt.”

“What is her name?” Bad asked again.

“Her name is Rich,” they told him.

“Her name is Rich, but she has no money to even pay for the interest of her debt?” Bad queried once more. “It doesn’t matter if she is called Rich or Poor. In any case, she has no money. A name only serves to identify a person. Only a fool would not know this!” they rebuked.

After hearing this, Bad became even less interested in changing his name.

After leaving the city, along the roadside, he met a man who had lost his way. “What is your name?” he asked the man. “My name is Tourguide,” replied the stranger.

“You mean to say that even a Tourguide will get himself lost?” asked Bad.

And the man answered, “It doesn’t matter if I’m named Tourguide or Tourist. In any case, I have lost my way. A name merely serves to identify a person. Only a fool would not know this!”

Now completely satisfied with his own name, Bad returned to his teacher.

“My son, have you found yourself a good name?” asked the world-famous teacher of Takkasila.

“Sir, I have discovered that death comes to Alive and Dead alike, that Rich and Poor may both be penniless, and that both Tourguide and Tourist can get lost,” he answered. “Now I realise that a name is merely a word used to identify a person. It does not govern the destiny of a person. The name does not make things happen, only deeds do. I’m satisfied with my name. There’s no point in changing it.”

The teacher summarised the lesson that his student had learnt — “By seeing Alive as dead, Rich as poor, Tourguide as lost, Bad has accepted himself.”

**THE MORAL IS** ⇨ ***“A rose by any other name would still smell as sweet.”***

---

# 98

## **A Man Named Wise (Cheating)**

Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva was born into a merchant's family in Benares. He was given the name Wise. When he grew up, he did business with a man called Very Wise.

One day, Wise and Very Wise took a caravan of 500 bullock carts to the countryside. After they had sold all their wares, they returned to Benares with their handsome profits.

When it was time to split their gains between them, Very Wise said, "I should get twice as much profit as you."

"Why?" asked Wise.

"Because you are Wise and I'm Very Wise. It is obvious that Wise should get only half as much as Very Wise."

"Didn't we both invest equal amounts in this caravan trip? Why do you deserve twice the amount of profit compared to me?" asked Wise.

"This is because of my quality of being Very Wise," he replied. Their dispute went on with no end in sight.

Then Very Wise thought of a plan to win this argument. He went to his father and asked him to hide inside a huge, hollow tree. "When my partner and I come by and ask how



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

we should share our profits, you should say, 'Very Wise deserves a double share', " he instructed his father.

With that, Very Wise returned to Wise. "My friend, neither of us wants this quarrel. So let's go to the old sacred tree and ask the tree spirit to settle it," he suggested.

"My lord tree spirit, we have a problem. Kindly solve it for us," said Very Wise solemnly when they reached the tree. Hiding inside the hollow tree, Very Wise's father disguised his voice and asked, "What is your question?"

"My lord tree spirit, this man is Wise and I'm Very Wise. We have done business together. Tell us how we should share our profits," asked the dishonest man. Disguising his voice again, his father responded, "Wise deserves a single share and Very Wise deserves a double share."

Hearing this, Wise decided to find out if it really was a tree spirit speaking inside the tree, so he threw some hay into it and set it on fire. Immediately, Very Wise's father grabbed onto a branch, jumped out of the flames and fell onto the ground. "Although my son's name is Very Wise, he is just a clever cheater. I'm lucky that the one named Wise is really so, and I have escaped only half toasted!"

Then Wise and Very Wise shared their profits equally. Eventually they both died and were reborn as they deserved.

**THE MORAL IS** ⇨ ***A cheater may be clever but not wise.***



---

# 99

## Achieving Nothing (Nothing)

Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva was born into an upper-class family in northern India. When he grew up, he renounced the world and became a holy man. He went to the Himalayan mountains where 500 other holy men became his followers.

As he meditated throughout his long life, he gained supernatural powers, such as being able to fly through the air and the ability to read people's thoughts. These special powers impressed his 500 followers greatly.

One rainy season, the chief follower took 250 holy men into the hilly country villages to collect salt and other necessities. It happened that this took place at a time when the master was about to pass away. The remaining 250 followers who were still by his side realised this, and therefore they asked, "Oh most holy one, what was your greatest achievement in your long life of practising wholesomeness, goodness and meditation?"

Having difficulty in speaking as he was dying, the last words of the Bodhisattva were "Nothing." Then he was reborn in the heavenly realms.

The 250 followers were sorely disappointed. They had expected to hear their master talk about some fantastic magical powers. "After practising goodness and meditation for his whole life, our poor master has achieved 'nothing'," they said to one other. Since they considered him a failure, they did not accord him due respect, and cremated his body with no special ceremony or honours.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

“Where is the holy one?” the chief follower asked when he returned.

“He has passed away,” informed the other followers.

“Did you ask him about his greatest achievement in life?”

“Of course we did,” they answered.

“And what did he say?” asked the chief follower.

“He said that he has achieved ‘nothing’,” they replied, “so we didn’t conduct his funeral with any special honours or celebrations.”

“Brothers, you did not understand the meaning of our teacher’s words,” said the chief follower. “He has achieved the great knowledge of ‘Nothing’. He realised that the names of things are not what they are. Names are just labels. There is what there is, without being called ‘this thing’ or ‘that thing’. There is actually nothing.” In this way, the chief follower explained the wonderful achievement of their great master, but they still did not understand.

Meanwhile, from his heavenly world, the reborn Bodhisattva saw that his former chief follower’s words were not accepted. So he left the heavenly world and appeared floating in the air above his former followers’ monastery. In praise of the chief follower’s wisdom, he said, “The one who hears the Truth and understands it automatically is far better off than a hundred others who spend a hundred years thinking and thinking.”

By preaching in this way, the Great Being encouraged the 500 holy men to continue seeking the Truth. After leading lives spent in serious meditation, all 500 died and were reborn in the same heavenly world with their former master.

***THE MORAL IS ⇒ When the wise ones speak, listen!***



100

## **A Mother's Wise Advice (Non-violence)**

Once upon a time, there was a righteous ruler in Benares. He was the son of King Brahmadata. However, it all came to an end when the King of Kosala waged war, killed the King of Benares, and forced the queen to be his wife.



## Tales of the Buddha's Former Lives

---

Meanwhile, the queen's son had managed to escape through the sewers. Out in the countryside, he recruited people and eventually raised a large army to surround the city. He sent a message to the king, who was the murderer of his father and the present husband of his mother. "Surrender your kingdom or go to war!" was the message.

Soon, words of this threat came to the Queen's ears. She was a kind-hearted and gentle woman who wanted to prevent violence, suffering and killing. With her kind intentions to prevent any bloodshed, she sent a message to her son — "There is no need to wage a battle. It would be far wiser to simply close every entrance to the city. Eventually the lack of food, water and firewood will wear the citizens down, and they will hand the whole city to you without any fighting."

The prince decided to follow his mother's wise advice. His army barricaded the city for seven days and seven nights. Eventually, the citizens of Bernares captured their unlawful king, beheaded him and delivered his head to the prince. He entered the city triumphantly and became their new King.

***THE MORAL IS*** ⇒ ***Kind advice is wise advice.***