

# **Korean Zen Legends Illustrated in Temple Murals**

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**Part I:**  
**Jataka Tales**

# I

## **The People Whom Siddhartha met at the Four Gates: The Four Gate Connection**

When the Lord Buddha was a prince, he lived a life of luxury, ease, and comfort. His father, King Jungban, ensured that Siddhartha, his only son, lived in a different palace every season of the year. The prince enjoyed happiness, was served by beautiful maids, and had many forms of entertainment. His palace life was joyful and without difficulties of any kind. However, when he left the palaces, he would sometimes witness grim scenes of the real-life struggle to survive. The prince suffered when he witnessed the struggle for existence occurring in nature, and his heart ached when he compared his own luxurious and comfortable life to the poor and difficult life of the peasantry.

One day, the prince rode a cart out of the palace in order to enjoy the fresh air of the hills. When he was about to pass the eastern gate, he saw an old man walking by the side of the road. The old man's hair was faded like dry weeds, his body was as skinny as his walking staff, and he was breathing hard.

The prince asked himself: "Do all people become like this old man when they grow old? If so, then I, too, will eventually grow old like him." Feeling grieved, the prince thereupon returned to the palace. Another day, some time later, he again left the stuffy atmosphere of the palace and set out on the road in order to enjoy the pleasures of nature. Without the prince's knowing, the king had taken many measures to prevent him from seeing this kind of sad thing again. However, when his cart was passing the southern gate, he saw a man lying in the street, dressed in rags and writhing in pain. His face was pale and his arms and legs were like sticks.

Looking at the man, Siddhartha wondered: "Why do people have to suffer from disease? Why do the pains of old age and the agonies of illness arise? Is there any way to be delivered from these anguishes?" And on this day, too, the prince returned home with a heavy heart.

On yet another day, he went out to the fields through the western gate. When his cart reached the unfrequented, silent woods, he encountered a funeral procession bearing a corpse at its head and composed of people weeping with sorrow. As Prince Siddhartha observed this sight, he was as startled as if he had seen his own death. He realized then, for the first time, that while he thought he was living a life, he was actually walking to his death with every step.

A few days later, the prince went out through the northern gate, and he saw a man in rags walking towards him. He unconsciously got off his cart and bowed his head because of the man's dignified appearance.

"Sir, may I ask, what is your occupation?"

"My name is Sahmun, and I have left home to renounce the world."

“Oh Sahmun, what is the benefit of renouncing the world?”

“I am walking the way of peace, unaffected by the world, and, in doing so, I receive the eternal peace of this path.”

When Siddhartha heard these words from the ascetic, a bright light seemed to shine upon him. He was moved to tears, and he swore to himself: “This is exactly what I have been looking for. I will leave my home and become an ascetic.”

Thereupon, Siddhartha returned to his palace, filled with joy.

## II

### **Siddhartha Abandons the Palace and Becomes an Ascetic: Renouncing Sexuality**

When Crown Prince Siddhartha was twenty-nine years old, his wife, Yashodhara, gave birth to a baby boy. When Siddhartha heard of the birth of his son, he sighed for grief saying, “Rahula!”, which means “hindrance.” He thought that he could no longer postpone leaving home and entering the priesthood. In India, once people have produced heirs, they are traditionally allowed to leave the state of householder and enter the priesthood if they should so desire. Siddhartha went to his father, King Jungban, and said: “I truly desire to leave home and become an ascetic. Please allow me to go.”

When the king heard this, he thought: “that which was prophesied has come to pass,” and he felt the world turn black before his eyes.

“Siddhartha, I know that you have good reasons for leaving home. However, have you thought about the future of your country, of your wife, and of your son, Rahula? I will grant anything you wish if you will only give up this desire.”

“I do not wish for the power of king, or for wealth and prosperity in this world, or for the pleasures of this life. What I really crave is to be delivered from aging, from disease, and from death. And it is only through leaving behind my false existence and finding my true self that I can seek real freedom and eternal happiness where there is no agony.”

The king grew depressed and his heart grew heavy because he realized that he could not stop his son from struggling with the fundamental problems of life, problems that he himself was unable to solve. Siddhartha on the other hand, who had made up his mind to leave before he told his father about his decision, could hardly wait to get out of the palace.

One night, Siddhartha gazed upon his wife, Yashodhara, and upon his baby boy, Rahula, as they were sleeping, and he swore to save them through his own deliverance. The palace was now as dreary as a tomb, though it had been noisy with music and dancing till late in the night. The palace maids were sleeping about, here and there, on the spacious floor. Some of these gorgeous and beautiful ladies had thrown off their blankets and were writhing in their sleep, some had their faces contorted in ugly gestures, some were grinding their teeth, and saliva was drooling out of the open mouths of yet others. Looking at this picture, Siddhartha again sensed the frailty of human life, and he felt pity for them.

Thereupon, Siddhartha went outside, woke a charioteer, and asked him to saddle his horse for him. At long last, riding his beloved horse, he left behind the walls of Kapilla Palace and began his journey to become an ascetic. As he rode, he sang:

I have had a desire deep in my heart  
To drink the sweet dew of wisdom  
Now I am riding my horse fast

In order to reach the land of Truth

### III

## **Six Years in the Snow-Covered Mountains: Spiritual Exercises in the Snowy Mountains**

Siddhartha was no longer a prince, having left his beloved wife and his palace in order to seek after Truth. “I will certainly achieve great enlightenment,” he swore to himself as he went into the woods. When he found the proper place, he began sitting in meditation. He was determined not to give up meditating no matter what happened. When it grew dark, the sound of beasts roaring made him shudder, and the chilly, humid night air soaked through his torn and worn-out clothes.

Seven days passed by, however, and he was unable to achieve enlightenment, so he realized that it was not as easy to seek illumination as he had thought. Thereupon he decided to go and find a master, for he thought that it would be better to be taught by a great and powerful ascetic than to continue seeking Truth by himself.

First he met a guru called Bakkaba, whose disciples were tormenting themselves through asceticism. In India at that time many ascetics sought Truth in this way because they believed that, after death, they would be born again in heaven because of the sufferings they caused themselves.

Siddhartha asked Bakkaba: “Why do you torment yourselves like this?”

Bakkaba answered: “To be born again in heaven.”

Siddhartha thought to himself, “they endure suffering to get pleasure, and then once the pleasure of heaven is gone, they must return to this world and suffer again.”

Feeling skeptical about this, Siddhartha went on. He had heard good things about a guru named Allahrakhallama, and so he went to him at this time. Allahrakhallama taught him that he should pursue meditation in order to become free from ideas and thoughts, and so to be delivered from this painful world. Thus, Siddhartha trained under his new master, and in a short while he learned all that he could from him and attained the highest proficiency in the art of meditation. However, feeling that this path was not the right road to enlightenment and so was of no help to him, he left this place and went on.

Siddhartha then met another ascetic named Uttakharamaphuttha living in the vicinity of Wangsa Palace. In this place, too, he achieved a high proficiency in his master’s path to personal enlightenment in a very short time. However, he was unsatisfied with his new master’s teaching as well and, finally, he realized that there was no option but to seek enlightenment on his own.

Therefore, Siddhartha began looking for a proper place to discipline himself until he found Truth. The woods close to the village of Urvella, in the region of Gaya, in the land of Magada, appealed to him. The Niranjara River flowed quietly from the peaks of the mountains through these beautiful and lush woods. The ascetic Siddhartha reached the middle of Mount Gaya and sat down on the grass underneath a big tree. Then and there he



commenced practicing asceticism as no one had ever done before.

The young prince's body, which had radiated beauty, grew so gaunt and took on such a weak appearance that no one could tell whether he had died or was still alive. When he began, he took his meals once a day, but after a while he reduced the number of his meals so that he ate only once every two days, then once every three days, then once a week, and finally he took only one meal every fortnight. He turned into such a mere bag of bones that if one had touched his stomach, one would have felt his spine. Only his deeply sunken, hollow eyes continued to burn brightly.

Siddhartha spent six years practicing severe asceticism. Although he thereby learned to train his mental powers, he was still unable to attain enlightenment. Since it was not possible to arrive at the highest enlightenment through the most harsh and severe of ascetic practices, Siddhartha came to think that he would have to leave off self-mortification and make a new beginning. Whereas he had been tormenting his physical self, he now came to think that he ought to employ his physical strength instead of wasting it.

The other ascetics who had been practicing with Siddhartha blamed him for abandoning their path and thought that he had been corrupted. However, Siddhartha thought that he first needed to make his weakened body healthy, so he paid no attention to their criticism, but went down to the Niranjara River and bathed. Thereafter a maiden named Sujata gave him a bowl of milk and rice from which he gained strength. While he was eating this porridge, the thought occurred to him that he could realize the vanity of life even as he gained energy from eating. After that, he set off looking for another place to begin sitting in meditation again. This time, though, his heart was full of hope and confidence.

A lad who had been mowing made a seat for Siddhartha with an armful of gani grass underneath a bodhi tree. Facing east, Siddhartha sat on the grass with his legs crossed and swore to himself:

“It does not matter if my body grows thin in this place. It does not matter if I lose my skin and bones and flesh in this place. I will not arise from this seat until I have attained the enlightenment that cannot be found anywhere in this world.”

He began to meditate deeply and silently underneath the bodhi tree. At dawn on the seventh day, when the morning star had just arisen in the east, the darkness that had been in Siddhartha's heart for so long cleared away and was replaced with brightness. Siddhartha had attained the Great Wisdom, and this was a new dawn for humanity.

## IV

### **Siddhartha Rolls the Wheel of Truth: The Primary Rule of Change**

The moment the Lord Buddha, seated under the bodhi tree, saw the rising of the morning star, he came to understand all the truths in the universe. He immediately wished to share his enlightenment with others, and he thought of the five ascetics with whom he had practiced asceticism. Thereupon, he turned his steps toward the deer park in Benares, which was two hundred kilometers away from Buddha Gaya. Although the five ascetics had promised each other that they would pretend not to know him, they were compelled by a mysterious power to stand up and welcome the Lord Buddha as he approached them. They spoke thus:

“Oh, Gautama, you must be tired since you have traveled so far.”

The Buddha replied: “Do not call me Gautama any more. Call me Yawrae for I have now become Yawrae.”

Yawrae (“thus come, thus go”) is a term for a person who has reached the Land of Truth, or for a person who has come from the Land of Truth to preach.

The Lord Buddha then preached his first sermon to these five ascetics:

“There are two extremes in the world, and ascetics should not run to either of them. One of them is the way of pleasure, which means giving oneself over to the pleasures of the senses. Ascetics will not gain anything from this path, which is suitable for ordinary people, because it is a vulgar and worldly way. The other extreme is the way of mortification, or mortifying one’s body in the attempt to enlighten one’s soul. However, mortification only torments the body, and it is not of great advantage for the true goal of ascetic practices. You should renounce those two extreme ways, and learn the Middle Way. A Yawrae is a person who attains enlightenment by the Truth of the Middle Way. And what is this Middle Way? It is the eightfold path of right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.”

The five ascetics were pleased as they listened to the Buddha describe his earnest experiences. They realized that he had found the right Truth, and they worshiped him with wholehearted thanksgiving.

The Lord Buddha preached again to his first five disciples and he told them of the Four Noble Truths:

“Ascetics! These are the right insights about human life. Birth is agony, growing old is anguish, suffering from disease is affliction, and death is great pain. When lovers part, they feel pain, and when people who hate each other meet, they feel anguish. Pain from not having the things that one seeks, the anxiety that we feel as we live our lives, worry, sadness—all this is suffering.

“Why does suffering arise? It is because our innermost thoughts are covered with love and lust, and because we are attached to everything through desire. The origin of suffering

is being tied to the world of samsara through desire and existence. In order to remove suffering, one must know the way to dispel craving, which is the source of agony, until nothing remains, and to reach Nirvana through deliverance. One can do this by practicing the eightfold path that I mentioned previously, as follows:

“The first path is right understanding, which is the wisdom to view the Four Noble Truths correctly.

“The second path is right thought, which means rejecting earthly desires and vain ideas, and avoiding anger and resentment.

“The third path is right speech, or abstaining from lying, hurtful talk, sowing discord, and engaging in idle gossip, and always speaking words that are right and true.

“The fourth path is right action, or abstaining from the destruction of life, thievery, and promiscuity, and persevering correctly and truly in one’s austerities.

“The fifth path is right livelihood, which means living or obtaining food and clothing always by right and fair means, and not leading a life in which one obtains necessities by unjust and wrong ways or means.

“The sixth path is right effort, or exerting oneself to prevent bad thoughts from arising before they have arisen, and abandoning evil thoughts that have already occurred. Furthermore, right effort involves persevering in the endeavor to cause good ideas to reveal themselves to the mind, and always maintaining and cultivating those good thoughts that have arisen.

“The seventh path is right mindfulness, which means observing one’s body and mind prudently so as to concentrate one’s thoughts on right things, and casting away all earthly desires, which arise from avarice.

“The eighth and last path is right concentration, or entering into meditation so as to quench all desires and so as to purge vain and complicated thoughts.

“Ascetics! I have not only found the Noble Truth of suffering, I have realized this Truth perfectly. I have found the cause of suffering, cut it off, and removed its reality. I then discovered the way to cast away suffering, and when I practiced it with my whole body and heart, I became the Buddha.”

As the Lord Buddha was preaching this first sermon to his five disciples after he had found the Noble Truth, a herd of clear-eyed deer that had been frolicking about in the woods approached the place where he was speaking and listened quietly.

**V**  
**Becoming Queen:**  
**The Story of Lady Malli**

Lady Malli, the queen of Cosallah, was originally a maid of low birth named Hwangdu who did errands in an orchard. One day, when Hwangdu had been gathering a garland of flowers in the orchard called Malli, she happened to observe the Lord Buddha as he was asking for alms. When she saw his noble appearance and his upright, dignified manner, delight and reverence welled up from deep in her heart, and she wanted to offer something up to him. However, since she had nothing to give, she served the food that she had brought for her own lunch to the Buddha, and then she bowed down at his feet and worshipped him by bestrewing him with flowers.

Hwangdu returned to the orchard filled with the joy of her offering and diligently resumed her work with a peaceful heart. At that same time, King Pasenadi, who was hunting with his soldiers, lost his way and got separated from his men when he concentrated on chasing a deer. The king wandered about wearily trying to find his way and eventually he found the road to Malli and drove his chariot straight there. Hwangdu served the exhausted king wholeheartedly without knowing that he was a king. In King Pasenadi's sight, she appeared to be an angel from heaven as she was serving him. King Pasenadi was so impressed by Hwangdu's kind heart that he took her to his palace and made her his wife. After this, the people called her Lady Malli because she had come from Malli.

Lady Malli helped the king to make his country prosper ever more, and she led him to the Lord Buddha so that he, too, developed a strong faith. There was always peace in Lady Malli's heart, and since she lived a joyful life and was always kind to everyone, her faith in the Lord Buddha grew deeper and deeper.

Whenever they contemplated the Buddha's teachings, King Pasenadi and Lady Malli thought of Princess Seungman, who had been given in marriage to the kingdom of Ayona. They believed that, since the princess was wise and thoughtful, she would perceive the truth of the Buddha's law if only she had the chance to meet the Lord Buddha. They resolved to send a messenger for her so that she could come and seek enlightenment.

When King Pasenadi and Lady Malli thought of this, they wrote Seungman a letter praising the Buddha's immeasurable virtuous deeds and the profundity of his teachings. Since Seungman had already heard about the Buddha's sublime acts of charity and had been impressed by him, she was eager to meet him and worship him when she heard of her parents' earnest desire. Thereupon, she pressed her hands flat together in the direction of Svattih, where the Buddha was, and sang this song of praise:

I venerate the Lord Buddha, who came into the world for us  
And I am worshiping him because he has all the laws

This is my desire in this world and in the next life  
The salvation of the Lord Buddha through his great mercy

## VI

### **The Unfailing Light of Virtuous Deeds: A Poor Woman's Lamp**

There was a poor woman in Svatthi who lived a lonely existence without any family members or relatives. She often barely managed to sustain herself by begging food from house to house.

One day, the whole region was agitated and the people were all very animated. The poor lady asked someone what had happened.

“The Lord Buddha is coming to this province today. Tonight, King Pasaic and the people are going to welcome him with countless lotus lanterns, which is why the whole town is thronged with people.”

When the poor woman heard this, she was saddened and thought:

“The king is building up many blessings, but what shall I do? It is so rare to meet the Buddha in this life, and even if I can come into his field of blessings, since I have nothing, I have no seed to sow. Would that I could welcome the Lord Buddha by lighting a lotus lamp!”

Bewailing her poverty in this fashion, the poor woman begged two coins from a passerby and then went into an oil shop. The shop owner, who saw at a glance that the old woman was worn with poverty, asked her what use she had for the oil. She answered:

“I have heard that it is very hard to meet the Lord Buddha in this world. Fortunately, I was born in the land where the Lord Buddha now lives, but I have been too poor to offer him anything until now. I heard in the street that the king and the people are about to welcome him by lighting innumerable lotus lamps, and so I also want to light a lamp to offer the Lord Buddha.”

The owner of the oil shop was so impressed by her words that he gave her twice the amount of oil for her money. Deeply grateful, the old woman went out to a street corner that the Buddha was due to pass, lit her lamp there with a joyful heart, and prayed:

“Since I am poor, I can only offer this small lamp to the Lord Buddha. However, I pray that I will be able to enter Nirvana in the next life through this deed so that the light of his wisdom will illuminate the darkness in all people's hearts.”

As the evening wore on, the other people's lights began to fail gradually, but the poor lady's lamp kept burning brightly and shining on in the dark surrounding.

Anan, one of the Buddha's ten chief disciples, tried to extinguish her lamp with his hand because the Lord Buddha would not go to bed before all the lamps were out. However, her lamp would not be extinguished. Therefore, he tried to blow the lamp out by waving the hem of his surplice and a fan, but still the lamp, which had been lighted by the poor woman's whole heart, would not go out. Tradition says that the lamp could not even be extinguished by the divine power of the venerable Mokryun, another of the Buddha's ten principal disciples.

The Lord Buddha observed this and said:

“Anan, do not make efforts in vain. This lamp was lit by a wide and great vow, and by the devotion of a poor woman who has a kind heart. This light of virtuous deeds will never be extinguished. This woman will surely become a Buddha in the next world by virtue of this lamp.”

When the king heard this story, he asked a wise servant:

“For three months I have given alms of clothing, food, bedding, and medicine to the Buddha and his disciples, and I have offered tens of thousands of lamps to the Buddha. Although I have done many virtuous deeds like these, the Lord Buddha has not prophesied that I would become a Buddha in the next life. Why, then, has he complimented this poor old woman and prophesied that she would become a Buddha in her next life because of her deed with such a little light?”

Thinking of the Lord Buddha’s teachings, the wise servant replied as follows:

“The Lord Buddha has said that the Sea of the Virtuous Deeds is so infinitely deep that it is hard for ordinary people to fathom or comprehend. Although one person might build up virtuous deeds by one little offering, another person might not be able to build up credit in the next life by hundreds or even thousands of offerings. Although you did great deeds, your heart was not sincere. On the other hand, the poor woman’s heart was consistent and faithful. I have also heard from the Buddha that the merit of one’s deeds would be decreased if one boasts that one has built up deeds.”

As he heard these words of his wise servant, King Pasaic was ashamed, and he realized the true meaning of virtuous deeds.

## VII

### **The Buddha Worships a Skeleton: The Way to Repay One's Obligations to One's Parents**

While leading a multitude southwards, on the way to Lajagaha castle, in the land of Magada, the Buddha found a skeleton carelessly cast away on the road, and when he did so, he stepped up to the white bones and worshipped them politely. Watching this scene, many in the multitude were surprised and his disciple, the venerable Anan, asked the Lord Buddha:

“You are a master, whom all beings in the earth and in the heavens respect. Why, then, should you bow down to this worthless skeleton?”

The Buddha quietly replied to the venerable Anan's question:

“Anan, listen to me carefully. This pile of bones might have been my parent in my previous life. And look them carefully. If they are the bones of a man, they are probably white and heavy, and if they are the bones of a woman, they are probably dark and light.”

The venerable Anan was dubious, so he asked again:

“Of course one is able to distinguish between the appearance of a man and that of a woman while they are alive. However, how can one identify the gender of a skeleton?”

The Buddha answered:

“Women shed much blood whenever they give birth, and they take the trouble to raise their children by giving their breasts to them, do they not? This is the reason why their bones are dark and light.”

As Anan listened to this, he could not restrain his tears as he thought of his own great debt to his mother, and he asked:

“What should I do to repay my deep and high obligations to my parents?”

Thereupon the Buddha explained the great pains that mothers undergo from pregnancy to childbirth. He also taught the ten favors that mothers bestow after they give birth, which are as follows:

The first favor is to protect their children during their pregnancy. The second favor is to endure birth pains. The third favor is to forget all sorts of worries and anxieties after childbirth. The fourth favor is to feed their children their own sweet food as they themselves swallow bitter things. The fifth favor is to lay their children down on dry beds while they sleep in wet places. The sixth favor is to nourish their babies with their own milk. The seventh favor is to change their diapers. The eighth favor is to worry about their children when they are far away. The ninth favor is to not mind doing anything for their children, even wrong deeds. The tenth and last favor is to love their children unto death.

After he taught these ten deep and wide favors of parents, the Buddha continued preaching to the public as follows:

“If children suffer from disease, their parents also get sick. Only if children recover from their illnesses do their parents get better, too. It is the nature of the parental heart to hope



that their children will grow well as they make all these sorts of efforts.

“Nevertheless, some children do not know this parental heart and, after they have become adults, they think that they grew up by their own efforts. They lack filial piety, and they even cause their parents distress. They respond disrespectfully to their parents, scowl at them, and even shower abuse upon them when their parents ask for something. There are many ungrateful children who only dress and feed themselves although they know that their parents are starving. Compared to the unlimited favors of parents, the unfilial behavior of children is beyond description. As they grow older and become weak and their faces get worn, some children grow ashamed of their parents’ appearance. For this reason, these children lock their aged parents in back rooms and neglect and treat them harshly, as if they were old strangers, and thus they drive their old parents to deep sorrow.

“The parental heart is the only one to care for children. Parents grow ill when their hearts heave with concern for their children, and sometimes they even grow emaciated and pass away waiting for their children. If parents die in this fashion, they turn into lonely souls and wander about Hades looking for their children, whom they never forget, even in their dreams.”

After the Buddha had finished preaching, the people repented deeply of their sins, threw themselves onto the ground, and cried out:

“Our hearts are sore and aching. Now we realize that we have committed lots of sins. Although we have lived laughingly so far without knowing of our sins, now we have become convinced of the error of our ways and we shed penitential tears. Lord Buddha, we pray that you will take pity on us and save us! Teach us the way to repay our wide and deep obligations to our parents.”

The Buddha replied solemnly in a clear and beautiful voice:

“To repay your deep parental favors, write down your obligations to your parents, and then read and memorize this scripture for the sake of your parents, repent of your sins for your parents, give offerings for the sake of your parents. Observe the commandments, give alms, and build up blessings for your parents. By doing these things, you will be filial children. Thereupon, your parents will be born again in heaven and enjoy bliss, for they will be saved from the tortures of hell forever.”

As they listened to this, the venerable Anan and the great multitude realized the profound depth of their parents’ parental favors, and they resolved to attempt to repay their obligations to them.

## VIII

### **Nanda Sees the Sights of Heaven and Hell: Nanda Enters the Priesthood**

The Buddha had a younger brother named Nanda who was born of a different mother. The Buddha was brought up by his aunt, Mahaprajaphatti, whom his father, King Jungban, had enthroned as queen. Nanda was his half-brother, born of these two.

When the Buddha returned to his home country, Kapilla, after he attained the Great Wisdom, three happy events occurred to Nanda. First of all, he moved into a new palace, which had just been completed, and then he took a bride and got married, and finally he was enthroned as the Crown Princess of Kapilla. Soondari, Nanda's bride, was the most beautiful woman in the country.

The Buddha knew that the time had come to redeem his brother, so he entered the palace and went up to Nanda's chamber. When Nanda heard of the Buddha's visit and came out of his quarters, he saw that the Buddha was carrying an empty bag to beg food. Nanda took the bag politely from the Buddha in order to give him food. However, the Buddha, saying nothing, turned away and went back whence he had come. Nanda followed the Buddha in order to give the bag back to him, and eventually they reached Nigroda Temple. Once there, the Lord Buddha seated Nanda in a chair and said:

“Welcome, *bhikku* (“monk”).”

As the Buddha aimed to save him, Nanda's hair was shaved and a surplice was put on his body. However, Nanda missed his wife, Soondari, whom he had left at home, and he was thinking of running away from the temple. However, the Buddha knew that his brother's heart was inclined in this fashion, and so he always took him with him wherever he went, and thus it was not easy for Nanda to get the chance to run away from the temple and go back to his palace.

Several days passed in this fashion and then, one day, Nanda was ordered to guard the temple. It was a tradition to leave a person on duty in the temple while the Buddha and his other disciples went out to beg for alms. Nanda thought: ‘Finally, I have the opportunity to escape from this place.’

He left the temple and walked along a trail, avoiding the wide road, which the Buddha was wont to use. For some unknown reason, however, the Lord Buddha came walking up to him from the opposite side of the trail. As the Buddha reached Nanda, who was thrown into confusion, he said:

“Nanda! You are still only thinking about your wife, whom you left at home.”

Nanda replied: “Yes, you are right, Lord Buddha...”

After this, the Buddha took Nanda to a mountain deep in the Himalyas. There was an old monkey on the mountain. Pointing to the monkey, the Buddha asked Nanda:

“I have heard that your wife is a beauty. Compared to this blind old monkey, do you

think that she is more beautiful?”

“Lord Buddha, my wife, Soondari, is the reigning beauty, and there is no human being who can compete with her. Why do you compare my wife to a blind old monkey?”

After Nanda had spoken, the Buddha took him to heaven and showed him a celestial palace. In this palace, there were five hundred beautiful heavenly maidens, playing exquisite music on their instruments, who seemed as if they were preparing to receive someone. Filled with curiosity, Nanda asked one of the celestial ladies:

“Whom are you wholeheartedly preparing to receive?”

The heavenly maiden replied:

“In Kapilla, by the sea of Yombujae, there is a man called Nanda, who is the Buddha’s brother, who observes the commandments and does right deeds since he has left his home to become a priest. He will be born again here and become a son of heaven in the next life through the virtuous deeds that he has done in his previous life. Therefore, we are preparing to receive him from this time on.”

Nanda nearly leapt for joy as he heard this, and he said:

“I am the person you just mentioned. I would like to stay and live here as I am now.”

However, the heavenly maiden replied:

“No, you cannot. You are still not free from the human body, while we are heavenly beings. You should finish your life as a human and then you can come here.”

Having listened to her, Nanda realized that he could not have his own way, so he went back to the Buddha and told him everything that he had heard from the celestial lady.

Then the Buddha said to him: “Nanda, you told me that your wife was a beauty. How does she compare to a heavenly maiden?”

Nanda answered: “There is as great a difference between my wife and a heavenly maiden as there is between the old monkey and my wife.”

Thereupon, the Buddha and Nanda returned to Yombujae. After this experience, Nanda practiced asceticism dutifully.

One day, the Buddha took him to visit hell. There they saw several huge iron pots. Although one of them was boiling over, the warders continued putting more wood on the fire underneath it.

Nanda asked them: “Excuse me, but why are you boiling water in an empty iron pot that has no sinner in it?”

One of the warders replied: “In Kapilla, by the sea of Yombujae, there is a man called Nanda, who is a brother of the Buddha. In the next life, he will be born again in heaven because he has become a priest. However, he will fall into hell when his life in heaven is done. Therefore, as we are waiting for him, we are boiling water in this iron pot.”

When he heard this, Nanda trembled in terror, and asked the Buddha to take him back to Yombujae.

The Buddha said: “Do you observe the commandments and devote yourself to the

practice of asceticism in order to be born in heaven in your next life?”

Nanda answered the Buddha: “No, I do not want to live in heaven, I only hope that I will not fall into hell.”

After this experience, Nanda made even greater efforts in the practice of asceticism, and in the end, he became an Arahant, a venerable Buddhist, and attained Nirvana after seventeen days.

## IX

### **Making a Necklace with Severed Fingers: A Devilish Murderer Becomes a Believer**

While the Buddha was alive, there was a respectable Brahman in Savatti. He had five hundred disciples, one of whom was named Ahimsa (“non-violence”). Ahimsa earned the praise of his master, for he was an excellent young man endowed with physical strength, outstanding wisdom, and handsome features.

One day, when her husband had gone out, the Brahman’s wife called Ahimsa into her room to seduce him. However, Ahimsa was not tempted, but remained calm and said: “My master’s wife is like my mother. I cannot even think of this.”

Mortified with shame because she had cherished attachment for him, the Brahman’s wife tore her clothes, disheveled her hair, and threw herself onto her bed. When the Brahman returned home, he wondered what had happened to his wife and he asked her to tell him the whole story.

She explained: “Ahimsa, your favorite disciple, tried to rape me while you were out. He tore my clothes when I resisted and refused him.”

As he listened to his wife, the Brahman felt a surge of anger. Wishing to destroy Ahimsa, he called him into the room, and said:

“Ahimsa, you have almost completed your studies. I will initiate you into my secret methods if you do one more thing, the last thing I will ask of you.”

Not knowing what this was all about, Ahimsa was very glad to hear these words and, grateful for his master’s favor, he replied:

“I will do whatever you ask me to do.”

The Brahman took a sword out of the closet, and gave it to Ahimsa, saying:

“Take this sword and go out into the street right now. Kill one hundred people, cut one finger off of each corpse, make a necklace of them, and then come back to me. Your studies will then be complete.”

Ahimsa felt tormented as he listened to these words and received the sword from his master. Nonetheless, he firmly believed in his master’s teaching, and so he decided to follow his instructions. He went out into the street, killed whomever he met, and cut a finger from each corpse. People began to call this satanic killer who cut the fingers from his victims and made them into a necklace “Angullimalla” (*angulli* means fingers, and *malla* a necklace).

Some monks who were begging for alms in the streets learned the story of Angullimalla. When they returned to the Kiwon temple, they told the Buddha what they had heard. As soon as the Buddha got news of this, he went out into the streets begging for alms. When he was about to go into a dangerous street, many people detained him:

“Lord Buddha, you should not go down that road. There is a dreadful, devilish homicide

called Angullimalla who kills every person who comes his way.”

However, the Buddha quietly replied: “I have nothing to fear.”

Angullimalla had by then killed ninety-nine people, and he needed to kill just one more person in order to complete the necklace. Glaring fiercely, he was roaming about in search of his final victim. Just then, his mother, who had heard about what her son was doing, came to see him. Since he had lost his mind, he was unable to recognize his own mother, and he ran forward to kill her. However, when he saw the Buddha walking on the other side of the street, forgetting the woman, he ran towards him instead, roaring:

“Do not move from that spot, son of King Jungban! I am Angullimalla! Surrender your life and your finger to me!”

The Buddha stopped, turned around, and looked silently at him. Confronted with the Buddha’s merciful and dignified appearance, Angullimalla’s thirst for blood instantly disappeared. Thereupon the Buddha spoke in clear, deep voice:

“Angullimalla, I am standing before you right now. In your foolish blindness you have killed many people, and now you wish to kill me. Behold, however, that I have no fear, and that I am at peace although I am in front of a mad killer. I came here because I feel pity for you, and I wish to give you a Sword of Wisdom.”

The moment Angullimalla heard the Buddha’s clear and deep words, he suddenly came to his senses, as if awakening from a nightmare. Just as bursting flames can be extinguished by a cool spout of water, Angullimalla’s devilish heart disappeared. He threw down his bloody sword, knelt before the Lord Buddha shedding penitential tears and saying:

“Lord Buddha, please forgive my foolishness and accept me as your disciple.”

Angullimalla, who deeply repented of his sins, thereupon followed the Buddha and entered Kiwon temple, where he was able to open his eyes to wisdom as he listened to the Lord Buddha’s teachings. One day, he spoke heartily to the Buddha, saying:

“Lord Buddha, originally my name was Ahimsa, which means non-violence. Nevertheless, I took many lives because of my foolishness, and I made a necklace out of bloody human fingers, so the people dubbed me Angullimalla. However, since I have come to believe in you, I have devoted myself to the attainment of enlightenment. I know that people use whips to manage their cows and horses, and rakes to train their elephants, but you reigned over my wickedness by your mercy, without using any whips or rakes. Now I have my eyes have been opened to pure wisdom as I listened to your words. I have cultivated patience in my heart and I will never fight again. Oh Lord Buddha, I do not desire to live, and I do not desire to die, either. I only wish to devote myself to entering Nirvana at the right time.”

## X

### **This is What I Heard: The Origin of the Sutras**

As the Buddha grew older, he needed someone to take care of him. Therefore, when the Buddha was fifty-five years old, the venerable Anan was chosen to be his disciple in attendance. Being thoughtful and recognizing the importance of his new responsibilities, Anan dutifully carried them out, although he asked the Buddha to respect three conditions, as follows:

First of all, Anan did not wish to eat food that had been served to the Buddha or to wear the Buddha's old clothing. His second petition was not to be required to follow the Buddha when believers invited him into their homes. His third and final condition was to be allowed to listen to all of the Buddha's sermons and to have the Buddha repeat for him any sermon that he specifically requested to hear.

Thereupon, Anan became the Buddha's disciple in attendance. He took good care of the Buddha for twenty-five years until the Buddha's death. Because he listened to all of the Buddha's preaching and remembered everything he said, people called him the disciple who listened most among the ten disciples.

After the Buddha's death, his disciples realized that they needed to put together his teachings and commandments for the sake of the Buddhist community. In order to do this, they elected four hundred and ninety-nine *bikus*, including the venerable Kasuph, who had attained Nirvana. However, Anan was not chosen, whereupon many monks wondered and said:

"Anan is the person who served the Buddha for the longest time. He has heard all of the Buddha's preaching without exception and he was allowed to ask the Buddha whatever he wanted as he waited upon him. Therefore, we think that it is only right to include him in our compilation committee."

The venerable Kasuph countered:

"I disagree with you because he still has earthly desires like love and lust, and he loses his temper easily, for he has not yet attained enlightenment."

When Anan heard this he was crushed with grief, but he immediately devoted himself to severe asceticism in order not to be utterly discouraged. One day, he went to the edge of a precipice and applied himself to the practice of asceticism while he stood on tiptoe and joined his hands flat together. He swore to himself then and there:

"If I am not able to attain enlightenment, I will fall from here and die."

Anan stood there for seven days, and at last he became an Araham, or one who attains Nirvana. Thus, he was allowed to play a role in reciting the Buddha's teachings, while Uphari was in charge of reciting the Buddha's commandments for the scripture compilation committee. The venerable Kasuph, who led the five hundred *bikus* as he presided over this

committee, asked Anan:

“Where did the Buddha preach his first sermon?”

Anan replied:

“This is what I heard: Once upon a time, the Lord Buddha was in Benares where the old ascetics lived...”

Anan reproduced not only the words of the Buddha’s teaching, but also their atmosphere. Some of the Buddha’s disciples who were gathered together then and there shed tears because Anan’s outstanding recital made them feel as if they were seeing the Buddha’s dignified appearance in front of them.

In this way, the Buddhist scriptures were completed, and each scripture begins by saying: “This is what I heard,” for this is how Anan recited the Buddha’s teachings. In this fashion, Anan played an important part in compiling the scriptures of the Buddha’s teachings and handing them on to posterity.



## XI

### **Falling to Hell Alive: Devadatah's Rebellion**

Devadatah, Anan's brother, was a near relative of the Buddha. He had been practicing asceticism since he entered the priesthood with his other brothers, such as Uphari and Anan. However, he did not practice asceticism in the right way and, as time passed, he grew lazy. Nevertheless, he still wished to be as respected by all people as the Buddha was.

At that time, the king of Magada was a sincere Buddhist named Vimvisara. His son, the crown prince, was named Azasahtoo. Azasahtoo fell victim to Devadatah's temptations, confined his father to prison, and usurped the throne. Having gained the confidence and support of King Azasahtoo, Devadatah then thought of taking over the Buddhist community. He conceived the evil design of taking the Buddha's place and ruling over the whole country together with King Azasahtoo.

One day, as the Buddha was about to preach a sermon to his disciples, Devadatah, who was cherishing his evil ambitions, came to see the Buddha with his followers and made a rude suggestion to him:

"Lord Buddha, you are very old and you have not been well these days so I think that it might be better for you to leave the community in my hands and give yourself rest."

The Buddha, knowing Devadatah's personality very well, responded:

"Listen carefully, Devadatah. I have not thought about delegating the community to anybody yet. If I were to think of doing this, I have many wise and excellent disciples like Saribool or Mokryun. Why are you so impertinent as to ask to take charge of the community?"

The Buddha thus firmly rejected Devadatah's proposal in front of many people. While Devadatah was mortified at being disgraced in public, he showed no signs of reflecting on his conduct. Indeed, relying on the support of King Azasahtoo, he plotted the vile murder of the Buddha and sent a skilled swordsman to assassinate him.

However, as the assassin approached the Buddha, he began to tremble, though he was otherwise unable to move at all. Perceiving him, the Buddha asked:

"Why are you standing there and trembling?"

Thereupon the assassin repented of his sins, knelt down before the Buddha, and asked his forgiveness. After he had atoned for his sins, he became one of the Buddha's most sincere disciples.

One day after that, the Buddha was descending from Mount Youngchook. Devadatah's followers were lurking on the edge of the cliff, waiting to kill the Buddha, and they rolled huge rocks down the cliff just as he was passing under the precipice. However, even though they rolled the rocks with unerring aim, the boulders stopped at a narrow gorge after rolling just a couple of times. The Buddha's worried disciples sought to protect him, but, filled with

great composure, he kept walking and said:

“Yawrae cannot lose his life by force of arms.”

After these two conspiracies to kill the Buddha ended in failure, Devadatah set a maddened elephant upon him. However, the wildly rampaging beast, upon reaching the Buddha, simply drooped its trunk and sat down on its knees.

Watching this scene from a distance, King Azasahtoo underwent a change of heart. He eventually perceived his gross error in listening to Devadatah, confining his father to prison, and plotting to kill the Buddha. Thereafter, King Azasahtoo forbade Devadatah to enter the palace, and he began to go to see the Buddha in order to listen to his teachings.

One day, Devadatah went to the palace to see King Azasahtoo, but he was repulsed and expelled from the gate. As he reluctantly turned away, he met a bhikkuni (a Buddhist priestess) called Yeonhwasek, who scolded him thus:

“To attempt to harm the Lord Buddha is heinous, and you will suffer terrible retribution for doing so.”

As soon as he heard this, Devadatah beat her to death in a fit of anger.

Since he could not overcome his surge of anger and jealousy, he applied poison to all of his fingers and went to the place where the Buddha was, intending to kill him by scratching his face with his fingernails. The moment Devadatah came near the Buddha, however, the earth upon which he stood divided, and he fell down into an endless darkness.

## XII

### **A Boy who Consecrated Sand to the Buddha: The Story of King Ashoka's Previous Life**

One day, as the Buddha and Anan were heading into town in order to go about asking for alms, they met some playing children. The children were building castles and storehouses out of sand and soil, and also putting sand in their shoes and pretending that it was rice. One small boy among them saw that the Buddha was coming near and thought to himself:

“I have heard that if I offer anything to the Lord Buddha, I will receive a huge blessing from him.”

Thinking thus, the boy made his younger brother fall on his breast, then stepped on his back, and offered the “rice,” that is, the sand that he had put into his shoe, to the Buddha with all his heart.

The Buddha smiled, took the sand-rice, gave it to Anan, and said:

“This child offered me sand with joy; therefore, he will become the king of this country and support the Buddha, his laws, and his community of monks. On top of this, he will erect eighty-four thousands pagodas for Yawrae.”

When Anan heard this, he asked the Buddha: “How can a little boy build up such huge credit in his next life by offering a mere handful of sand?”

The Buddha replied: “In the past, there was a king. When the Buddha appeared in front of him, he and all his subjects worshiped him and asked him for a sermon. While listening to the Buddha's teachings, the king's heart opened and he learned many things. After this, the king drew eighty-four thousands pictures of the Buddha and offered them to others in order to share his joy with them. Through this deed, he was able to build eighty-four thousands pagodas. This king is indeed the boy who offered sand today.”

In other words, the boy was King Ashoka, who ruled over India in the mid-third century B.C. King Ashoka united the largest territory in India's history and governed it as one country. At the same time that he was victoriously conquering lands, however, he became deeply aware of the wretchedness of war and the frailty of human life. Thereupon, he came to believe in the Buddha, and governed his country wisely.

King Ashoka understood and perceived the true meaning of peace, for he realized that the peace that all people seek in life and society could not be achieved by weapons or by military power, but rather only by the efforts of a virtuous reign. He felt that it was his duty to spread the right teachings for the sake of world peace. Thus, he not only learned the Buddha's teachings himself, he made the queen, the prince, and the ministers learn them as well, and also popularized them widely among the common people.

In the seventeenth year of King Ashoka's reign, he gathered one thousands monks together in order to compile the Buddhist scriptures. Furthermore, he dispatched Buddhist missions to various countries such as Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Cyprus, and Sri Lanka. In addition,

he respected the lives of animals to the degree that he banned hunting in order to follow the Buddha's teachings in regards to the prohibition against the destruction of life. Nonetheless, he was tolerant and did not impose Buddhism, but provided equal freedom to other religions as well. During his reign, King Ashoka built eighty-four thousands pagodas and erected stone pillars, carved with Buddhist laws and rules, over the whole of India, and he established many medical treatment centers to care for the sick. In these ways, King Ashoka, who incorporated Buddha's laws into his own life, did his best to spread the Truth of Buddhism so that all people could embody it into their lives. The following are a few examples of the kinds of phrases that can be found on King Ashoka's stone pillars in many places throughout India even until today:

“Conquest by mercy is much greater than victory in war.”

“People prefer seeing their own good side and regarding only the good deeds that they have done to seeing their evil side and their evil passions and the sinful deeds that they have done.”

These phrases convey King Ashoka's spirit as he urged people to reflect on their conduct according to the teachings of the Buddha.

### **XIII**

## **The Face of the Utmost Seeker: The Story of the Buddha Shakyamuni's Previous Life**

Buddhism teaches that Shakyamuni was not the only Buddha, for there were numerous other Buddhas in the distant past, and a Buddha named Maitreya will come in the remote future to enlighten and deliver mankind.

Generally the narrative of a person's biography begins with the subject's birth. However, the story of the Buddha's life begins with his prior incarnations, for Shakyamuni Buddha had been born and lived countless lives in which he constantly devoted himself to the practice of asceticism. The following story is only one of the many stories about the Buddha's previous existences.

A long, long time ago, there lived a young man named Sunhye. He had respectable parents who bequeathed a large fortune to him when they died. While he was performing their funeral rites, he realized the ephemeral nature of the world:

“Although they amassed such a huge fortune, my parents could not take even a penny with them when they passed away. Therefore, I will try to sow seeds of things that I can take with me to the next world.”

Having resolved to do this, Sunhye asked the king to gather together all the poor people in the country and then he distributed his property among them. After he had made himself a penniless person of his own free will, Sunhye set off to practice the endless path of asceticism. In order to attain a clear mind and contemplate the truth of the universe, he went off into the woods and, through devoting himself to the practice of austerities, the hermit Sunhye at last perceived the Truth:

“All people fall into the sea of agony and are unable to emerge from it because they have a covetous heart, an angry heart, and a foolish heart. Thus, people can attain peace only if they reject these three wrong ways of thinking.”

After this realization, the hermit Sunhye purged his heart of greed by generously giving away all his possessions, controlling his temper, and cultivating the wisdom to perceive and correctly realize all the fundamental principles of the universe. Then he took a vow to save all humanity. One day, as was contemplating his vow and practicing austerities, he got news of the Buddha's advent, and he came down from the mountain.

Descending from the mountain on his way into town, the hermit Sunhye met five hundred other ascetics, with whom he shared the Truth. As the five hundred ascetics listened to Sunhye's teachings and heard of his vow, they were filled with joy. When they had to leave, each one of them expressed his grateful heart by giving him a silver coin. After the hermit Sunhye had said good-bye to them, he continued on his way until he reached the edge of a town. He perceived that that the whole village was fragrant from the juniper incense that

was burning in each house, and that all the alleyways were as clean as if they had been washed with water. Wondering what was going on, he asked one of the villagers and learned that the Lotus Lantern Buddha was coming that day. Because Sunhye had resolved to meet the Buddha at all costs and to tell him of his vow, words cannot describe the joy that he felt.

At that moment, the Royal Princess Gophi, holding seven blue lotuses, walked up to his side from the opposite direction. The hermit Sunhye, who also needed some flowers, earnestly entreated her:

“Please trade your lotuses for my five hundred silver coins. I will never forget your kindness.”

Gophi replied:

“Well, I intended to offer these flowers to the Lotus Lantern Buddha myself, but, because of your earnest request, I will give you five of them. When you attain enlightenment, do not forget me, but deliver me.”

Holding the five blue lotuses, the hermit Sunhye went to a street corner where the Buddha was supposed to pass. At last, when the Lotus Lantern Buddha appeared in the street with many disciples, a throng of people, including the king of the country, worshiped him by strewing flowers and burning incense. However, of all the countless flowers that were thrown, only Sunhye’s five blue lotuses floated in midair above the Buddha’s head.

The Lotus Lantern Buddha noticed Sunhye, came up to him, and said:

“You practiced asceticism for a long time in your past lives. You have lived for others by sacrificing your body and your heart. You have resisted your desires and have built up merciful deeds. Therefore, after ninety-nine kalpas [eons], you will become a Buddha and be called Shakyamuni.”

Thus, the Lotus Lantern Buddha prophesized that the hermit Sunhye would also become a Buddha.

Since the road where the Lotus Lantern Buddha was standing was full of mud, Sunhye was concerned lest the Buddha make his feet dirty, so he not only took off his clothes and laid out them on the muddy road, he even lay down and spread his long hair into the muck. Observing this scene, the Royal Princess Gophi was so impressed by Sunhye’s passionate seeking after Truth that she bowed down to the Buddha together with him. Because of this act of reverence, the hermit Sunhye later became the Buddha Shakyamuni and the Princess Gophi later became the Queen Jasodarah, Shakyamuni’s wife.

## XIV

### In Order to Rescue Others: The Story of the Golden Deer

Once upon a time, a herd of five hundred deer lived peacefully in a deer-park on a hill in Bernas. The king of this herd of deer was remarkably large and had a dignified appearance because of his golden pelt.

This deer-park seemed peaceful, but in actuality there was a great worry, for the human king of the region loved venison so much that he came to the deer-park day after day in order to hunt. Whenever the king appeared on the hill, most of the deer fled trembling with fear, while the unlucky ones died, groaning and shedding blood from the arrows by which they were pierced.

As many of his fellow deer were dying, the golden deer spoke to them all:

“Many of our compatriots are wounded and bleeding and dying in pain while the rest of us have to live in constant fear. In my opinion, it would be better for us to propose to the king that we go in turns, one by one, and offer ourselves up to him.”

He said this because he did not want the other deer to be injured if it was not their turn to die, and so that they could feel relief from fear, even if only for one day. Therefore, the deer king went to see human king, and delivered this proposal. When the human king heard this, he was overjoyed that he would be able to eat venison without having to bother shooting arrows at the herd of deer. After this, one deer after the other sacrificed its life for the sake of its fellows’ peace.

One day, it was a doe’s turn to die, but she was heavy with fawn, so, pitying her, the golden deer decided to sacrifice himself instead. However, the human king had given a special warning not to harm the golden deer. Thus, as soon as the royal cook saw him, he ran to his king and told him that the golden deer was awaiting his death. After receiving this news, the human king went out to the golden king and said:

“I have never intended to kill you, so why are you here awaiting your death?”

The golden deer replied:

“It was a doe’s turn to die today, but she was heavy with fawn, and so I decided to die in her place.”

When he heard this, the human king, repenting deep in his heart, said to the golden deer:

“I have met many people during my life, but I have never met anyone as merciful as you. Even though you are only an animal, you have such a deep and merciful heart.... I feel as if my eyes have been opened anew because of you. Go, I will spare you and grant the doe her life as well.”

However, the golden deer did not depart, but remained and said:

“Oh King, although the two of us are now saved, I am still concerned about the lives of the other deer, and so I am in deep grief.”

The human king replied:

“Well then, I will also spare all of their lives.”

The golden deer then asked the king:

“Now we deer are spared by your graceful mercy, but what about the other animals?”

The king answered:

“Very well, I will protect the lives of all animals.”

Lastly, the golden deer requested:

“Oh holy King, it is the hope of all living creatures without exception not to die violently, but to live forever in peace. Please guarantee the lives of the birds and the fish as well.”

The human king listened quietly to the golden deer and thought to himself:

“The way that both humans and animals strive for their lives is much the same. Nonetheless, this golden deer has such a heart as to be willing to sacrifice his own life in order to save others, and this is the very merciful heart of a Bodhisattva. He has shown me that a world of peace cannot arise from taking things away from others, but only by leading a life of mercy.”

In this manner, the human king perceived the quality of a merciful heart through the golden deer, and the golden deer king, who brought perception to the human king by his own willingness to sacrifice himself, thus guaranteed the safety of all living creatures and then continued to live peacefully with his fellow deer.



**XV**  
**For the Sake of a Single Verse:**  
**The Story of a Youth in the Snow-Covered Mountains**

Deep in the Himalayas, there lived an ascetic who had long devoted himself to the practice of austerities in order to perceive the Truth. One day, Sakra Devanam Indra [together with Brahma the Creator, one of the guardian gods of Buddhism], decided to test the ascetic to discover whether he had the disposition and the faith to become a Buddha. Therefore, Indra disguised himself as Raksasha, an ogre who catches and eats men, and descended from heaven to the Himalayas. As he approached the place where the ascetic was practicing his devotions, he recited the opening verses of a poem that the Buddha had composed in the past:

Flowers bloom, and soon they fall;  
Men are born, and before long they die.  
This vain law is the unavoidable fate of all living creatures.

Listening to this recital, the ascetic was filled with infinite joy, so he stood up and looked around. However, when he found nothing but Raksasha with his threatening demeanor, he thought to himself:

‘How can such an ugly and horrid demon recite such a sweet poem? It is like seeing a lotus bloom in the midst of a fire, but there is no one else around, so he must have met the Buddha and learned this poem in the past.’

The ascetic asked Raksasha:

“Where did you hear that poem, which was composed by the Buddha? As I listened to it, my heart was opened as if it were a lotus blooming.”

Raksasha replied:

“I know nothing about poetry. Since I am exhausted with hunger, I merely raved in delirium.”

The ascetic said:

“No, that cannot be true. If you recite the rest of the poem, I will become your disciple for life. Offerings of material objects are limited, but offerings of the Law will never be exhausted.”

Then Raksasha said to the ascetic:

“You do not have a merciful heart: you desire to seek wisdom, but you remain ignorant of the condition of others. I just told you that I was starving!”

The ascetic replied:

“Well then, I will give you something to eat. What kind of food do you want?”

Raksasha answered:

“I eat nothing but the flesh and drink nothing but the warm blood of living human beings.”

When he heard this, the ascetic joyfully told Raksasha:

“Please let me know the rest of the poem, and then I will give my whole body to you.”

Raksasha replied:

“Who can believe you that you will sacrifice your life for the sake of a single verse that is good for absolutely nothing?”

The ascetic said:

“How foolish you are! This is like giving an earthen pot and taking a vessel of treasure: I am going to throw away my useless body and get a body as strong as diamond in return. Trust me, I have many witnesses: all the Buddhas in all times and all places will attest to my honesty.”

“Well then, listen carefully and I will recite the rest of the poem for you.”

Thereupon, Raksasha recited the conclusion of the poem:

If they take away their thoughts of life and death,  
Their vain desire and fear will vanish.

When he heard this verse, the ascetic was filled with even greater joy. He went about carving the poem on cliffs and trees and boulders as he deeply savored its meaning. Finally, he climbed to the top of a tree and, just as he had promised, was about to throw himself down to Raksasha. At that moment, the tree-spirit asked him:

“Ascetic! What kind of virtuous deed does this poem imply?”

The ascetic answered:

“This poem has been recited over and over again by all the Buddhas in the past. I have learned this poem even at the cost of sacrificing myself for the benefit of all people.”

Upon uttering this sentence, the ascetic threw himself down to Raksasha. However, before he reached the ground, Raksasha turned himself back into Indra, caught the ascetic, and set him down gently on the ground. Observing this scene, all the gods in heaven were so impressed by the ascetic’s deep heart of seeking after Truth and by his keeping his vow that they threw themselves at his feet and worshiped him.

## XVI

### **For the Sake of a Starving Tiger: The Story of Crown Prince Chondanmaje**

Once upon a time, a Crown Prince named Chondanmaje lived in a large country. From his childhood, he had had a merciful heart. Thus, whenever he met his neighbors in need, he gave them everything that he had. In the end, when he had nothing more to offer his poor neighbors, he came to sell himself as a slave. When his father, the king of the country, heard that his son had been sold as a slave, he bought him, brought him back to the palace again, and enabled him to freely hand out all kinds of favors to others.

In the meantime, a hermit named Yongmang (“bravery”) lived practicing asceticism with his five hundred disciples in the mountains near the capital of the country. The Crown Prince offered them food and clothes as well. One day, having given them alms, he listened to the hermit’s teachings and realized the vanity of life. Thereupon, he took off his silk clothes and adornment, sent them back to the palace, and joined directly with the hermits in their ascetic practices. When the Queen and the Crown Princess learned of this, they were so grieved that they tried hard to change his mind. However, they could not stop him from practicing asceticism, so firm was his resolve. They had no choice but to wish him good health and deliver food to him in the mountains from time to time.

As the years passed, the Crown Prince deepened his practice of asceticism. Meanwhile, a tigress who lived in the mountain valley had a litter of seven cubs. There had been a very heavy snowfall, and the mother tiger had not been able to find prey for several days. The tigress and her cubs were so weak from starvation that she was on the point of catching and eating her own babies. The ascetics who were practicing austerities on the mountains witnessed this scene and felt pity for the tigers, but they had no particular way of helping them.

When the Crown Prince heard of this, he went and stood on a precipice from which he could look down at the poor mother tiger and her cubs, and he felt great mercy for them. He decided to offer himself as prey to the tigers, and he sat down on the precipice to meditate in order to look back on each of his previous lives, which receded innumerable into the past. In so doing, it was revealed to him that he had vowed to fulfill the Buddha’s teachings by sacrificing himself for the world one thousand times and that he had already executed this vow nine hundred and ninety-nine times in his prior lives. When he reflected upon the fact that this vow would be fulfilled by one more act of self-sacrifice, he was overwhelmed with great joy. Just then, a rich man named Buranjangja, who had gone into the mountains in order to give alms to the hermits, heard about the prince’s decision, and came to see him off, shedding tears of sorrow.

Thereupon, the Crown Prince, pressing his palms together, sprang from the precipice in order to become the tigress’ prey. Having eaten the prince’s flesh, the starving tigress

regained her strength and was able to suckle her babies, and so they all came to life again. However, the heavens and the earth were filled with the lamentations of the people who had observed this scene.

Tradition says that the hermit Yongmang and his five hundred disciples attained enlightenment after they witnessed this event.

## XVII

### **Giving the Most Beloved Thing: The Story of Crown Prince Sudena**

Sudena, the Crown Prince of Sibi, was an outstanding young man who excelled in all his scholarly studies and in both the fine and the military arts. Early in his life, he had vowed that, whatever people requested of him, he would grant with a cheerful heart.

One day, the king of a neighboring country, having heard of the prince's vow, framed a plot and sent messengers to Crown Prince Sudena to ask him for the white elephant, which was the pride and treasure of the country, and to bring it back to him. This elephant was endowed with a magical power; namely, that whenever it carried the king into battle, it was able to repel the enemy with a single breath.

Watching this magical elephant being lead from the palace and towards the neighboring country, the people of Sibi were shocked and angered, so they went to the King and said to him:

“Oh great King, we will soon perish because Crown Prince Sudena gave the enemy the white elephant that we all worshiped. We do not want to have a prince who makes that kind of decision. Exile him from the country!”

The king could not ignore the wrath of his people, so he resolved to expel his son from the land. Preparing to leave the palace, the crown prince asked Mahdree, his wife, to serve his parents faithfully, and to raise their two children well. However, she entreated him to take her and their children with him.

The Crown Prince could not reject this earnest request, and so, together with them, he set out on a long journey to Mount Danteuk in the Himalayas. They began the journey with a four-horse coach, but they met some Brahmans on the way who asked the Prince for his horses. He gave them to them, and then, when they also asked him for the coach, the prince did not hesitate to grant it to them as well. After he had given away everything for which he was asked, he and his family began walking towards their destination. After a long and hard trek, they reached Mount Danteuk with great difficulty. Thereafter, they lived in a mountain hermitage, devoting themselves to the practice of asceticism.

Meanwhile, at the foot of Mount Danteuk, there lived an old Brahman and his young, beautiful wife. She was thinking of fleeing from her aged husband because she was tired of him. Thereupon, she began to make unreasonable requests of him, such as procuring an errand boy even though they dwelt in otherwise uninhabited mountains, and she grumbled that she would leave him unless he granted her request. The old Brahman was unable to bear her complaint, and so he went to Crown Prince Sudena and asked him for his two children. Sudena knew that his wife would be crushed with grief, but nevertheless he could not break his vow, and so he gave his two children to the Brahman while his wife was out picking fruit. However, the children ran away and returned to their home. Lamenting,

Sudena tied their hands and brought them back to the old Brahman, who took them rudely.

In the meantime, Mahdree had lost her way while she was out picking fruit. She wandered about for a while, but eventually she found her way home. When she reached the hermitage, however, she realized that her children were not there. Wondering what had happened to them, she approached Sudena, who was sitting silently, and asked him where they were. When Mahdree learned what had occurred, she fainted in grief. Sudena nursed his wife with great care, brought her back to life, and persuaded her that giving away their children, though painful, was part of the praiseworthy virtue of almsgiving.

Observing this scene, Sakra Devanam Indra appeared in front of the Crown Prince disguised as an ugly Brahman, and said:

“Even though you give everything else away to others, it is all the same as if you had given nothing, until you give away your most beloved thing.”

Thereupon he demanded that the Crown Prince give him his wife if he really wanted to fulfill his vow of almsgiving. Although he writhed in great agony, the prince decided not to break his holy vow. When Mahdree perceived her husband’s resolve, she wailed in deep sorrow, but she also decided to comply with her husband’s will so that he could keep his sacred vow.

At this, Indra dropped the disguise of the ugly Brahman and resumed his own form. Then, praising their boundless almsgiving, he told Sudena and Mahdree that he would grant them eight wishes. Among other things, the prince wished to be forgiven by his father so that he could rule the country after him, to love only Mahdree for as long as he lived, that his possessions would never run out despite his ceaseless almsgiving, and that he would not be born again into this chaotic world, but rather into heaven. Indra granted all his wishes.

When Sudena, Mahdree, and their two children set off to return to Sibi, his royal father also headed towards Mount Danteuk with a grand procession in order to welcome back the Crown Prince.

This story tells of one of the Buddha’s previous incarnations, in which the King of Sibi was an earlier manifestation of King Jungban, Mahdree of the Crown Princess Jasodarah, and Sudena of the Buddha Shakyamuni himself.