

Under the Bodhi Tree



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- 1. A volunteer must free him / herself from the motives of personal fame and profit.**
- 2. A volunteer must cultivate a respectful and sincere attitude free from arrogance and conceit.**
- 3. A volunteer must refrain from aggrandizing his / her work and denigrating that of others.**
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- 5. A volunteer must take the Buddha-mind as his / her own mind.**
- 6. A volunteer must use wisdom of Dharma-Selecting Vision to determine true principles.**
- 7. A volunteer must request Virtuous Elders in the ten directions to certify his / her translations.**
- 8. A volunteer must endeavour to propagate the teachings by printing Sutras, Shastra texts, and Vinaya texts when the translations are certified as being correct.**

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Under the Bodhi Tree

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The Buddha-To-Be

Long ago, in a life before now, the Buddha-to-be was a wise hermit named Sumedha. He lived in the forest and ate wild food and wore clothing made from bark. For days upon days, he would sit in meditation absorbed in bliss.

One day he was roused from bliss by the distant sound of music and by the vibration of thousands of fearless feet. Sitting with his legs folded, he rose high into the air and flew over the forest until he came to a road.

Workers dotted the road as far as the eye could see. Sumedha called down to them. “What’s happening? Why do you work so hard like bees? Why is the road being strewn with golden sand and perfumes? Why the cart of flowers of every kind and color?”

“O Wise Sumedha, haven’t you heard? Burning Lamp Buddha is visiting our city,” answered the road workers, leaning on their shovels and looking into the brilliant blue sky where Sumedha was hovering.

Speechless with joy, Sumedha descended, grabbed a shovel, and set to work on the muddy road. A Buddha is coming, he thought. A real live Buddha!

Then faintly, then louder came music...drums! And flutes! And strings! And voices! And there up ahead, Sumedha saw Burning lamp Buddha moving slowly forward, wreathed in ever-changing colors of dazzling light—now blue, now orange, now green, now pink.

“I want to become a Buddha and help all living beings,” said Sumedha, and he spread his cape over a mud hole in the road and lay upon it. Then letting down his long, long hair, he stretched it out making a bridge. “Let the Buddha walk on my hair to keep from soiling his feet.”

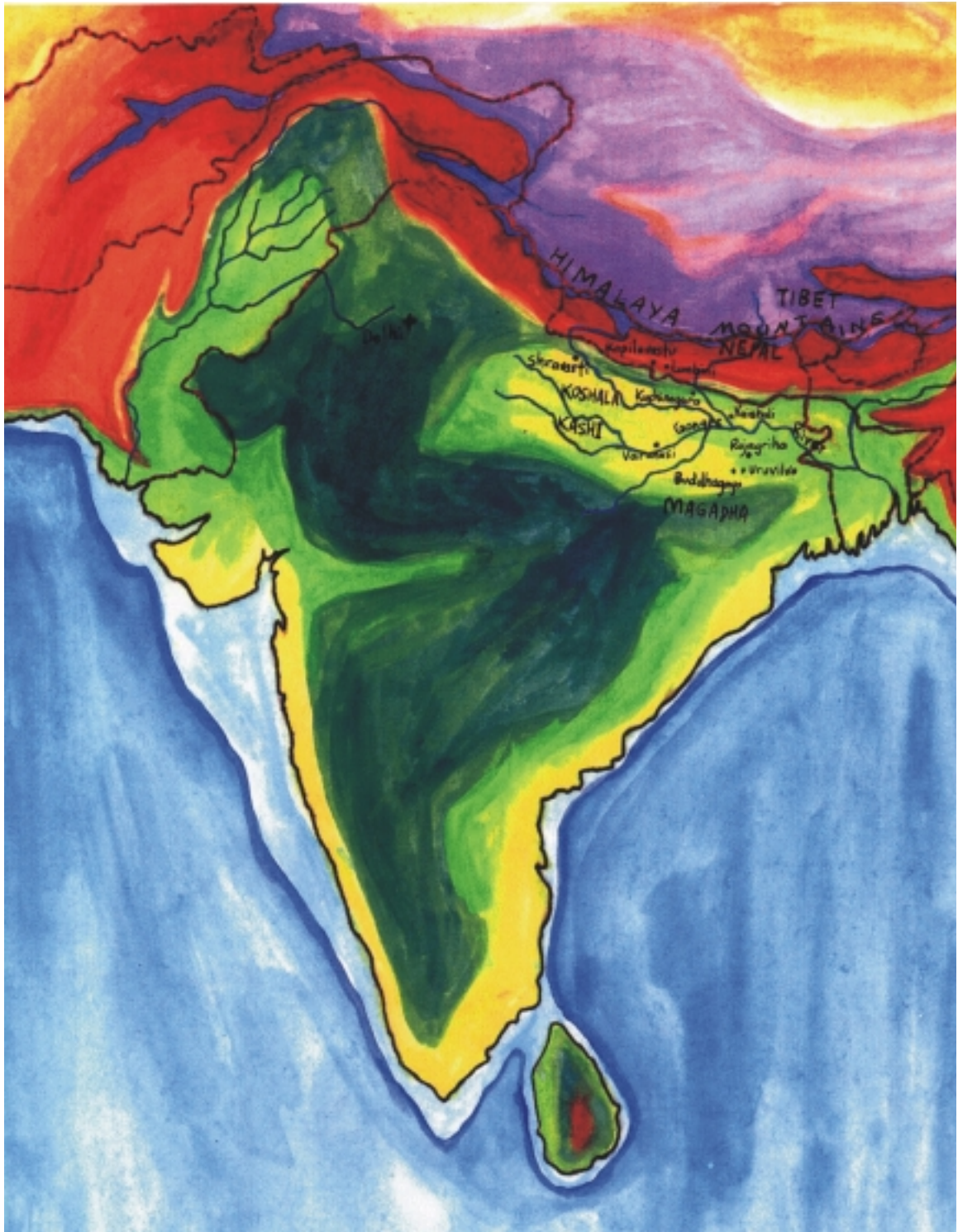
The music stopped. The voices and the laughter of the children stopped. Sumedha slowly opened his eyes. Light surrounded him, and he could faintly hear a voice say, “The hermit, Sumedha, lying here in the mud has made a great vow.”

And standing there among the thousands of monks and nuns, men and women, and children, Burning Lamp Buddha made a prediction for Sumedha. “Far, far in the future, you will become a Buddha! Your name will be Siddhartha. You will be born in the city of Kapilavastu. Your mother will be Queen Maya and your father, King Suddhodana. You will leave the palace and sit under the Bodhi tree. When the morning star appears, you will become enlightened.”

With tears of joy, Sumedha knotted his hair on the top of his head and quietly folded up his legs. He flew back into the forest from whence he came. “I, too, will become a Buddha! I, too, will become a Buddha!” he sang out into the starlight as he soared over the sleeping trees.



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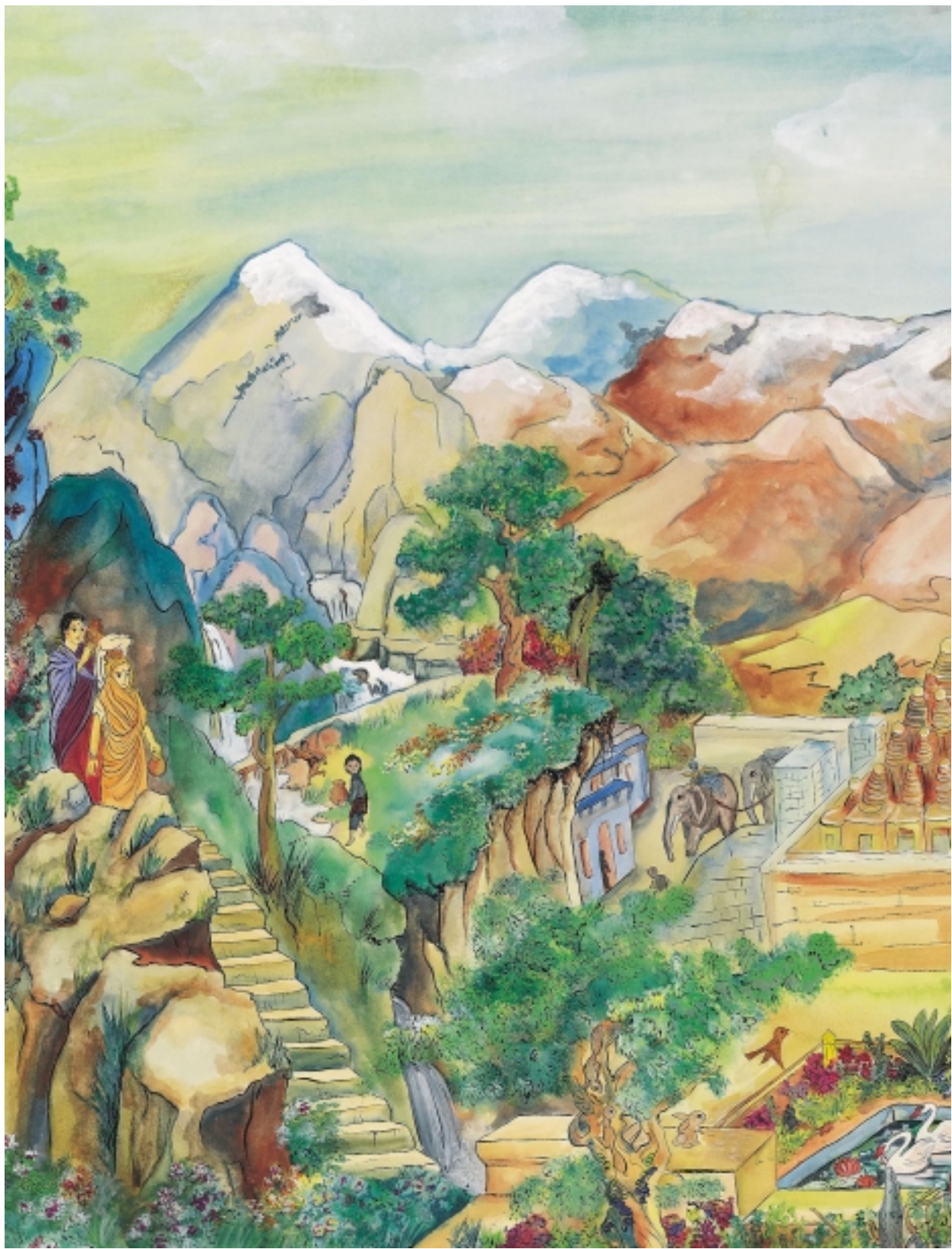
Then, in life after life, he was reborn with many different names and in many different places. Joyfully, he worked hard towards his goal until he was reborn in the Tushita Heaven, the Heaven of the Happy. This is where a Buddha-to-be lives before his last birth.

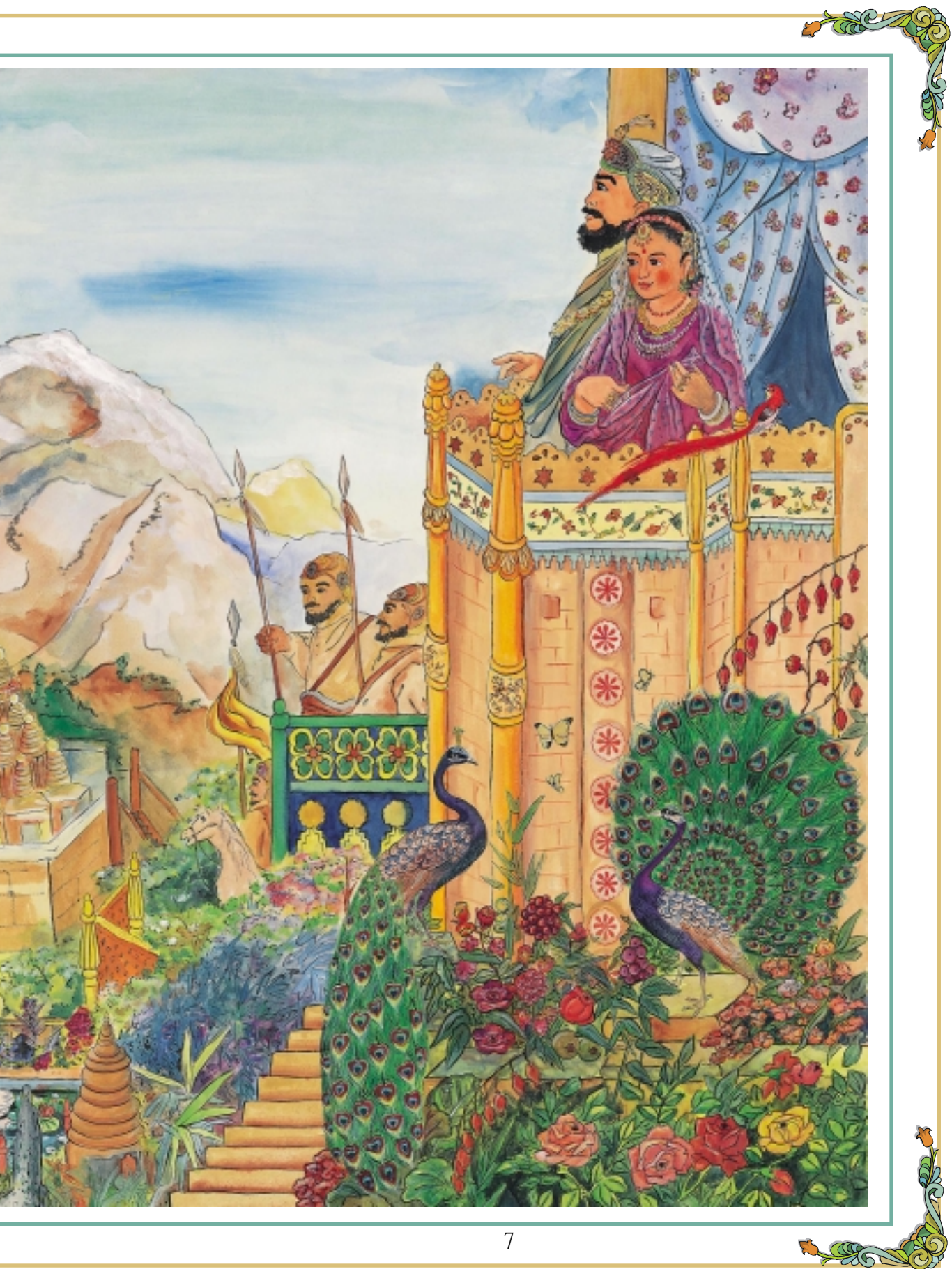
After a time, the Four Heavenly Kings came to summon him. “The moment has come for you to appear in the world and purify the people. Your name will be Siddhartha. You will be born in the city of Kapilavastu. Your mother will be Queen Maya and your father, King Suddhodana. You will leave the palace and sit under the Bodhi tree. When the morning star appears, you will become enlightened.”

In a radiant light of brilliant colors, the Buddha-to-be descended to earth as a white elephant with six golden tusks. The light shone in the nighttime sky like a blazing star. From a mountaintop far below on earth, the wise Asita gazed at the blazing star. “A Buddha will soon be born in the world,” he said.



More than 2,000 years ago in India, where the Snow Mountains rise high above the clouds, there was a small kingdom of the Shakya clan. Although the kingdom was small, it was known for its great wealth, its rich and fertile land, and its just and goodly King Suddhodana and his gentle wife, Queen Maya. Far and wide, because of the vast fields of rice and storehouses of grain, the just and goodly king was known as the White Rice King throughout the land.





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Queen Maya has a Dream

Long, long after Sumedha vowed to become a Buddha, on the night of the Summer Moon Festival, Queen Maya had a dream. In her dream, she was carried through the air by the Four Heavenly Kings to Lake Anavatapta high in the Snow Mountains. The queens of the four kings came and bathed her and dressed her in heavenly clothing. Then she was led to a golden palace on top of a silver mountain.

There, as she lay upon a soft, splendid couch, she was anointed with the finest perfumes and adorned with jewels and garlands of the most brilliant flowers ever seen. Suddenly a comet brighter than the brightest star streaked across the sky, falling silently behind the great mountain. Then into the golden palace where Queen Maya lay, came a magnificent white elephant holding a lotus flower in its great silvery trunk. It trumpeted joyfully. Once! Twice! Three times and circled the queen thrice. Then it touched her right side with the white lotus. When the queen awoke, she told the king her dream.

The White Rice King

More than 2,000 years ago in India, where the Snow Mountains rise high above the clouds, there was a small kingdom of the Shakya clan. The Shakyen kingdom was a small kingdom, but it was known for its great wealth, its rich and fertile land, and its just and goodly King Suddhodana and his gentle wife, Queen Maya. Far and wide, because of the vast fields of rice and storehouses of grain, the just and goodly king was known as the White Rice King throughout the land.

On the day Queen Maya told the king about her dream, the goodly king summoned sixty-four holy persons, the wisest in the land. He honored them with a grand and glorious rice feast in the grand and glorious palace. They were served from silver and golden bowls filled with rice, honey, curries of all flavors, and so on. Thereupon the king gave them wonderful and glorious gifts of gold and silver and herds of tawny cattle.

Then the beautiful Queen Maya told the holy persons about her dream. She told of the jeweled flowers and the thousand-petal white lotus and of the brilliant light. She told of the magnificent white elephant and how it trumpeted. Her voice was gentle and peaceful and light poured from her face as she spoke.

The king closed his eyes and listened once again to the queen's dream. The holy persons sat in rapt attention, taking in each and every word. After the queen had finished speaking, the holy persons nodded their heads in knowing wonder. The oldest rose quietly and smiled, "Rejoice! O King! Rejoice! Your beloved queen will bear a son—a son destined for the greatest greatness!" The sixty-four holy persons bowed and took their leave, keeping what they heard a secret that only they could know.

The king was delighted with the good news, "May the music play! May the dancers dance! May the drummers drum! May gifts be gifted to everyone in the land, to the poor and rich alike!"



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The Birth of a Prince

All winter long, the king and queen awaited the birth of their son. In the spring, blossoms washed the air and warm rains melted the snow. “The time has come for our child to be born. I must go to my parents’ home right away,” said Queen Maya. It was the custom in India for women to return to their family home so that their children could be born there.

“So be it!” said the goodly king and had the roads leveled and lined with vessels of water and decorated with banners and flowering trees. Then he seated the queen in a palanquin, a golden carrying chair, and sent her off with friends and a thousand attendants.

The royal party had not traveled far when they came to the beautiful gardens of Lumbini. “Let us stop here and rest amid the flowers,” said the queen.

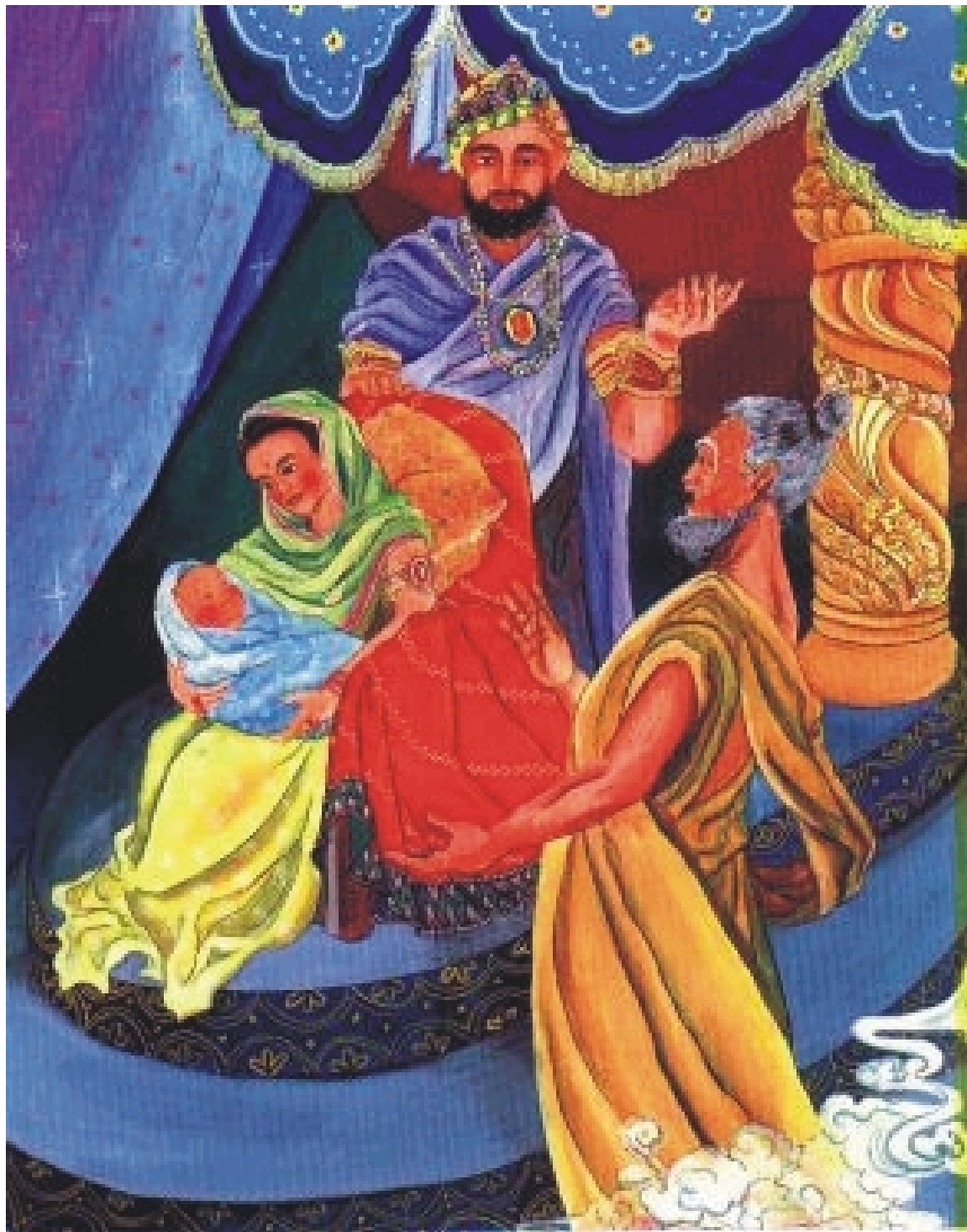
It was the eighth day of May and the gardens were buzzing with bees and filled with the sweet scent of sala trees in bloom. The daylight had begun to fade and a silver moon rose above the treetops. Stretching out her hand, the queen reached up to pluck a flower from a branch. The branch bent down to meet her hand. At that moment, a shining baby boy was born from her right side. He was as dazzling as the morning sun and perfect in every way.

The attendants wrapped the child in a royal cloth and presented him to his mother. Lotus flowers rained down from the skies and streams of water fell from the heavens, bathing both mother and child. A feeling of peace and happiness spread throughout the world.

Then to the amazement of everyone, the child slipped out of his mother’s arms and, like a newborn lion, took seven steps. With each step, a lotus sprang from the earth beneath his feet. Pointing one finger to the heavens and one finger to the earth, he said, “In the heavens above and the earth below, I am the World Honored One. In this life, I shall become a Buddha.”

Back at the palace, the king greeted his new son with great rejoicing. “This is the happiest day in my life,” he cried. The prince was named Siddhartha, which means “every wish fulfilled.”

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The Wise Asita

Far, far away in the snowy mountains, Asita saw a dazzling light shining over the city of Kapilavastu. He knew that a prince had been born.. Seated with his legs folded, he rose above the clouds and flew straight to the palace. The king graciously welcomed him. “What brings you here, my friend?” he asked.

“I have come to see your precious son,” said Asita.

Queen Maya held the glowing prince up for Asita to see. Joy and rapture

flooded his heart. “Rejoice! O King and Queen, a unique child is born to you,” he said. “He has the signs of a great person. A white light shines from between his eyebrows. His body sparkles like gold and there are wheels on the palms of his hands and on the soles of his feet.”

Asita, who knew of things to come, went into deep thought and said, “If the prince stays in the palace, he will become a king of kings. But if he sees the four signs—an old man, a sick man, a dead man and a monk—he will leave the kingdom and become a holy man.” A tear rolled down his old wrinkled, old cheek.

The king was troubled. “Will some misfortune befall the prince?” he asked. Asita answered, “I foresee no harm for the child. He will bring happiness into the world. I weep for myself for I am old and will not be here to honor and learn from him.”

Saying no more, he flew back to his cave in the snow-capped mountains whence he came. That night, he looked up into the nighttime sky and spoke to the silent stars, “Rare indeed! Rare indeed! A Buddha is born in our land.”

After Asita left, the king acted as if he had not heard him. “It is not fit for my son to become a holy man,” he said. “I will see that he grows up to be a brave warrior and a great king!”

But Queen Maya had other thoughts. She gathered her newborn baby into her arms and walked into the garden. Watching his face the moonlight, she heard and she saw something known only to her. “No, my son,” she said. “You will not be a king. You will be a Buddha.”

On the seventh day after the birth, Queen Maya fell ill and sent for her sister, Prajapati. “My dear sister, I will soon leave this world. After I have gone, please be a kind mother to Siddhartha.” Then she passed away.

Under the loving care of Prajapati, who became the new queen, Siddhartha grew up to be a happy child. He thought of her as his own mother.

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Prince Siddhartha's Childhood

Now the goodly king, the child's father, being a king himself and wanting his son to be a king, did everything he could to make Siddhartha's life happy and pleasant. His rooms were made of sweet-smelling sandalwood and his royal clothing woven by the finest weavers. He slept on silk cushions and ate the most delicate food. Lovely servants, wearing tiny tinkling bells waited on him day and night. A white umbrella laden with flowers, was held over him as he walked in the sun and rain. He even rode in a carriage yoked to two golden deer.

Everything he wished for was his. Yet with all this attention, Prince Siddhartha was not spoiled in the least. He was kind to everyone who waited on him and was a wonder to all.

On the day of the Plowing Festival, the king took Siddhartha with him. Whips cracked the air! Cowbells clanged! Everyone cheered as the king took the handles of his golden plow and plowed the first row for spring planting. Next came the royal ministers with their silver plows. Then thousands of peasants took over with their wooden plows, beating the poor oxen that were struggling to pull the heavy plows along the long rows.

Suddenly the sky filled with black birds. "Caw! Caw!" they cried and swooped down, snapping up long wiggling worms from the freshly plowed earth. Prince Siddhartha was horrified. "Can't anyone stop them?" he asked.

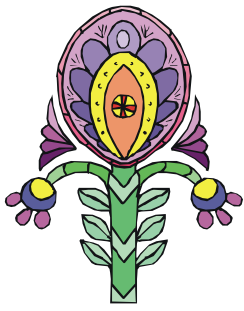
His father laughed heartily, "No, my son. It's only natural!"

But Siddhartha did not laugh. He turned from the unhappy sight and sat under a rose-apple tree. There he saw a moth being chased by a preying mantis. A snake appeared and swallowed the preying mantis. And just as suddenly, an eagle pounced down on the snake and ate it. "Why must creatures kill each other in order to live? Why must the farmers beat their oxen? Why? Why?" He had many questions about life.

Sitting quietly in the shade of the rose-apple tree, the young prince went into a deep meditation. When the servants came to fetch him, they noticed that the shadow of the tree had not moved since morning. They quickly ran for the king. And when the king saw his son, he looked at him in wonder.

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Education

Siddhartha awakened early and dressed in a hurry. He was now eight years old and this was his first day of school. After scrubbing his face clean, he ran to the classroom with his long writing stick and slate ready. He was the first one there. Hearing his teacher's footsteps coming down the hall, he stood up straight and grinned from ear to ear.

A small man with twinkling eyes entered the room. He said in a kind voice, "My name is Visvamitri. I will teach you about the sun in the sky and the stars in the heavens. You will study rocks and learn the calls of birds. You will also learn math and art and how to play the flute. And good manners, of course."

Before long, the large classroom was filled with five hundred other princes, who would be Siddhartha's classmates. Among them were his cousins Ananda and Devadatta and his half-brother, Nanda. The teacher asked the princes many questions, but Siddhartha was the only one who seemed interested. Each answer was better than the one before. Visvamitri wondered...who is the teacher and who is the student.

After studying all day, the princes wrestled and played fighting games in the schoolyard. "Come play with us," they asked Siddhartha.

"I'd rather explore the woods by the lake," he said.

"Siddhartha is afraid to fight," said Devadatta. "He's a coward." But Siddhartha was not upset in the least. He thought of Devadatta as his friend.

When the goodly king heard about Siddhartha, he shook his head, "My son is too kindhearted," he said to Visvamitri. "I want him to become a strong warrior."

"So be it!" said Visvamitri and had the prince trained in the arts of war such as archery and jousting from elephants.

One day the king took Siddhartha to the palace stables. "I have a present for you," he said and gave a low whistle. Out from the shade of a tree trotted a snowy white colt. "This is your horse. Take care of him. He will be a fine horse one day."

"What a wonderful present," cried Siddhartha, clapping his hands. "I will call him Kanthaka"

In the afternoons, Siddhartha and his teacher rode through the sunny meadows and woods, crossing rivers and jumping streams. Soon Siddhartha could ride as swiftly as the wind. He told Queen Prajapati, "I am most happy when I am studying and riding with my teacher."

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The Wounded Swan

One summer day Siddhartha and Devadatta were practicing archery in the woods by the lake. Devadatta was the best archer among the princes and was teaching Siddhartha to shoot moving objects. He held up an apple and said, “Line up the arrow in the path of the apple...” Just then, they heard the cry of a wild swan as it flew up from the water. Both boys lowered their bows and watched in wonder as the great white bird gracefully rose high in the morning sky.

Without warning, Devadatta quickly fitted his bow with an arrow. **Swish!** He let the arrow fly.

“Don’t shoot!” cried Siddhartha. But it was too late. With a sharp cry, the swan tumbled down from the sky and fell to the ground.

Siddhartha ran and picked up the quivering bird. “Oh, you poor swan! Don’t be afraid,” he said, gently stroking it. “I will help you.” And he carefully pulled the arrow out of its wing.

“Hey, that’s my swan! Give it to me! I shot it and it’s mine!” Devadatta shouted.

“I will never give it to you. You will only kill it!” Siddhartha said. “Animals love their lives as much as people do. And they also have families. Who will take care of the baby swans if the mother bird dies? Let us ask the wise men of the court who is right.”

The wise men listened to each prince tell his side of the story. One wise man said, “Devadatta shot the bird, it belongs to him.”

Another said, “But Siddhartha is the son of the king, the bird should go to him.”

Before the third wise man could answer, the door of the courtroom suddenly opened. In came a very, very old man whom no one remembered ever seeing. “The swan should go to the one who will save its life,” he said in a deep voice, “Not to the one who will destroy it.” He turned to leave.

“Wait, who are, good sir?” asked the wise men. But the old man just gave a friendly wave and disappeared. No one ever saw him again.

The wise men nodded in agreement and said, “Without a doubt, the swan should go to Prince. Siddhartha.”

Wrapping the swan in his shirt, Siddhartha carried it to the palace. There he fed and cared for it until it was well. Then he let it go free to live with its own kind. “Fly far, far away from here so you will be safe,” he said.

Devadatta stood behind a tree and watched the bird disappear into the clouds. “Someday I will get even with Siddhartha,” he said. A seed of jealousy was planted in his heart.

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Prince Siddhartha Choses A Bride

Siddhartha blossomed into a young man of great strength, beauty, and wisdom. Wishing to please his beloved father, he was trained in the duties of the court. He sat through long hours of talk about war and gaining wealth. And he was entertained by musicians and dancers, with eyes as bright as jewels, who played upon harps and tambourines and danced with the grace of fairies. But he was simply not interested in court life. He preferred to sit alone in his father's garden, pondering the meaning of life.

Watching the prince, the king became frantic with worry. Will Siddhartha will leave the palace and become a holy man like Asita? he wondered. He called his ministers together. "Let there be more music! More dancing girls! Scour the land for the best acrobats! The best mimes! Rare birds! Rare fish! Make my son happy again!"

"Siddhartha is sixteen and old enough to marry," advised his ministers. "With a family, he will surely be happy and stay in the palace forever."

High above the city of Kapilavastu, the palace bells clanged. They echoed through the mountains like a thousand bells ringing at once. People rushed to the square.

"A proclamation!" cried the king's herald as he unrolled a long scroll. "Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Let all send their daughters. Prince Siddhartha is ready to chose a bride."

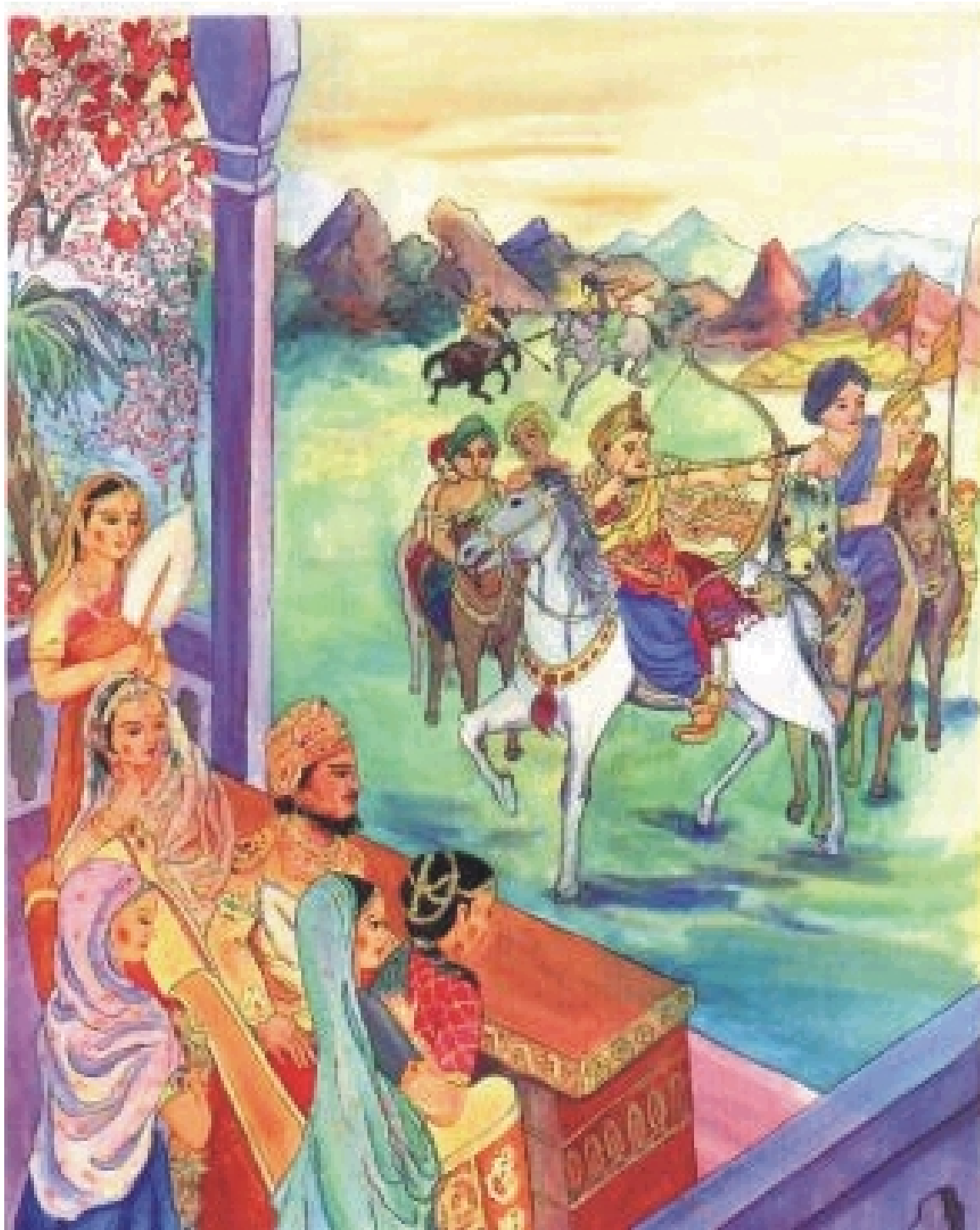
On an appointed day, the king invited all the beautiful young princesses to a grand and glorious feast at the grand and glorious palace. The royal families dressed each of their daughters in their finest garments and jewels and offered them in marriage to Siddhartha. One by one, the prince presented a jewel to each one, but none of them caught his eye.

At the last moment, a princess named Yashodhara entered the room and walked calmly up to the prince. She was as beautiful and tender as a lotus bud. "O Prince, is there a gift for me?" she asked. The table was empty. All the gifts had been given away.

Removing the ring from his finger, Siddhartha smiled and gave it to her. "Here, this is for you," he said.

"My son has found the perfect bride!" the king cried. "Let the music play! Let the dancers dance! Let the drummers drum! Let gifts be gifted!"

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The Royal Contest

But when the goodly King Suddhodana proposed marriage between the youths, Yashodhara's father said, "It is the custom of our clan to marry our daughters to warriors who are brave and wise. Prince Siddhartha lives a life of luxury and is too delicate. What will he do when war breaks out? Let there be a contest to put his strength to test."

So the good King Suddhodana proclaimed seven days of royal contests. The sports arena was filled with hundreds of young princes who came to test their skills and to win the hand of Princess Yashodhara. An eager crowd waited for the events to begin.

The first event was archery. One by one the noble princes took their turn, but no one was able to hit the center of the target. Then it was Devadatta's turn. A wicked grin covered his face as he held his bow ready. And being the fine archer that he was, he sent his arrow flying straight into the bull's eye. The crowd roared, "The winner is Devadatta!"

Yashodhara's heart sank. Sitting next to her father in the front row of the arena, she remained silent. She did not want him to know how she felt. But inside she cried, "Where is Siddhartha? I'll die if I have to marry Devadatta."

Suddenly, an arrow went flying over the heads of the crowd. It split Devadatta's arrow in two. The crowd cheered! The drums rolled! "It is Prince Siddhartha. He has won!" Yashodhara smiled.

On the following days, there were contests in everything from poetry and math to running and jousting from elephants. Siddhartha won them all with flying colors, leaving the judges in silence.

The final contest was in horsemanship. A wild horse was brought out for the contestants to ride. The horse kicked and bucked so furiously that no one could stay on his back for long. When it came Siddhartha's turn, he slowly walked toward the horse, whispering softly. Gently stroking the horse on the head, he climbed onto its back. The crowd cheered. He rode the horse around the arena and stopped in front of Yashodhara.

Her father said, "Siddhartha will make a fine husband."

And the seed of jealousy continued to ripen in the heart of Devadatta.



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A Rude Awakening

Siddhartha and Yashodhara lived in a world of nothing but happiness and laughter. Out of joy, the king had three palaces built for them—one for the cool season, one for the hot, and one for the rainy. There were sparkling fountains and pools filled with fragrant lotus flowers and fish of all the colors in the rainbow.

The happy king thought his worries were over, but he did not know what was in the heart of his son. He did not know of the things that Siddhartha talked about with Yashodhara. “All around me there is beauty and joy, yet I feel like a chained elephant. Are there other joyful things beyond these palace walls? Are there gardens as lovely as these? How do my people live? Tell me!”

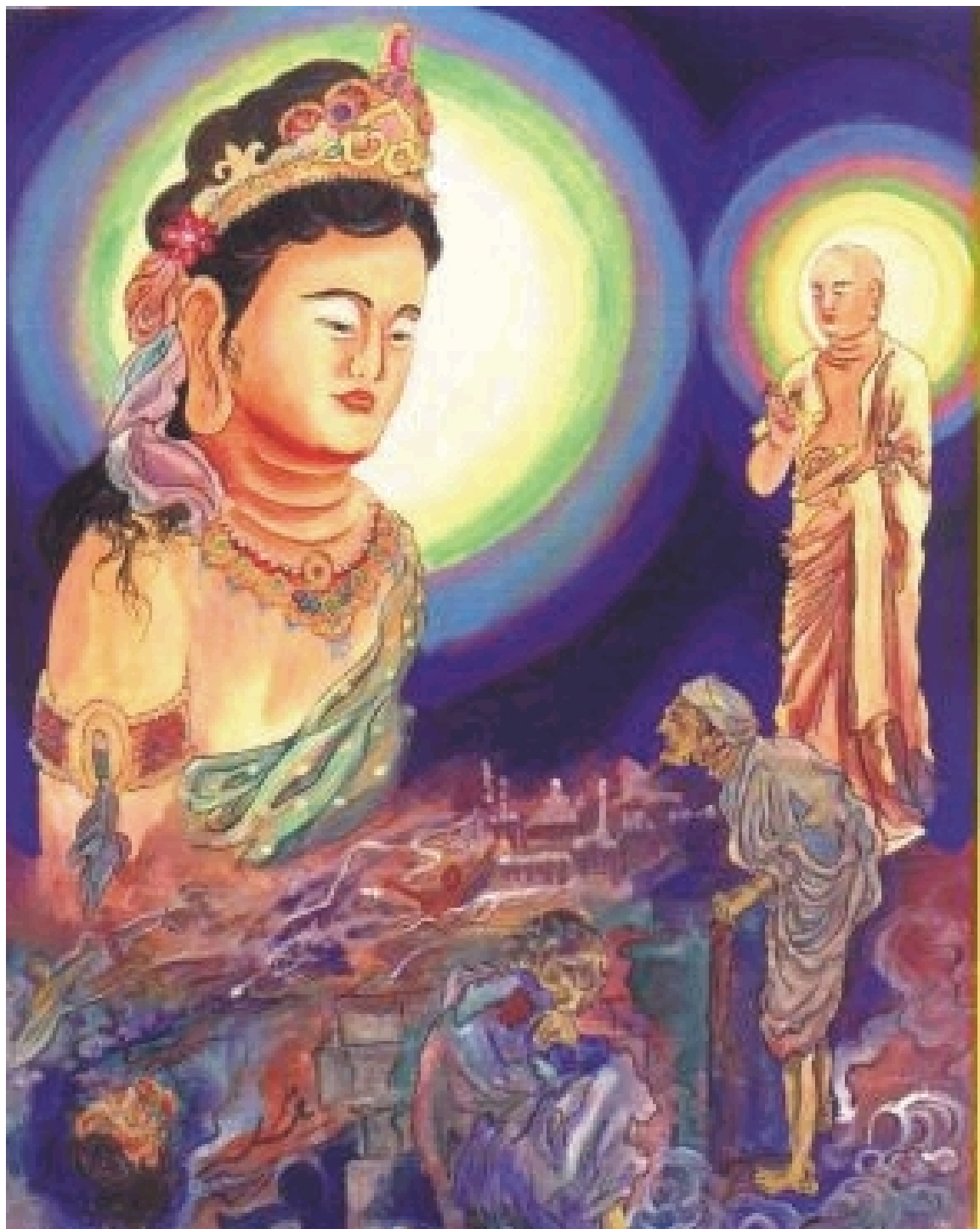
Then one day, he heard a young servant girl singing a song he had never before heard. It was a song about the beauties of the world—of flowing fountains and sparkling lakes and golden cities with happy people. He longed to see these wonders.

Going to his father, he asked, “O King, grant me permission to visit the city. I wish to see what lies beyond the palace walls.”

The goodly king had long been dreading this moment. But he could not refuse his beloved son’s wish. “So be it!” he said. “I will make the necessary arrangements.”

With drums and gongs, the king had it proclaimed throughout the kingdom, “Hear Ye, Hear Ye, all people, sweep the streets! Remove every stone. Strew the roads with flower petals and perfumes and golden sand. Keep the old and sick people hidden. Make sure that all the young, beautiful and strong people are in the streets.”

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The First Journey

Channa, the charioteer, rose at daybreak and harnessed Kanthaka to a golden chariot. Taking the reins, Siddhartha drove out of the palace through the East Gate and raced to the city. Garlands of bright flowers hung everywhere. Gaily colorful banners waved in the morning breeze. When the crowds of happy people saw their beloved prince dressed in royal splendor, looking as majestic as a god, they cheered and showered him with flowers and bowed in admiration.

So this is life, he thought. The city sparkles and my people are happy! Then why have I been so sad?

But what was that? Kantaka snorted. Suddenly, before the eyes of the prince, an old beggar appeared. His skin was wrinkled, his head bald, and his teeth gone. He tottered from the crowd and stood in the road. “What, oh, what is that Channa?” asked the prince, pulling up his horse. “A man or some other kind of creature?”

“That, O Prince, is an old man.”

“Tell me Channa, do all people get old like that?”

“Yes, O Prince. It cannot be helped,” Channa answered.

The prince trembled. “Knowing that one day I will get old, how can I enjoy this pleasure ride?” Wheeling the chariot around, he drove with lightning speed back to the palace.



The Second Journey

The next day Siddhartha and Channa drove out the South Gate to tour another part of the city. “Let us see more!” said Siddhartha. Again happy crowds of people cheered and sprinkled heaps of flowers in his path and cast their admiring eyes upon him.

This time, a sick man appeared on the side of the road. He rolled on the ground, coughing and moaning in pain. “What, oh, what is that, Channa? It looks like a man, but is it?” asked the prince.

“That, O Prince, is a sick man.”

“Was he born like that?” asked the prince.

“Most likely he was born as strong as you or me. Everyone gets sick. It’s nothing to worry about.”

“Nothing to worry about! First the horror of old age and now sickness. How can I go on seeking pleasure?” The prince found someone to take care of the sick man. Then wheeling the royal chariot around, he fled back to the palace in despair.



The Third Journey

On the third day, Siddhartha and Channa drove out the West Gate for the city. The royal chariot was splendidly decorated with bright lotus flowers. And once again, happy crowds cheered and covered their beloved prince with flowers. A group of people came walking down the road, carrying a dead man wrapped in a shroud. They were weeping and moaning.

“What, oh, what is that, Channa?” cried the prince. “What is wrong with that man?”

“He is dead. It is the end of his life.”

“Will I, the son of the king, also die like this man? And will the king and queen and my wife?”

“Everyone will die,” Channa gently told the prince. Too shocked for words, the prince wheeled the golden chariot around and drove in silence back to the palace.

Siddhartha could not forget the old man, the sick man, and the dead man. He thought about them day and night and could find no peace in his heart. “Now I know what life is like outside the gates,” he told Yashodhara. “Everyone appears happy, yet beggars line the streets and children go hungry. The sick and old wait for a lonely death, while the rich live in luxury. Yet, no one knows, not even the rich, when old age, sickness, or death will strike. Is there no more to life than that? Is there no end to sorrow?”



The Last Journey

For the last time, Channa and Siddhartha set out the North Gate at the break of day. Again the smiling crowds, with arms full of garlands, lined the roads. But the prince did not see or hear them. “What, oh, what is that, Channa, a man or a god?” he asked.

A man clad in a ragged robe waited for the golden chariot to pass. His face glowed with happiness in the morning sun. The prince halted the chariot and stared.

Channa said, “That is a seeker of the Truth, a holy person. He has given up everything and wanders in the forests and mountains.”

The prince asked the holy person, “Is there a path that leads beyond the sufferings and difficulties of this world? Please show me!”

The holy one beat on the ground three times with his staff. Then he was gone. Alas, Siddhartha had no one to teach him. “I must find the path on my own! I must leave the palace and give up my crown, my riches, my father, and my wife and enter the forest,” he cried. A river of hope flooded his heart. “There is no time to lose.”

Siddhartha quickly returned to the palace and said to the king, “Now that I am twenty-nine years, I wish to leave the palace to seek the truth. Please grant me your permission, O King.”

“Enough of this! I am your father. How can you leave me?”

“I see all men as my father and all women as my mother. I want to help everyone.”

“Think no more of this! You are in the bloom of youth. If you stay, I will give you all my wealth and the entire kingdom to rule.”

“I will stay, if you promise me that I will never grow old, get sick or die, or lose my wealth.”

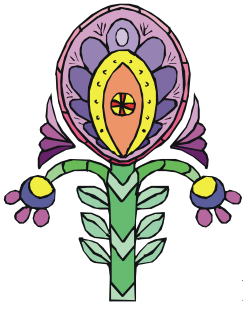
Knowing that these promises could never be fulfilled, the goodly king wept and could not be comforted. “Double the guards at the city gates!” he ordered. “Do not let my son escape!”

Silently Siddhartha slipped into his wife’s chambers to tell her of his decision. She understood his quest, yet her heart was filled with sorrow. “I ask only for one thing,” she said, “That you leave me with a child so I will not be lonely while you are away.”

Channa appeared at the door. “Kanthaka is ready! We must leave at once.” Siddhartha pointed his finger at Yashodhara and said, “You will have a son, and his name will be Rahula.”

Under the Bodhi Tree





Leaving the Palace

In the quiet moonlight, the Four Heavenly Kings appeared and held the hooves of Kanthaka in their hands and lifted him over the palace wall. With Channa riding behind him, the prince flew off into the nighttime sky. Mounting the high clouds, Siddhartha and Channa passed over three great kingdoms. At dawn they alighted in the Snow Mountains far, far away from Kapilavastu.

Resting by a mountain stream, Siddhartha cut off his long princely locks with a single stroke of his sword. He tossed them up into the sky, saying, “Now I begin my quest for the Truth.” A god caught the locks in a golden net and carried them to the Tushita Heaven.

The gods of the forest came out to welcome him. They presented him with a rag robe and an offering bowl. He put on the yellow rag robe and gave his royal garments and crown to Channa, saying, “Quickly, my friend, return to the palace with Kanthaka. Give these to the king and tell him what has become of me.”

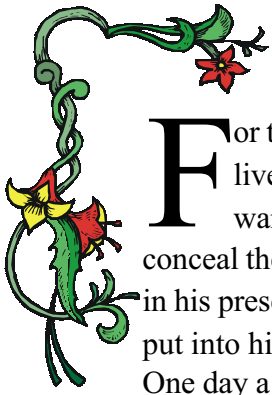
Channa fell to the ground, sobbing and begging, “I followed you out of the palace and I was with you when you flew away from the city. Allow me to stay and serve you.”

“I must go alone,” Siddhartha said and turned to his horse, Kanthaka. “Good-bye old friend. You have served me well.”

Leaning over, Kanthaka licked Siddhartha’s feet. Then he turned into a god and rose up to the Tushita Heaven. Channa set out alone to break the news of the prince to the royal family.

Under the Bodhi Tree





In the Snow Mountains

For the first time in his twenty-nine years, Siddhartha was alone. He had no palace to live in and no servants to care for him. Wearing a rag robe and carrying his bowl, he wandered from place to place as holy people in India do. But the rag robes did not conceal the beauty of his youth and his majestic manner. The mountain people felt blessed in his presence and happily gave him offerings. In silence, he accepted whatever food they put into his bowl.

One day a woodcutter led him through the mountains to the Forest of Hermits. The lovely groves were alive with holy people contemplating the mysteries of life and death. Eating little food and wearing rags, they devoted themselves to meditation, yoga, and pure living. Is this where I belong? Siddhartha wondered.

There he found the wise yogi teachers, Arada and Udraka. He sat in turn, at their feet, and learned the wisdom of the Indian religions, but he did not learn how to end suffering. “There is no one in the world who understands that,” said the yogis.

“Then I must find the Truth on my own,” Siddhartha said and moved on, alone.

He went deep into the forests, never sleeping under the same tree twice. Near the town of Uruvilva, he met some hermits who told him, “The best way to end suffering is to overcome fear and bodily pain.”

So for six years, he underwent all kinds of difficult practices, thinking this was the right path. He lived on wild fruit and roots and wore clothes made from strips of bark. He slept on a bed of thorns and stood on one leg for hours. In the winter, he sat in the icy snow. In the summer, he sat in the blazing sun. No one endured more hardships than he.

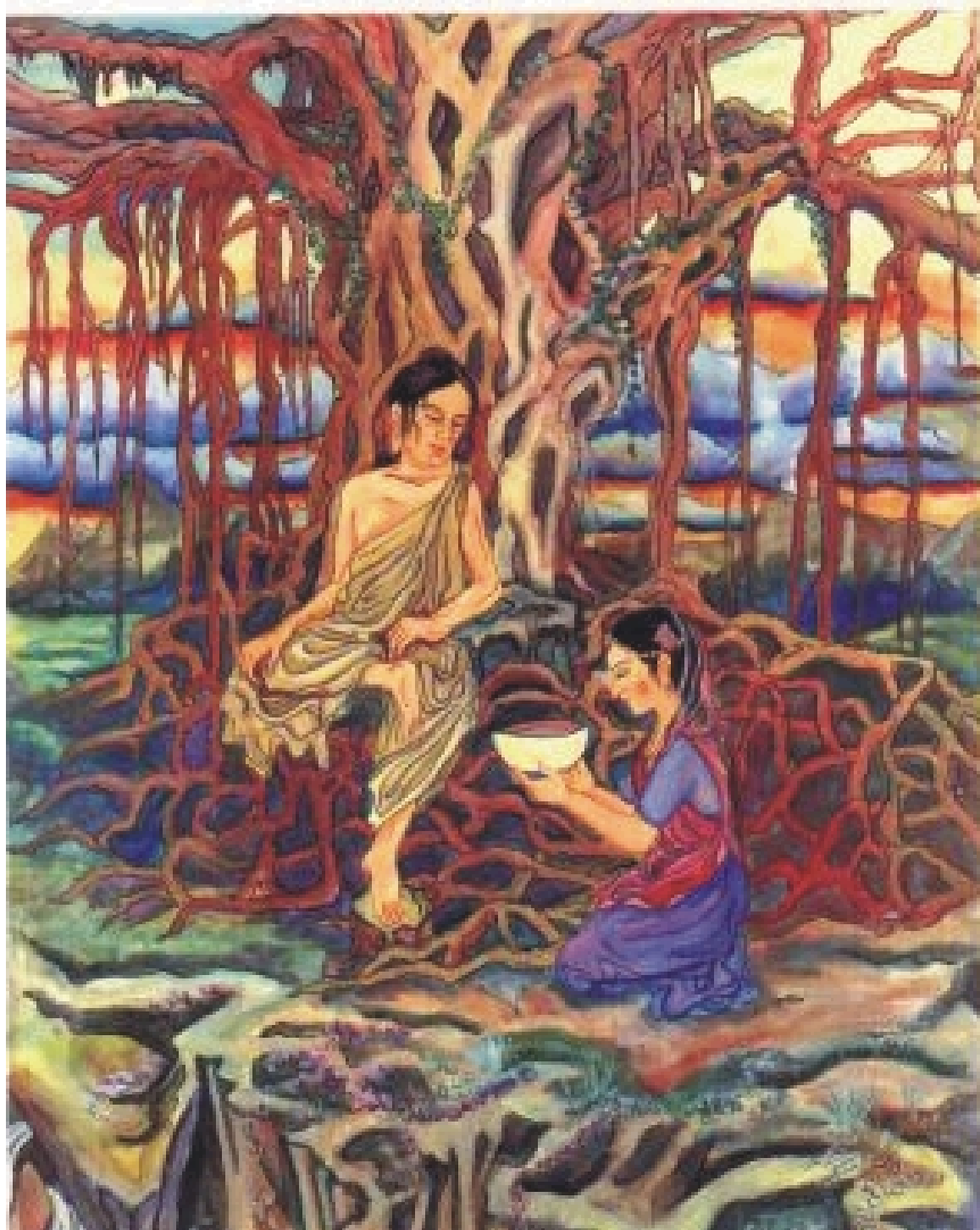
At first, he was afraid at night. The snap of a twig, the rustle of a leaf, the cry of a peacock sent his blood curdling. Run! Run! he thought, but he never did. He sat bravely and faced his fear. Seeing him sitting so peacefully, the animals came to protect him. Deer brought him offerings of flowers, and playful monkeys came with fruit.

Before long, his fame as a holy person reached the kingdom of Kapilavastu. Five of his friends from the royal family said, “Siddhartha will surely find wisdom and will teach us the Truth. Let us find him.” And they found him on the banks of the clear Naranjara River near the town of Gaya. They took him as their teacher and followed his ways.

By that time, Siddhartha was eating one grain of wheat and one sesame seed a day. His skin was dried up like a leaf and his eyes sank deep into their sockets. His head was shriveled up like a withered gourd and his joints looked like knotgrass. Queen Maya, who was resting in the Tushita Heaven, looked down and wept for her son. So did the gods.

Siddhartha forced himself on. Bugs bit him and scurried over his body, but he sat still, not even moving a finger to brush them away, lest he harm them. Layers of dust covered his body. To the children of the forest, he looked like a dust demon. They threw sticks at him and laughed at him. But he did not think ill of them.

Under the Bodhi Tree





An Offering of Rice Milk

Every spring a sparrow came and built its nest on his shoulder. Then one spring, it did not return. Tears of loneliness filled his eyes. “All these years, I have spent in unspeakable pain, and still there’s sadness in my heart,” he said. “What’s the point?”

Suddenly, what was that? The sound of singing and the vibration of dancing feet roused him from his sadness. Words of a song drifted up to him from the road where a group of girls were singing on their way to the village:

“With the strings too loose, the lute does not sound.
With the strings too tight, they will break apart.
Not too loose, not too tight, the lute sounds just right!”

“What a fool I have been! I have tightened my strings of life too tight,” he said. “How can I find Truth in a body so lean and wasted? True happiness cannot be found in too much pleasure or in too much pain, but in the Middle Path.”

Leaning on his staff, Siddhartha made his way to the river and washed away the filth on his body. The water was cool and refreshing, and the sandy bottom felt pleasant under his feet. But after bathing, he was so weak that he almost fainted. Tired and weary, he rested on the riverbank under an old Banyan tree.

On that morning, on the edge of the forest, a lotus flower sprang up from the ground bearing a jeweled bowl of rice-milk. The gods who were watching over Siddhartha sent Sujata, a heavenly maiden, to offer the rice-milk to him.

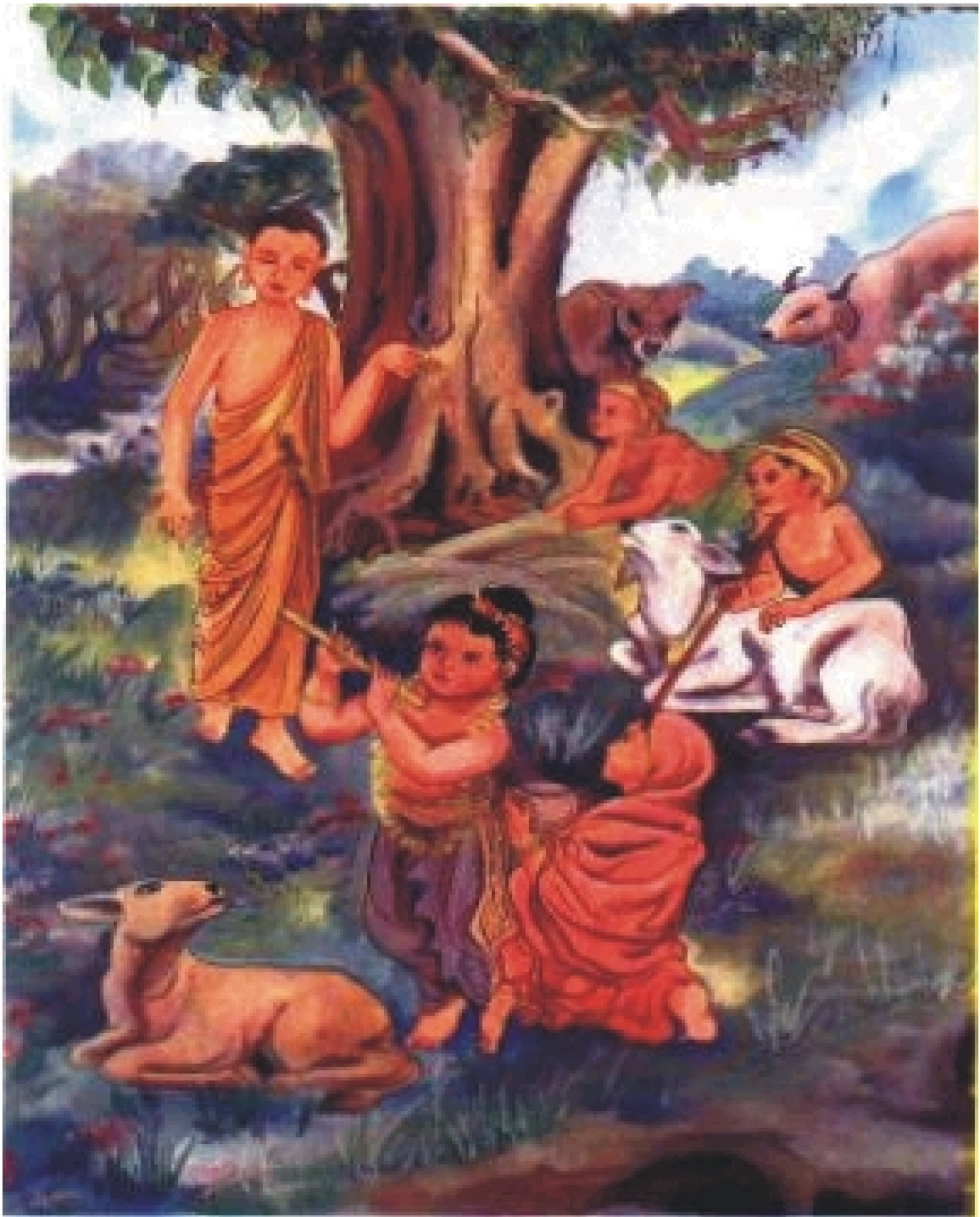
He ate in silence and then smiling at the maiden, he said, “If you had not given me food, I would have died without finding Truth. May happiness come to you.”

When the friends who had come from the palace saw their teacher take food, they became disgusted and said, “Siddhartha has gone back to an easy life. Let us leave.” And they left.

With his renewed strength, Siddhartha stood up, put the empty bowl afloat in the river and declared, “If I am to become a Buddha, may this bowl float upstream.” And it did. As the bowl cut its way against the current, it was caught up in a whirlpool and whirled down, down to the jeweled chambers of the Dragon King, Muchalinda.

Catching the jeweled bowl, Muchalinda held it up and announced, “Siddhartha will become a Buddha. Let us rejoice!” The sky darkened and the great Garuda bird swooped down into the swirling water. Snapping up the bowl, he took it to the Tushita Heaven. Then the river spirits came and sprayed Siddhartha with showers of emeralds, sapphires, and diamonds that fell in a sparkling heap at his feet.

Under the Bodhi Tree





An Offering of Kusa Grass

Once again, Siddhartha began to eat every morning. Soon his golden skin glowed with health. The children from the village were no longer afraid of him. They gathered around him in the afternoons, bringing him offerings of rice-milk and coconuts they had gathered from the forest. He told them stories about his search for enlightenment and taught them to be kind to each other.

On a full-moon day in May, Siddhartha bade the children farewell and waded across the river on his way to the city of Gaya. On the road, he met a poor young boy named Svasti, who was sobbing bitterly. On his back was a bundle of kusa grass. When he saw Siddhartha, he ran to hide, but Siddhartha blocked his way. Svasti stood dumbstruck.

“Why are you crying, my friend?” Siddhartha asked.

“O Holy One. Stay back! I’m an untouchable,” Svasti cried.

Siddhartha put his hands on Svasti’s shoulder. “I asked not what caste you are, but why you are unhappy?”

Never had Svasti been treated with such understanding. A strange feeling came over him. No longer afraid, he dried his tears and asked, “Have you seen my cows? They ran away while I was cutting grass. Their owner will surely beat me for this!”

“Come, I will help you,” said Siddhartha. They walked down to the river where Siddhartha cut a reed and made a flute upon which he played. Sweet notes filled the quiet forest. By and by the sound of cowbells could be heard.

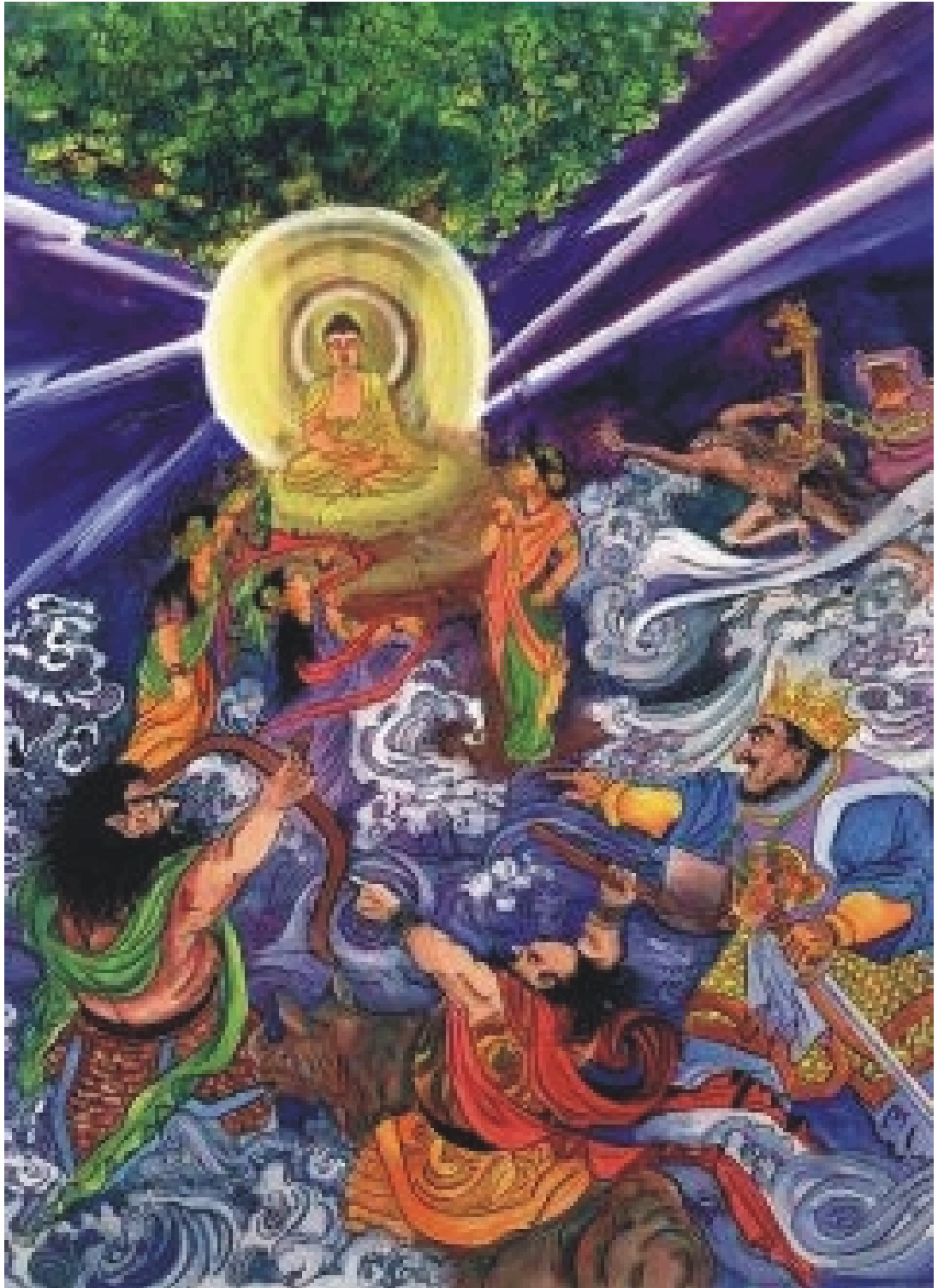
“Look, the cows have come back,” cried Svasti. Picking up a stick, he began to beat them, “I’ll teach you to run away, dumb beasts!” The eyes of the cows widened, and the woods echoed with their loud cries as they felt the sting of Svasti’s stick. Again they ran away from him.

Siddhartha said, “Beating animals turns them away from you and fills them with mistrust and anger.”

Svasti thought for a moment. Filled with shame, he took the flute that Siddhartha handed him and played. Hearing the music, the cows calmed down and returned.

Then Svasti handed a bundle of the sweet-smelling grass to Siddhartha. “Here, this is for you and the lesson you taught me.”

Under the Bodhi Tree





Under the Bodhi Tree

In the soft light of the late afternoon, Siddhartha spread the sweet kusa grass under the boughs of a lovely old tree and sat down with his legs crossed. “Even if my blood dries up and my skin and bones waste away, I will not leave this seat until I have found the end of suffering!” he said.

Now Mara, the Evil One, heard this vow and boomed! “I’ve got to stop Siddhartha! If he wins, I’ll be doomed.” And calling his armies of demon sons and daughters around him, he mounted a magnificent elephant and made war on the silent figure.

First Mara sent his army of beautiful daughters to lure Siddhartha away from his virtuous path. They were a vision of loveliness as they twirled and swayed before him. Their eyes sparkled like sapphires and their faces shone like the moon. But Siddhartha was not tempted. As he gazed at them with compassion in his heart, they turned into ugly old hags with skin wrinkled like a chicken. Crying with disgust, they ran back to their father.

Mara shook with rage. Twirling his magic stick in the air, he conjured up whirlwinds, hail, and rain. Clouds of darkness swept across the sky and violent winds lashed at Siddhartha’s body. Trees crashed all around him and the earth cracked open at his feet. But the rain did not wet him. The wind did not ruffle a hair on his head. The skies cleared and the storm drifted away. Such was the virtue of Siddhartha—the Buddha-To-Be.

Next Mara dispatched his frightful army of sons. Horrible beasts they were, with human heads, three horns and six eyes. And there were serpents with yellow fangs and monkeys with spidery fingers. On they came, hissing and screeching. They shot poisoned arrows. They swung iron chains. They heaved meteors. And as they came near the prince, he looked upon them with loving-kindness. Their weapons turned into flower petals and floated to the ground.

One by one, Siddhartha met Mara’s armies and defeated them with his goodness.

Under the Bodhi Tree





Enlightenment

The night became still and peaceful. A full moon crept over the horizon and a mist of tiny red blossoms dropped on the prince's golden shoulders. He went into deep meditation.

Like an eagle soaring to the sun, his mind passed beyond the limits of human understanding. He saw the world as it really is, not the way it appears.

As his mind soared higher, he saw the rounds of birth and death that all living beings keep making. One birth, ten births, a zillion births. It was the same for everyone and everything—from a tiny ant to the greatest king. All that are born, live and die—not once but over and over. The cycle is like a wheel that spins round and round. It is called the “Wheel of Rebirth.”

Those who do good deeds are reborn into happiness, and those who do evil are reborn into misery, as a beggar, a slave, or even a mouse. That is known as the law of “karma.”

He saw that suffering was due to selfish desire. The more one has, the more one wants. But when desire is ended, suffering vanishes like night. The light of true happiness shines forth, bringing Enlightenment. Then one need never be reborn and suffer again.

As the morning star appeared in the sky, Siddhartha opened his eyes and looked at the world through the eyes of a Buddha. He was perfect in wisdom. He had found the path that leads beyond all the sufferings and difficulties of this world. “Wonder of wonders!” he said. “All living beings have the Buddha nature and can become Buddhas. I will show them the Way.”

And on that glorious morning with its glorious light, both gods and humans rejoiced. The blind could see. The deaf could hear. The lame could walk. Dry rivers flowed with water, and flowers bloomed out of season. The animals hushed their cries and people stopped quarreling. A wonderful fragrance filled the air.

Encircled in a wreath of ever-changing colors—now blue, now orange, now green, now pink—the Buddha sat in perfect peace. His hair curled to the right and a flesh mound appeared on top of his head. A soft breeze lifted the leaves of the Bodhi tree and the world lay in peace.

Once again Mara appeared and said, “O Prince! You, who have wasted your life in pleasure and in senseless pain, who will believe that you are enlightened?”

The seated Buddha touched the ground with his right hand. The earth thundered, “I, the earth, am his witness.”

Under the Bodhi Tree





The Deer Park

The Buddha gazed at the Bodhi tree and thanked it for having given him shelter. Then he left the quiet forest to go forth and teach. “First, I will find my five friends who were with me in the Snow Mountains,” he said. “They have only a little dust in their eyes, they will understand

After days of walking, he crossed the Ganges River and came to the Deer Park near the city of Benares. The park, long adorned with flowering trees, was filled with the songs of birds and the scent of sala flowers. The five friends, seeing him, whispered among themselves, “Here comes Siddhartha, that luxury-loving fellow. Let’s ignore him.”

But as the Buddha slowly came near, they saw his radiance and glory. Before they knew it, they were preparing a seat for him and washing his feet. Then the Buddha spoke to them, saying, “I have discovered the Path to true happiness. If you listen and practice yourselves, you will know that what I say is true.”

As the full moon rose on that July night, the Buddha gave his first teaching known as “Turning the Dharma Wheel.” He spoke the Four Noble Truths.

In life, there is suffering.

The cause of suffering is selfish desire.

Cutting off desire leads to the end of suffering.

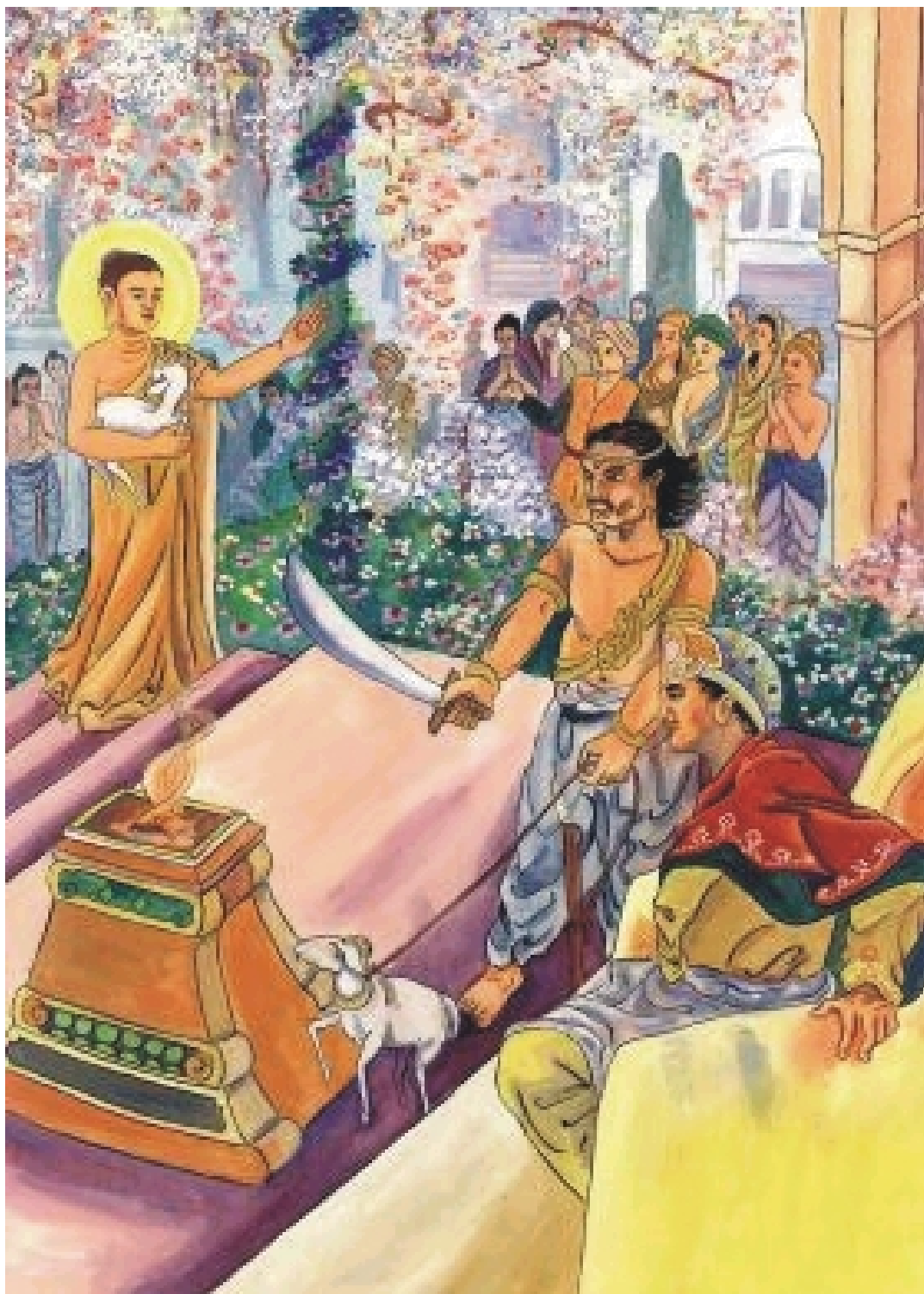
The Path to end suffering is to follow the Eightfold Path: right views, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

The five friends realized that Siddhartha had become a Buddha, and they became his first disciples. They formed a community known as the Sangha. The Sangha grew and soon there were sixty monks. The Buddha taught them meditations to purify their body, speech, and mind. He gave them rules about wearing their robes and taking their daily food, which was vegetarian. Whenever a wrong was done, he made a rule at once, so it would not happen again. These rules became known as Precepts.

After three months, the Buddha said, “O monks, go forth for the happiness of the many. Teach this Dharma which is wonderful in the beginning, wonderful in the middle, and wonderful in the end. Let each go a different way.”

Joyfully, the disciples set out in all directions, walking from village to village, sleeping under the stars, and braving all sorts of weather and hardship. All they asked for was a little food on the way. They lived simply, owning a bowl, a robe, a sitting cloth, a needle, a water strainer, and a razor. Everywhere they went, they turned the Dharma Wheel giving people comfort and happiness.

Under the Bodhi Tree





Saving a Lamb

News of the Buddha's teaching traveled fast. Day by day the number of his disciples increased. One day on the way to Rajagriha with one thousand disciples following him, the Buddha overtook a herd of sheep being driven to the city.

A little lamb was being crowded out of the herd near the riverbank. Suddenly, it slipped and lost its balance. Down, down, it went tumbling into the river. The strong, swift current bore it swiftly away. It cried out for help. "Baaa! Baaa!" Hearing the cries of the poor lamb, the Buddha leaped into the swirling water and swam to the drowning lamb. Lifting it up on his back, he carried it safely back to the road.

"Where are you taking these sheep?" he asked the shepherd.

The shepherd said, "To be sacrificed by King Bimbisara in a fire-worshipping ceremony."

The Buddha and his disciples accompanied the herd to the royal palace where the fire ceremony was being held. A huge fire was burning on the altar, and a priest was raising a sword to the first sheep. The Buddha stepped in front of the sword. It clattered to the ground. He said to the king, "O King, the way to happiness does not lie in the killing of animals."

The king looked from the lamb to the Buddha. His face softened. "Your words have touched my heart. What you say is true," he said. "I will stop this useless killing. From now on, animal sacrifices are forbidden in my kingdom."

In the following days, the king and the multitudes of people sat under the trees in the city and listened to the Buddha's teachings. One day the king said to the Buddha, "It is my wish that you stay in my kingdom and teach the Dharma. There is a quiet bamboo grove near the city. I will build you and your disciples shelters if you will stay in my kingdom and teach my people."

The Buddha graciously accepted the offer. During the rainy season, he and his disciples stayed in the shelters, but continued to wander during the cool and dry seasons. The Bamboo Grove became the first Buddhist monastery. Above the Bamboo Grove was a mountain called Vulture Peak where the Buddha gave most of his important teachings.

Soon afterwards, another monastery called the Jeta Grove was built for the Buddha, then another called the Great Grove and many more. Most of his journeys took place between these monasteries as he wandered from place to place spreading the Truth.

Under the Bodhi Tree





The Return to the Palace

When the Buddha's father, the White Rice King, heard that his son was enlightened, he said to Channa, the Buddha's old servant, "Go to Siddhartha and tell him that his father wishes to see him."

Channa found the Buddha in the Bamboo Grove and delivered the king's message. "Very well, I will visit him," said the Buddha. Happy to see his old servant, the Buddha asked, "Would you like to become a monk?"

"But I am a lowly slave, how can I?" asked Channa. "Everyone in my Sangha is treated the same, whether one is a king or a slave," answered the Buddha. So Channa became a monk and was respected by all.

At the end of the rainy season, the Buddha and his disciples set out barefoot on the mud-caked road leading to Kapilavastu. By hanging onto the tails of cows, they crossed the wide rivers swollen with melting snow from the Snow Mountains. After two months, they arrived at the city gate where the king had shelters made for them.

As the Buddha crossed the bridge into Kapilavastu, he stopped at the scene before his eyes. His kinsmen lined the road, holding armfuls of flowers and jewels, eagerly waiting. Bright-faced children ran to greet him with colored banners flying in the air.

Tears filled the eyes of the king when he saw the Buddha, his lotus-eyed son, standing there as perfect as the full moon. He slowly walked up and placed a garland of flowers over his neck. The crowd cheered joyously. Their happiness rained down upon the Buddha and their beloved king as they tossed jewels and flowers into the air. One by one, they fell upon their knees as the last flower fell to the ground.

The Buddha and his father, the king, met together as they used to in the throne room. The scent of roses drifted in from the garden. The goodly king looked at his precious son sitting next to him, as dear to him as life itself, and questioned him, "When you were a prince, you wore silk slippers. Now you walk barefoot on dirt roads. Do your feet hurt?"

"I have given up all desire for an easy life," said the Buddha. "I feel no pain."

"You once bathed in rose-scented water. How do you bathe now while roaming around?"

"I bathe in the streams of goodness and virtue," answered the Buddha.

"In the palace, you slept on soft pillows. Does your body ache from sleeping on the ground?"

"I am peaceful and do not worry about anything. I sleep well and happily."

"You were protected by guards in the palace. Are you afraid at night amid the hooting owls and howling jackals?"

"Such creatures do not frighten me."

"All this could be your kingdom, if you had not left."

"The whole earth is my kingdom," the Buddha said. "Everyone is my disciple."

"Wise and true are your words," said the king. "I once wanted you to be king, but now I'm happy that you left the palace and returned as a Buddha."

Under the Bodhi Tree





Yashodhara Tells the Truth

Then the Buddha asked. “Where is Yashodara?”
“She waits for you in her chambers,” said Queen Prajapati.
The king then spoke, “When Yashodara heard that you were wearing yellow robes, she began to wear yellow robes. When she heard that you were taking only one meal a day, she began to take only one meal a day. When she heard that you were sleeping on the ground, she began to sleep on a straw mat.”

Then Queen Prajapati told this story: “Rahula, your son, was born six years after you left the palace, the same night you became enlightened. The king was mortified. ‘How shameful!’ he cried. ‘My son left home six years ago, how could a prince be born today?’ He asked the members of the Shakya clan what to do.

“They said, ‘The shameless Yashodhara and her son should be thrown into a fire pit and burned to death.’ All in the palace agreed except for one servant, who pleaded, ‘I was with the princess everywhere she went. She did no wrong.’ But no one believed her.

“So a fire pit was dug and wood placed in it to burn. With Rahula in her arms, Yashodhara faced the fire and said to everyone, ‘My son is indeed born of Prince Siddhartha. If I am telling the truth, when I jump into the fire, neither Rahula nor I will be harmed!’

“Saying this, Yashodhara threw herself into the burning pit and the pit turned into a pool of clear water. She rose sitting on a lotus flower, holding Rahula close to her heart. Everyone realized that they had made a mistake and that the birth of Rahula was very indeed special.”

The Buddha visited the royal chambers of the princess, accompanied by his father, the king, who carried the Buddha’s bowl. When Yashodhara saw the Buddha, she fell at his feet and wept with joy. He praised her virtue, saying, “You had been a faithful and devoted wife to me not only in this life, but also in many past lives.”

During his visit to Kapilavastu, the Buddha ordained 500 Shakyans princes. Among them were his half-brother Nanda and his cousins, Aniruddha, Devadatta, and Ananda.

In a splendid procession, the royal princes left the city wearing yellow robes and carrying only offering bowls. Following the Buddha, they arrived at the Bamboo Grove with the first clouds of the rainy season.

On the way back, the Buddha stopped at the city of Gaya. On the edge of the city were the huts of the untouchables who did the lowest kind of work—tending cows, spreading cow dung, and carrying water. There he found Svasti in the cow stables, building a fire to keep the mosquitoes away from the cows on that hot summer night. “Will you give up this wretched life and follow me?” the Buddha asked.

“Yes, World Honored One,” said Svasti.

“Then rise and follow me,” said the Buddha. And Svasti, the untouchable, rose and followed him.

Under the Bodhi Tree





The Buddha Teaches Rahula a Lesson

Over the years, the Buddha visited Kapilavastu many times. One day he asked his son, “Would you like to become a monk and seek Truth, the greatest happiness known to humankind?”

Rahula replied eagerly, “Yes, I would,” and donned the yellow robe of a monk. As the youngest monk, he was adored by everyone and was very spoiled. He did not follow the rules and did just as he pleased. He ate whenever he liked and made noises during meditation. He played tricks on the other monks and told lies just for the fun of it.

One day the Buddha visited Rahula. Happy to see his father, Rahula offered him a basin of water to wash his feet. After washing his feet, the Buddha pointed to the water and asked, “Will you drink this water?”

“No, it is filthy!”

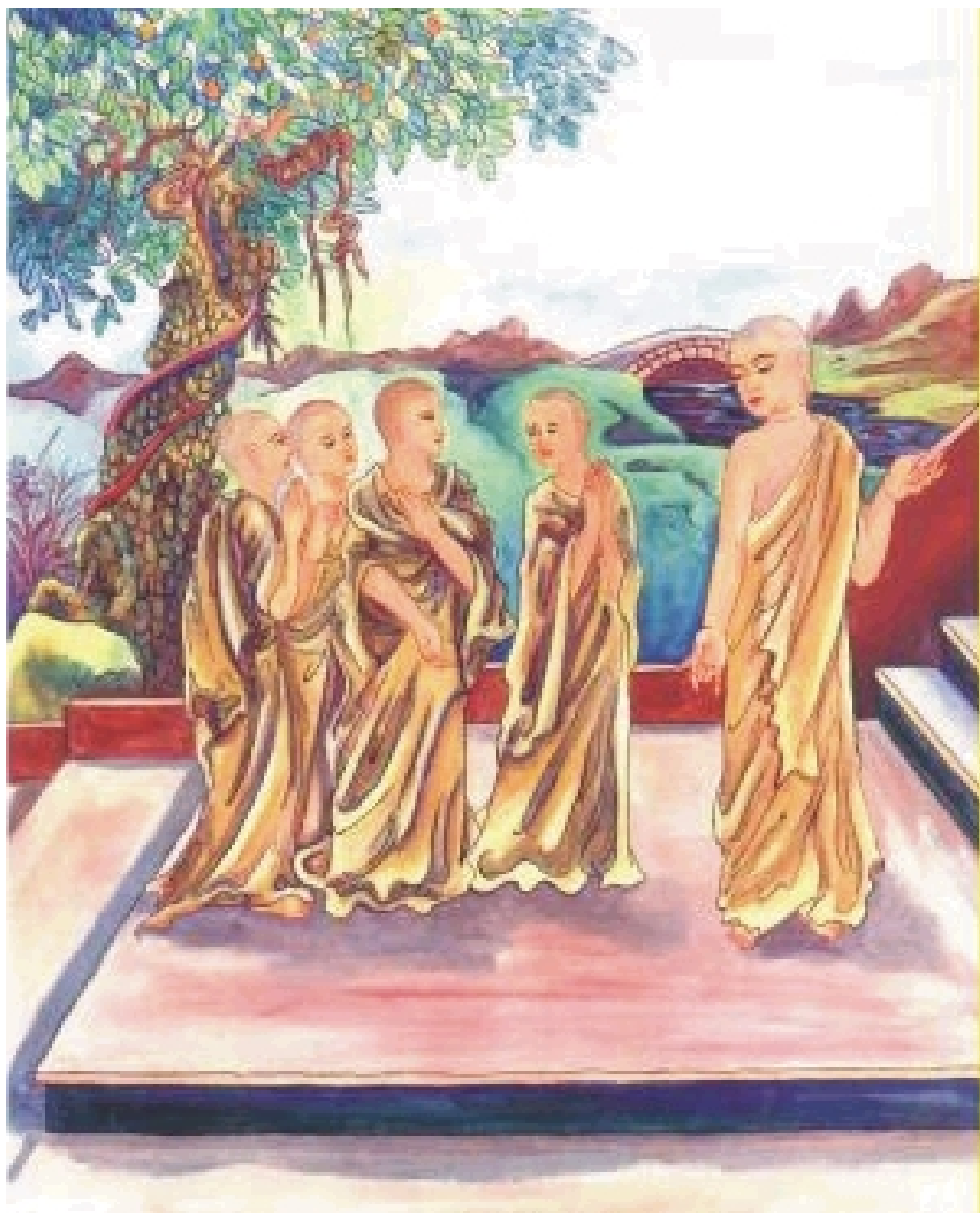
“People who tell lies are just like this water. Their minds are unclean.” Then the Buddha tipped the basin over and the water flowed out onto the floor. “Can this basin now hold water?”

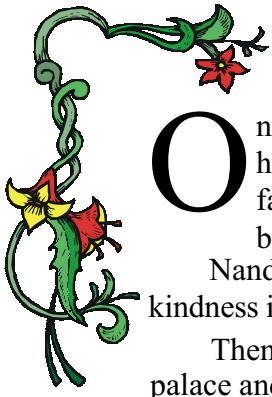
“No, it is useless,” said Rahula, as he watched the water trickle out onto the floor.

“Liars are like this basin. They are useless and cannot hold the Dharma. No matter how wonderful the Buddha’s teachings, and no matter if they wear the yellow robe of the monk, they are of no use. If they do not speak the truth and live a noble life, they will not be fit to do noble work. When they die, no one will feel the loss,” said the Buddha.

Tears of shame filled Rahula’s eyes. From then on, he never told another lie. He was well mannered and eager to learn. Every morning he would throw a handful of dirt high up into the air and call out, “Today, may I learn as many lessons from my teachers as these grains of dirt.” Rahula became one of the Buddha’s wisest disciples.

Under the Bodhi Tree





The First Nun

One morning as the Buddha sat in meditation on Vulture Peak, he saw with his heavenly eye that his father was lying sick on his bed. “The White Rice King, our father, is sick. We should go visit him before his death,” he told Nanda, his half brother.

Nanda agreed, “It is right that we go see him and express our gratitude for his kindness in raising us.”

Then Ananda spoke, “The king is my uncle. It was he who allowed me to leave the palace and become the Buddha’s disciple. I wish to go with you.”

Then Rahula spoke, “Although the Buddha is my father, my grandfather, the White Rice King, raised me. I wish to go and attend upon him.”

The Buddha smiled and said, “Good indeed! Good indeed!”

When the king saw the Buddha, Nanda, Ananda, and Rahula, all his pain vanished. The Buddha and Rahula stayed by his side, washing him and feeding him. With all his family around him, he passed away in peace.

The king was put into a coffin and the Buddha stood at the end of the coffin. “To carry a coffin is the duty of the servants,” said Nanda.

The Buddha replied, “In the future, people will not be good to their parents. They will not know how to repay their kindness. I will carry my father’s coffin to show them the right way.”

Then Nanda and Rahula stood at the other end of the coffin, “May we help you carry the king?” they asked.

The Buddha replied, “Yes, you may.” As they lifted the king’s coffin onto their shoulders, the earth quaked in six wondrous ways and flowers fell from the heavens in praise of this act of kindness.

After the king’s death, Queen Prajapati said to the Buddha, “It would be good if the Buddha would allow women to follow him the same as the monks. They can help the Dharma in womanly ways.”

The Buddha said to the queen, “The life we lead is not safe for women. It is not necessary to give up your home and family to live a spiritual life. The Buddha’s teachings can be followed anywhere.” Then the Buddha set out for Vaishali to stay in the Great Grove monastery for the rainy season.

But Queen Prajapati would not be discouraged. Along with Yashodara and many women of the court, she cut off her hair, put on a yellow robe, and headed for Vaishali. Sundari, the Buddha’s half-sister, was among them.

When the women arrived, they were covered with dust and their feet were swollen and bleeding. With tearstains on her face, the queen, quietly weeping, stood outside the gate of the Great Grove. Ananda saw her waiting there. “O Queen Prajapati, why are you waiting...and crying?” he asked, surprised.

“Because the World Honored One will not allow women to be ordained, O Venerable Ananda,” she said.

“Wait here,” Ananda told her. “I’ll ask him myself.” So Ananda asked the Buddha to ordain women. One time, two times, three times, he asked. And one time, two times, three times, the Buddha refused.

Then Ananda asked in a different way, “World Honored One, are women able to attain the same level of spiritual enlightenment as men?”

The Buddha answered, “Yes, Ananda, they can—even in this very life.”

That is how Prajapati became the first woman to be ordained by the Buddha. She founded the first Order of Nuns and ordained Yashodara, Sundari, and many other women.

The Buddha is known in history as the first to give women an honored place in religion. Many women became his most devoted followers and were a great influence on the people in India.

Under the Bodhi Tree





A Beauty that Never Fades

Vaidehi, the queen of King Bimbisara, was beautiful like the glimmer of moon light on still water. Her lips were smooth as a rose petal and her eyes sparkled like diamonds. The king often said to her, “Come with me to the Bamboo Grove and meet the Buddha.”

But the queen would say, “I prefer the lovely surroundings and pleasures of the palace.”

“In that case, I will bring the beauty of the bamboo forest to you,” said the king. And he did just that. He had poets compose poetry and musicians sing to the queen about the loveliness of the Bamboo Grove. The queen, who loved the beauties of nature, was so enchanted by the poems and songs that she decided to visit the grove after all.

Dressed in silk and glittering jewels, she entered the grove one cool morning. As if by magic, she was drawn to where the Buddha was seated under a flowering tree. When the Buddha saw her, he used his spiritual powers and created a beautiful young maiden who appeared standing by his side and fanning him. The queen was enthralled by the girl’s beauty. “Never have I seen anyone so lovely. She is as beautiful as a lotus blossom-even more beautiful than I.”

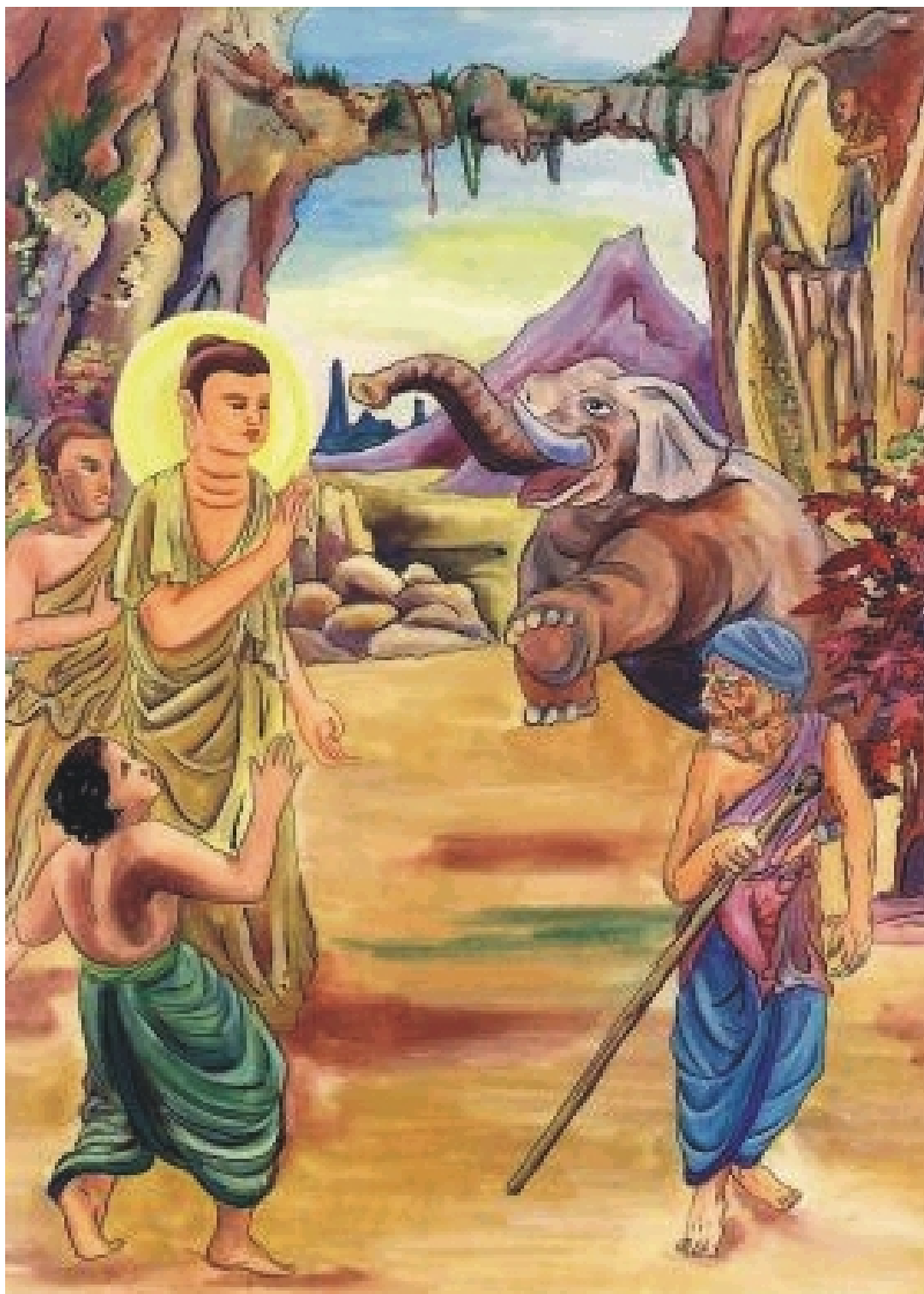
But as the queen came closer, the beauty of the lovely maiden began to fade away. Wrinkles appeared on her skin and her teeth fell out, one after the other. Her hair turned gray, then white. Older and older she grew until she sank lifelessly to the ground and disappeared in the dust.

A veil was lifted from the queen. Hiding her face in horror, she cried, “If such a body comes to an end like that, then I will also lose my beauty and die.”

The Buddha pitied her and said, “Beauty does not last. Those who are attached to beauty are like a spider trapped in its own web. There is no way out.”

The lovely queen saw the truth in the Buddha’s teaching. She asked King Bimbisara for permission to join the Order of Nuns and became one of the Buddha’s chief female disciples.

Under the Bodhi Tree





Nalagiri the Elephant

Over the years the seed of jealousy sprouted in Devadatta's heart. In spite of all his training as a monk, he simply could not tame this jealousy. "Everyone honors the Buddha and ignores me," he often said to himself. "I am his cousin and should be the leader."

And with his terrible twisted mind, he plotted to kill the Buddha. "Nalagiri, the mad elephant!" he cried. "Nalagiri will kill the Buddha for me. Then I will be the Buddha. What a perfect plan." Nalagiri was a brute of an elephant with a bad temper. Like Devadatta, she could not be tamed, and should be the leader."

With a jug of liquor, Devadatta went to the king's stables and said to the elephant keeper, "I will make you rich if you help me." Then he told him his plan.

"So be it, sir," said the elephant keeper, and he emptied the jug in Nalagiri's drinking trough.

The next morning as the Buddha was walking through the streets of the city, he heard cries and screams. "Nalagiri is loose! Run for your life!"

A cloud of dust rose up in front of the Buddha and parted. Out stepped Nalagiri, maddened with liquor. When she saw the Buddha, she trumpeted and rushed towards him. Her tail was stretched out behind her and her eyes were ablaze with fire. The crowds screamed wildly and ran to safety. Only Ananda stood by the Buddha's side.

Raising his hand, the Buddha said, "Come, friend." Like a ray of sunlight, the power of his loving-kindness enveloped her. The noble elephant staggered and stopped, her huge ears fanning back and forth. Her wild eyes softened and huge tears rolled down her old wrinkled cheeks. "Do not be mad," said the Buddha, gently stroking her long curled trunk. "Do not harm anyone." Kneeling in front of the Buddha, she cleaned the dust from his feet with her trunk and blew it over her head.

Hiding among the crowd, Devadatta watched with a scornful eye. "The Buddha will dearly pay for this," he said and slipped away.

Unlike Nalagiri who found peace, Devadatta became more cruel and wicked. Still determined to kill the Buddha, he hired a band of archers to shoot him. But they were so moved by the Buddha's loving-kindness that they dropped their bows and became his disciples, instead. "Then I will kill the Buddha myself," Devadatta said. And he rolled a boulder off a cliff on top of the Buddha's head. But before it crushed him, it broke into tiny pieces. One fragment, however, hit the Buddha's foot and cut it. A thin trickle of blood flowed from the cut.

The Buddha peered up at Devadatta hiding behind a rock and sadly said, "One who sheds the Buddha's blood will die a violent death." Devadatta turned to run, but the ground cracked open and licking flames of fire pulled him into the hells.

The Buddha said to his disciples, "Devadatta was as dear to me as my own son. But have no fear, he has the Buddha nature. After a hundred thousand years in the hells, he will rise and at last, become a Buddha."

Under the Bodhi Tree





The Last Words

Many memorable events took place in the Buddha's life. Some were happy. Some were sad. Yet the Buddha faced each one of them with great understanding and courage. For forty-five years, he trudged across the rich valleys and parched plains of Northern India. The soles of his feet became like leather and his hair turned gray. Wherever he went, the words of Dharma flowed from his lips like sweet dew falling upon the earth early in the morning. "Delight in doing good deeds and giving to the poor. Cherish all life and do not kill. Take only what is given and speak the truth. Respect your husband and wife and leave wine and harmful drugs alone. Stay on the road to goodness and health."

A friend and teacher to all, the Buddha lived only for the sake of others. Now that he was eighty years old, he felt that his work was done. He called the faithful Ananda to him and said, "Let us return to Kapilavastu. I wish to die in the city where I grew up."

Hearing this, tears poured from Ananda's eyes like rain. The Buddha comforted him saying, "Do not grieve, Ananda. I am old and feeble and cannot live forever. It is natural for everything that is born to die."

And so the Buddha, with a few disciples and Ananda by his side, traveled north. On the way, he fell ill near the village of Kusinagara in a grove of trees. He pointed to a set of twin sala trees and said, "Please fold my upper robe and lay it between those sala trees so I can lie down with my head to the north. I am weary and need to rest a while."

Weeping, Ananda laid down the robe on a slab of stone that rested between the trees. Then the Buddha lay upon it on his right side, the way a lion lies, resting one foot upon the other. As he did so, the sala trees broke out into full bloom, out of season, and sprinkled its white blossoms upon the ragged robes of the reclining Buddha.

The Buddha said, "Ananda, this very night, I will pass into Nirvana, the ultimate peace. In the future, there will be a Buddha named Maitreya who will appear in the world. Now go tell everyone that the Buddha is about to leave so they can come and bid him farewell."

When the people heard the news, they rushed to see the Buddha before it was too late. Although he lay in pain, he continued to teach them until his last breath.

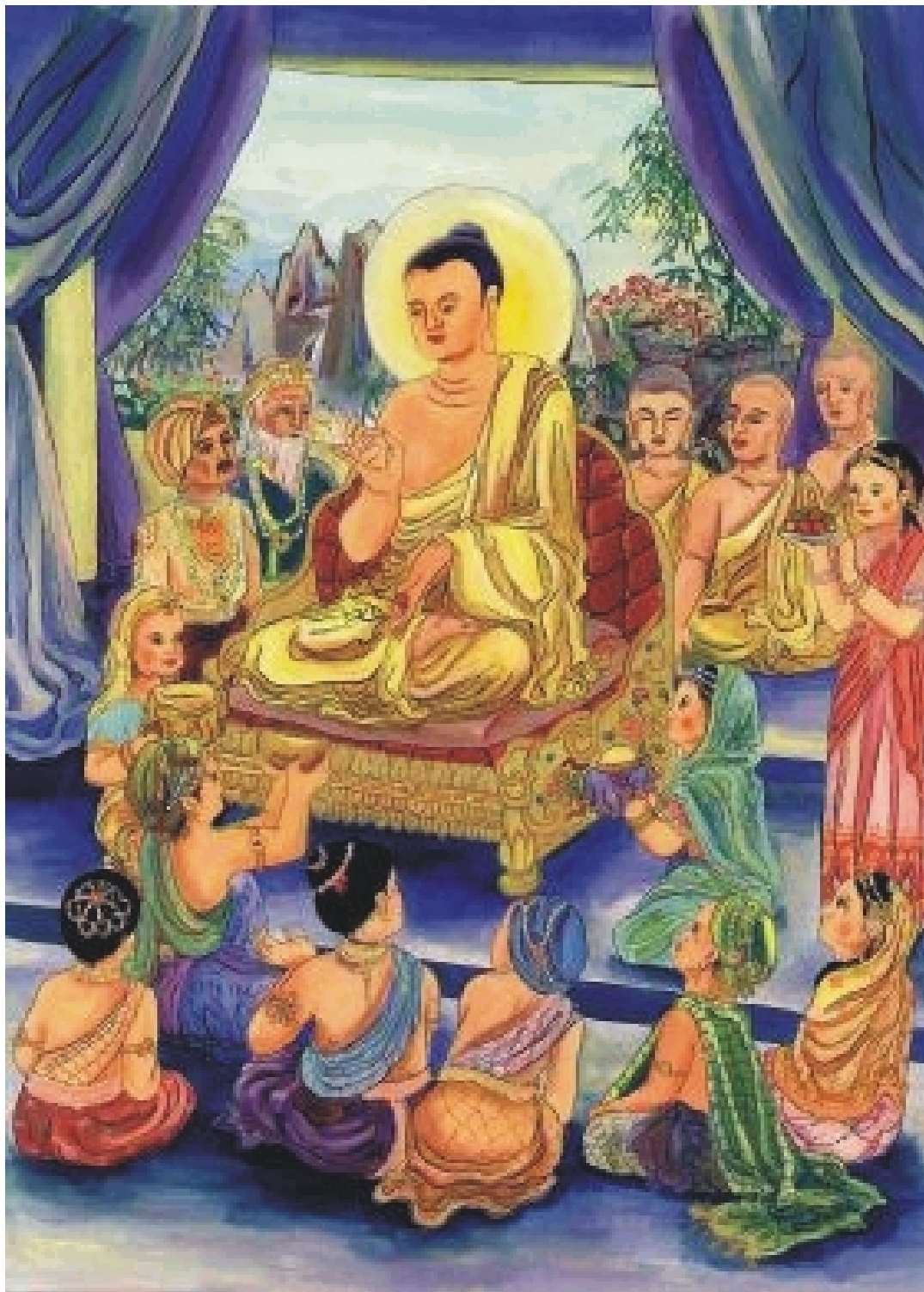
The night was almost over and so was the life of the Buddha. The disciples wept and begged him to remain in the world. Ananda asked him, "When the Buddha is no longer in the world, who will teach us?"

"What more is there to teach, Ananda?" the Buddha said. "I have taught you all I know. There is nothing that I have kept hidden. The precepts are now your teacher. Follow them and you will be true to me."

In the purple shadows of dusk, the Buddha entered final Nirvana. Before his departure, he spoke his last words. "All things in life change and decay, but the truth remains forever. Strive on diligently without delay."



Under the Bodhi Tree





A Day in the Life of the Buddha

The Buddha rose at 4:00 in the morning and bathed in a cool stream of water. Afterwards, he sat in meditation and cast his net of compassion out into the world to see who needed his aid. If anyone needed him, he went to help. Otherwise, at 6:00, he took his bowl and walked to the nearest village to collect offerings of food. His disciples followed him in single file.

When the people in the villages saw him coming, they cried, “Today the Buddha has come to our village for offerings.” And they came out of their houses and waited on the road, holding incense, flowers, and vessels of food. With happy voices, they bowed and greeted him and placed food in his bowl.

After the Buddha had finished his meal, he looked into the hearts of the people and taught them what they needed to know. Each felt as if he were speaking especially to him or her. Taking leave of the village, he returned to where he was staying.

At noon the monks and nuns met with the Buddha. He answered their questions and gave them advice on meditation. Then each went on his own to meditate, some under a tree, some on a riverbank. If the Buddha wished, he rested for a while inside his fragrant hut.

In the afternoon hundreds of people from the villages came to listen to the Buddha and seek his advice. After they left, kings and royal families came to discuss their problems. The Buddha encouraged them to stop their wars and to rule their kingdoms peacefully.

At the first watch of the night from 6:00-10:00 p.m., the monks or nuns again came to ask questions. In the middle watch, from 10:00 p.m.—2:00 a.m., the gods and spirits came to listen to the Dharma. And in the last watch, from 2:00 p.m.—3:00 a.m., the Buddha took a stroll under the moonlight to relieve his body from so much sitting. Then he slept one hour to begin a new day.



GLOSSARY

BODHI TREE- A sacred fig tree under which Shakyamuni Buddha became enlightened.

DHARMA- A rule or method; the Buddha's teachings and the practice of them.

ENLIGHTENMENT- Understanding the ultimate Truth and thereby attaining freedom from ignorance and desire.

FOUR HEAVENLY KINGS - These gods abide in the first heaven of the desire realm and protect the Buddhas and their teachings.

Garuda - A huge golden-winged bird.

KARMA- Action; the law of cause and effect. For every action there is a cause. Good actions lead one closer to perfect happiness or nirvana; bad actions lead one away.

MARA- A Sanskrit word for the evil forces in the world.

MEDITATION- Sitting quietly to focus the mind for inner calmness and peace.

MONASTERY- A place where monks nuns, live, study and worship.

Naga King - In Indian folklore, a mythical serpent that lives in the underworld kingdom.

NIRVANA- A state of everlasting joy and peace attained by enlightened holy persons.

OFFERING BOWL- A bowl in which nuns and monks collect offerings of food.

ORDAINED- A monk or nun who has received the full precepts.

PRECEPTS- Moral vows that monks and nuns receive. The five major precepts are: no killing, no stealing, no lying, no sexual misconduct, and no intoxicants.

RENOUNCE- to give up worldly desires.

SANGHA- The community of Buddhist nuns and monks. The Sanskrit word means "harmonious living".

SANSKRIT- An ancient Indian language. Many sacred Buddhist books were written in Sanskrit.

SPIRITUAL POWERS- The power to see future and past lives and to transform oneself into various forms.

Tushita HEAVEN- The third of the six desire heavens.

UNTOUCHABLES- In ancient times, people in India were divided into classes known as the caste system. Those outside the castes were called outcasts or untouchables. It was against the law for them to touch anyone in a higher caste.



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The Dharma Realm BuddhiSt ASSociation

The Dharma Realm Buddhist Association (DRBA) was founded in the United States of America in 1959 by the venerable Master Hsuan Hua (prior to his own arrival in the U.S.) to bring the genuine teachings of the Buddha to the entire world.

Its goals are to propagate the Proper Dharma, to translate the Mahayana Buddhist scriptures into the world's languages and to promote ethical education.

The members of the association guide themselves with six ideals established by the venerable Master which are: no fighting, no greed, no seeking, no selfishness, no pursuing personal advantage, and no lying.

They hold in mind the credo:

Freezing, we do not scheme.

Starving, we do not beg.

Dying of poverty, we ask for nothing.

According with conditions, we do not change.

Not changing, we accord with conditions.

We adhere firmly to our three great principles.

We renounce our lives to do the Buddha's work.

We take responsibility in molding our own destinies.

We rectify our lives to fulfill our role

as members of the Sangha.

Encountering specific matters,
we understand the principles.
Understanding the principles,
we apply them in specific matters.
We carry on the single pulse of
the patriarchs' mind-transmission.

During the following decades, international Buddhist communities such as Gold Mountain Monastery, the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, the City of the Dharma Realm and various other branch facilities were founded. All these operate under the traditions of the Venerable Master and through the auspices of the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association.

Following the guidelines of Shakyamuni Buddha, the Sangha members in these monastic facilities maintain the practices of taking only one meal a day and of always wearing their precept sashes. Reciting the Buddha's name, studying the teachings, and practicing meditation, they dwell together in harmony and personally put into practice the Buddha's teachings.

Reflecting Master Hua's emphasis on translation and education, the Association also sponsors an International Translation Institute, vocational training programs for Sangha and laity, Dharma Realm Buddhist University, and elementary and secondary schools.

The Way-places of this Association are open to sincere individuals of all races, religions, and nationalities.

Everyone who is willing to put forth his/her best effort in nurturing humaneness, righteousness, merit, and virtue in order to understand the mind and see the nature is welcome to join in the study and practice.





Venerable Master Hsuan Hua

The Venerable Master Hsuan Hua was also known as An Tse and To Lun. The name Hsuan Hua was bestowed upon him after he received the transmission of the Wei Yang Lineage of the Chan School from Venerable Fider Hsu Yun. He left the home life at the age of nineteen.

After the death of his mother, he lived in a tiny thatched hut by her grave-side for three years, as an act of filial respect. During that time, he practiced meditation and studied the Buddha's teachings. Among his many practices were eating only once a day at midday and never lying down to sleep.

In **1948** the Master arrived in Hong Kong, where he founded the Buddhist Lecture Hall and other monasteries. In **1962** he brought the Proper Dharma to America and the West, where he lectured extensively on the major works of the Mahayana Buddhist canon and established the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association, as well as the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, the International Translation Institute, various other monastic facilities, Dharma Realm Buddhist University, Developing Virtue Secondary School, Instilling Goodness Elementary school, the vocational Sangha and Laity Training Programs, and other education centers.

The Master passed into stillness on June 7, 1995, in Los Angeles, U.S.A., causing many people throughout the world to mourn the sudden setting of the sun of wisdom. Although he has passed on, his lofty example will always be remembered. Throughout his life he worked selflessly and vigorously to benefit the people of the world and all living beings. His wisdom and compassion inspired many to correct their faults and lead wholesome lives.

Here we include the Records of the Mendicant of Chang Bai written by the Venerable Master to serve as a model for all of us to emulate.

*The Mendicant of Chang Bai was simple
and honest in nature.
He was always quick to help people and benefit others.
Forgetting himself for the sake of the Dharma,
he was willing to sacrifice his life.
Bestowing medicines according to people's illnesses,
he offered his own marrow and skin.
His vow was to unite in substance with millions of beings.
His practice- exhausted empty space as
he gathered in the myriad potentials,
Without regard for past, future, or present;
With no distinctions of north, south, east, or west.*

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