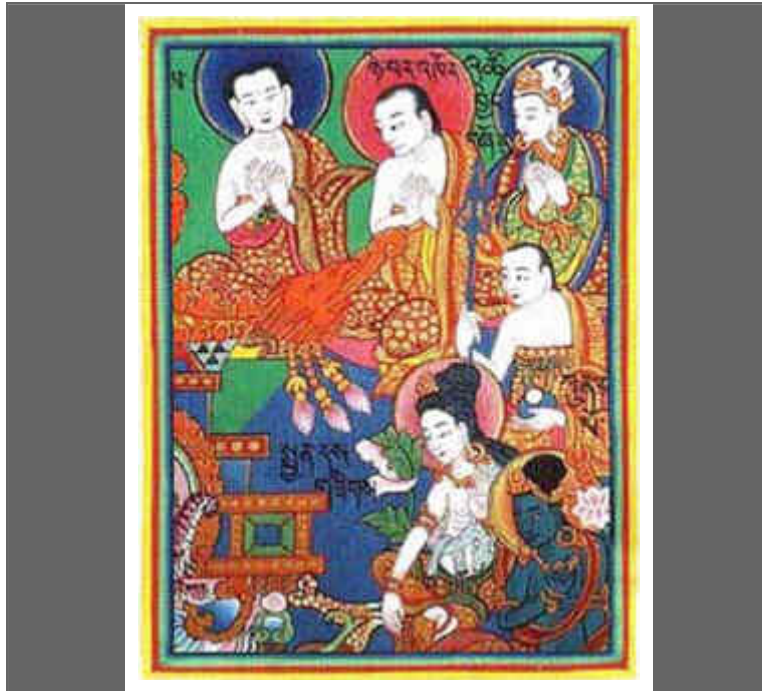


Source link: www.newsfinder.org

Jivaka Kumarabhacca



At the time of the Buddha, among the lay physicians, the most renowned was Jivaka Kumarabhacca, who is described as providing free medical care to the Buddha and other monks and donating his mango grove at Rajagaha for use as a monastic community, named Jivakarama. Jivaka's fame as a healer was widely known and tales about his life and medical feats can be found in almost all versions of Buddhist scriptures.

Versions about Jivaka's birth and infancy

The Pali version began with Salavati, a courtesan of Rajagaha, giving birth to a son whom was then given to a slave woman, who placed him in a winnowing basket, which was thrown on a rubbish heap.

In the Sanskrit-Tibetan account, a promiscuous wife of a merchant from Rajagaha gave birth to a son of King Bimbisara, placed the infant in a chest, and ordered maidservants to set the chest at the gate of the king's palace.

In the Chinese narrative, a divine virgin named Arampali, who was raised by a Brahman, gave birth to a son of King Bimbisara. The boy was born with a bag of acupuncture needles in his hand and therefore was predestined to become a doctor and a royal physician. His mother wrapped him in white clothes and ordered a slave to take him to the king.

In all versions, the infant is taken and raised by the king's son Abhaya.

In the Pali account, the boy is given the name Jivaka because he was alive (from root jiv, to live), and because a prince cared for him he is called Kumarabhacca (nourished by a prince).

Medical training

Concerning his interest in medicine and his medical education, in the Pali account, Jivaka, as he approached the age at which he must seek his own livelihood, decided to learn the medical craft. Hearing about a world-famous physician in Taxila, he travelled to that city, famous for education, to apprentice with the eminent doctor. After seven years of medical study, he took a practical examination that tested his knowledge of medical herbs, passed with extraordinary success, and, with the blessings of mentor, went off to practice medicine.

In the Sanskrit-Tibetan version, Jivaka desired to learn a craft. Seeing white-clad physicians, he decided to become a doctor and studied the art of healing. After acquiring the basics of medicine, he wished to increase his understanding by learning the art of opening skulls from Atreya, the king of physicians, who lived in the city of Taxila. So Jivaka went there, took the practical examination on medical herbs and performed other healings, and so deepened his knowledge of medicine that he could even advise his master on therapeutic procedures, thereby earning the latter's respect. Pleased with Jivaka's depth of understanding, Atreya communicated to him the special technique of opening the skull. Jivaka eventually left the company of Atreya and journeyed to the city Bhadrakata in Vidarbha, where he studied the textbook called "The Sounds of All Beings" (most probably a textbook related with the practice of dharanis and mantras). During his travels, he purchased a load of wood from a thin and feeble man and discovered in the woodpile a gem called "the soothing remedy of all beings" (The Bodhisattvas of Healing). This gem, when placed before a patient, illuminated his inside as a lamp light up a house, revealing the nature of illness.

In the Chinese version Jivaka relinquished all claims to the throne and studied medicine. He found that the education he acquired from local physicians was inadequate and showed their deficiencies in the knowledge presented in the textbooks on plants, medical recipes, acupuncture, and pulse lore, which he had successfully mastered. He therefore instructed them in the essential principles of medicine and gained their respect. Hearing of a famous physician, Atreya, who lived in Taxila, he traveled to the city to learn medicine from him. After studying medicine for seven years, he took the practical examination on medical herbs and passed it with great success. When Jivaka departed, his master told him that, although he himself was first among the Indian physicians, after his death, Jivaka would become his successor. On his travels, Jivaka encountered a young boy carrying firewood and found he was able to see the inside of the boy's body. Immediately realizing that the bundle of wood must contain a piece of the tree of the King of Healing, who, according to early Mahayana scriptures, is a Bodhisattva of healing, he bought the wood, discovered a twig of the auspicious tree, and used it to diagnose illnesses in the course of his famous medical practice.

Jivaka is regarded as the Father of Medicine, a source of knowledge about the healing powers of plant, mineral, massage and so forth. His teachings travel to Thailand at the same time as Buddhism. Definitely a central figure in the Buddhist medical system, he is legitimately regarded as the aspiration for all practitioners of traditional Thai massage.