

Jivaka And His Contribution To Medical Science

By Dr. Rastrapal Mahathero, Edited by Gyana Ratna

It was a fine morning and Abhaya Kumara, the prince-son of Srenika Bimbisara, the King of Magada, was surprised to see a lot of crows flocking around a dust bin. He asked his attendants, and it was reported that a new born baby had been left there. Having heard the child was alive, he was ordered to be picked up and was taken to the Harem of the Royal Family. This child was no other than 'Jivaka', the world famous Buddhist physician. Jivaka was so named for the fact that he was rescued alive (“jivati”) from a very deplorable condition. He was also known as 'Kumara Vacca', as he was adopted like a son of the prince, Abhaya Kumara.

Having been nurtured within the royal family environs, when he grew up Jivaka worried about not knowing his natural parents. This very thought used to infest him mentally to extremes. He then realized that if he had to maintain the good wishes of the royal family he must have to acquire efficiency in some sort of discipline. Jivaka was said to be extraordinarily meritorious. Understanding his own capability, he intended to go to Texila for study. Texila was at that time the greatest seat of learning and was the heart of the Gandhara civilization. There was an internationally acclaimed university there for various disciplines, including medicine, and scholars from India and other countries would come here for studies. For the fulfillment of his aspirations, Jivaka Kumara Vacca had sought permission from the prince Abhaya Kumara and having accorded the same, he went to Texila for study. He had an earnest desire to carry on with medical science, and he learned under the world-reputed physician Atreya. Jivaka was extremely bright and therefore he finished the entire syllabus of fourteen years within only seven years. At this point, he approached his teacher and expressed that he wasn't sure if there was anything more for further study. On hearing this, the teacher asked Jivaka to go all around Texila for an area of two *yojanas* and to report whether any type of plant could be found which would be of no use as medicine. It was a test for Jivaka and he took up the event. After completion of the search over several weeks, he submitted a report to his teacher that he could not find anything which might not be regarded for medicinal treatment. Having heard such a reply, his teacher was very much satisfied and accorded that Jivaka had perfected his knowledge in the medical science. He was awarded the certificate of a physician and was allowed to return to Rajagriha.

While coming back to Rajagriha, he was told of the wife of a merchant from Saketa who had been suffering from a head-ache for the last seven years. She had spent huge sum of money for her treatment. But all the physicians had failed to cure her. Jivaka used a little fat and strong herbal medicines which were boiled together and filtered. A drop of the mixture was poured in the nasal cavity of the patient and her headache was fully cured. Jivaka was rewarded with abundance.

The Magadhan King Bimbishara was once suffering from fistula. By applying herbal ointments Jivaka cured the King's disease. He was also very expert in surgery. He skillfully opened the skull of a merchant's son from Varanasi. After cleaning the area he set it back in order. After stitching the scalp together, he applied an herbal ointment and the patient was cured. Pradyot, the King of Ujjain was suffering from jaundice. But he had disdain for any sort of cheese. Jivaka most artfully changed the color and odor of the cheese the King liked to eat, and in this way the king, by eating cheese, was cured of his disease.

Jivaka not only became the Royal physician but was also the personal physician of the Buddha. Once the Buddha had been suffering from high biliary diseases. Jivaka arranged natural purgatives as required. The Buddha used the same and was cured of the disease. On another occasion, the Buddha had a incident of blood poisoning, and was cured by Jivaka. It was said that the Royal physician used to treat the members of the Bhikkhu Sangha whenever there was any necessity. By the application of natural herbal remedies, Jivaka could easily cure diseases like leprosy, jaundice, skin disease, etc. Jivaka became a great devotee of the Buddha, and he donated his mango grove to the Buddha for use by the members of the Sangha. Jivaka once requested that the Buddha allow monks to wear saffron-dyed new robes if he gifted them to the Sangha and also the use of blankets by the members of the Sangha whenever they were donated by devotees. It was also said that Jivaka attained the first stage of sanctification on hearing the discourse offered by the Buddha. This discourse is known now as the Jivaka Sutta.

Glory be to Jivaka, the greatest of the ancient Indian physicians.
