

Jivaka's Corner

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Jívaka Komárabhacca was the most famous physician of Gautama Buddha's time (563-483 BC), and is revered as the founding father of traditional Thai massage. He was the son of Sálavatí, a courtesan of Rájagaha. Directly after giving birth, his mother placed the child in a basket and out it on a garbage heap. Later that day, Prince Abhaya, son of King Bimbisara, passed by and noticed the baby. When he asked nearby people about the baby, they said "jívati" (he is alive), and therefore the child was called Jívaka. The name Komárabhacca may have resulted from the fact that he was rescued and brought up by the Prince (Kumárena Posápito). It has also been suggested that Komárabhacca meant master of the Kaumárabhrtya science (the treatment of infants, or pediatrics).

Because of his devotion to the ways of the Buddha, Jivaka eventually had a monastery built close to his house, in his mango grove. After construction ended, the Buddha and his disciples were invited to the premises, and the monastery itself was formally donated to the Buddha and his monastic order (sangha). After the blessing ceremony of the new monastery, Jivaka is said to have attained the first level of sainthood (sotapanna).



Famous statue of "the hermit doctor"
(Jivaka Kumārabhacca) at the Grand Palace /
Wat Phra Kaew, Bangkok. *Photo: Bob Haddad*

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