

# Some people and places historically associated with Jivaka Kumarbhaccha

*source: www.palikannon.com, compiled and edited by Bob Haddad.*

**Bimbisára** was the king of Magadha and a patron of the Buddha. Jivaka Kumarabhacca was King Bimbisára's personal physician. He ascended the throne at the age of fifteen and reigned in Rájagaha for fifty two years. The Buddha was five years older than Bimbisára, and it was not until fifteen years after his accession to the throne that Bimbisára heard the Buddha preach and was immediately converted by him.

The first meeting between the Buddha and Bimbisára took place in Rájagaha after the Buddha's Renunciation. The king, seeing the young ascetic pass below the palace windows, sent messengers after him. On learning that he was resting after his meal, Bimbisára followed him and offered him a place in his court. The Buddha refused, and revealed his identity.

Bimbisára did all in his power to help to further growth of the Buddha's teachings, and his affection for the Buddha was unbounded. When the Buddha agreed to visit the neighboring city of Vesáli, Bimbisára had the entire road from Rájagaha to the Ganges repaired for the Buddha's journey. He erected a rest house at the end of each league, and spread flowers along the whole way. Two parasols were provided for the Buddha and one for each monk. The king himself accompanied the Buddha in order to look after him, offering him flowers and perfume and all requisites throughout the journey, which lasted five days. Once at the river, he fastened two boats together decorated with flowers and jewels and followed the Buddha's boat into the water up to his neck. When the Buddha had gone, the king set up an encampment on the river bank, awaiting his return, and escorted him back to Rájagaha with similar pomp and ceremony.

Among the ministers and personal retinue of Bimbisára was his physician Jívaka. Jivaka was made known to him by the prince Abhaya when he was suffering from a fistula. The king's garments were stained with blood and his queens mocked him. Jívaka cured the king with one single anointing; the king offered him the ornaments of the five hundred women of the palace, and when he refused to take these, he was appointed physician to the king, the women of the palace, and the fraternity of monks under the Buddha.

**Magadha** was one of the four chief kingdoms of India at the time of the Buddha, the others being Kosala, the kingdom of the Vamsas and Avanti.

Under Bimbisára and Ajátasattu, Magadha rose to such political eminence that for several centuries, right down to the time of Asoka, the history of Northern India was practically the history of Magadha. (A list of the kings from Bimbisára to Asoka is found in Dvy.369 ; cp. DA.i.153; Mbv.96, 98).

During the early Buddhist period Magadha was an important political and commercial centre, and was visited by people from all parts of Northern India in search of commerce and of learning. The kings of Magadha maintained friendly relations with their neighbours, Bimbisára and Pasenadi marrying each other's sisters. Mention is made of an alliance between Pukkusati, king of Gandhara and Bimbisára. When Candappajjota of Ujjeni was suffering from jaundice, Bimbisára sent him his own personal physician, Jivaka.

**Rájagaha** was an important city, the capital of Magadha. There seem to have been two distinct towns; the older one, a hill fortress, more properly called Giribbaja, was very ancient and is said to have been laid out by Mahágovinda, a skilled architect. The later town, at the foot of the hills, was evidently built by Bimbisára.

Rájagaha was closely associated with the Buddha's work. He visited it soon after the Renunciation, journeying there on foot from the River Anomá, a distance of thirty leagues. Bimbisára saw him begging in the street, and, having discovered his identity and the purpose of his quest, asked him to visit Rájagaha. During the first year after the Enlightenment, the Buddha went to Rájagaha and Bimbisára and his subjects gave the Buddha a great welcome, and the king entertained him and a large following of monks in the palace. After the Buddha's death, Rájagaha was chosen by the monks as the meeting place of the First Convocation.

**Sirimá** was a courtesan of Rajagaha and the younger sister of Jivaka. An interesting story involves Sirimá's death and the Buddha's teachings. A monk in a far away monastery, having heard of the excellence of Sirimá's alms and of her extraordinary beauty, decided to go and see her. Having obtained permission to beg for alms, he went to her house, but Sirimá was ill, and her attendants looked after the monks. When the meal had been served she was brought into the dining hall to pay her respects to the monks. The lustful monk at once fell in love with her and was unable to eat. That same day Sirimá died. The Buddha gave instructions that her body should not be burned, but laid in the ground, protected from birds and beasts. When putrefaction had set in, the king proclaimed that all citizens, on penalty of a fine, should gaze on Sirimá's body. The Buddha, too, went with the monks, and the lustful monk accompanied them. The Buddha made the king proclaim, with the beat of the drum, that anyone who would pay a thousand could have Sirimá's body. There was no response. The price was gradually lowered to one eighth of a penny. Yet no one came forward, even when the body was offered for nothing. The Buddha then addressed the monks, pointing out how even those who would have paid one thousand to spend a single night with Sirimá would not now take her as a gift. Such was the passing nature of beauty. The lustful monk attained the first level of realization, and became a *sotápanna*.