

THE DISCARDED CHILD

Accounts of Jivaka's childhood and his skills as a physician

From The Ven Dickwelle Mahinda
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When the supreme Buddha was living at Rajagaha in the Anathepindika monastery, there lived a beautiful courtesan named Salavati. A child was born to her. But unfortunately, that infant was a son.

In accordance with their ancient custom, they would not bring up sons. They raised only daughters, who would later become courtesans. So she called a servant woman and asked her to put the infant into a winnowing fan and throw him onto a rubbish heap. The servant took the infant, and threw him onto a rubbish heap which was not far from the main road.

The following morning, the king's son Abhaya was attending a royal audience. He saw some crows circling above the rubbish heap, and asked his retinue:

“What is it that is surrounded by crows?”
“*It is an infant, Sire*” – they replied.
“And is he alive?”
“*Yes, he is alive, Sire.*”
“Then bring that orphan and let the nursing mother of the palace look after him.”

The baby was taken and nursed to health, and when the naming day arrived, because it had been said of him “*jívati*” (*he is alive*) they gave him the name Jivaka.

As the child grew, he became curious, and one day he approached his foster father and asked many questions:

“Prince, who is my mother? Who is my father?”
“*Not even I know your mother.*” replied Prince Abhaya.

As he grew older, it occurred to Jivaka, that he would have to learn a craft in order to maintain himself later in later years. He set out for Taksila to meet the teacher known as Disapamok Achariya. Under this teacher, he learned medicine for seven years. At the end of his seven years, he told his teacher that he had remembered all that he had been taught. The teacher said: “Well then, Jivaka, take this horse and go all around Taksila and bring back any plant that cannot be used as medicine.” After a long period of time, Jivaka returned with empty hands, and declared that everything he encountered had a purpose for medicine.

The teacher then declared: "You are fully trained, and this much is enough for your livelihood." The teacher gave him some money and provisions for his journey, and sent him on his way.

On the way, he went to Saketa where there lived a merchant's wife who had been suffering from a disease of the head for seven long years. Jivaka told her servant to please inform the lady that a doctor has come to see her. When the servant told the lady, she inquired what sort of doctor he was.

"He is young, my lady," replied the servant.

"That is enough, servant. What could a young doctor do for me? Many famous doctors have not been able to cure me. They have gone away from here taking so much gold."

Doctor Jivaka heard this, and said to her:

"I will collect my fee only after you are cured. You can give me whatever you like."

So the merchant's wife agreed and she gave a handful of ghee to Jivaka to make medicine. He cooked the ghee with various medicines. He made the patient lie down on her back on a couch and injected it through her nose until it came out of her mouth. Afterward, the lady ordered the slave woman to come and collect the ghee with cotton.

Jivaka knew that the ghee should be thrown away, but this stingy woman had ordered it to be collected with cotton. He didn't know if he would ever receive his fee.

"Times are hard these days. The ghee is excellent for the servants or workmen for rubbing on their feet. Don't be afraid, your fee will not be lacking," said the lady.

Jivaka cured her disease by that treatment through her nose. In return, she gave him four thousand gold coins. Her son also gave him four thousand gold coins.

During that same period, King Bimbisára was suffering terribly from a fistula, (*an abnormal opening or passage between two organs or between an organ and the skin*). Jivaka removed his fistula with just one ointment. He received various kinds of gifts from the great King Bimbisára. Jivaka once went to see a patient suffering from a disease of the head for seven years who had been abandoned by other doctors. The doctors had said that the patient would pass away after five days. Jivaka cut the skin of his head and made an opening in his skull. He removed two tiny living creatures that were destroying the brain. After some time, the man recovered completely, and Jivaka received a hundred thousand gold coins in payment for his work.

One time, a son of a merchant who was playing by doing somersaults came to suffer from a twist in the bowels. He could not properly digest whatever he ate or drank. Jivaka cut the skin of his stomach, drew out the twisted bowel and then sewed back his skin. He was told to apply an ointment that Jivaka had personally prepared, and soon the boy became well.

An urgent message was once received by King Bimbisára from his friend who was living in Ujjeni. The message said that King Pajjota was suffering from jaundice, and it requested that Jivaka be sent as soon as possible. Bimbisára ordered Jivaka to go there.

Jivaka approached King Pajjota and told the King that he wanted to make a decoction with ghee. But the king told Jivaka that he must make the decoction without ghee because, ghee was abhorrent to him. Jivaka knew that the medicine could not be effective unless it were made with ghee. But he reasoned that the smell and color of the ghee could be changed by cooking it. He made a decoction, changing the color, the smell, and the taste of the ghee, and he added his medicines to it. Before giving medicine to the King, however, Jivaka got the king's permission to go out from and to return to the palace at any time he wished. Jivaka then gave the medicine to the servants so that it would be taken by the King, and at the same moment he fled from the palace riding on one of the King's elephants. Jivaka knew that the king couldn't control his anger. King Pajjota shouted in anger, saying "Wicked Jivaka has made me drink ghee. Go now and find Jivaka, and bring him to me." If Jivaka had been standing near the king, the king would have beaten or killed him. Jivaka knew the king's intention, and that is why he fled so quickly.

After a few days, the king recovered completely, and he sent a messenger to bring back Jivaka. When Jivaka approached the king, he praised him and gave him various kinds of gifts including a hundred pairs of clothes.

Once, when the venerable Ananda informed Jivaka that the supreme Buddha was not well, Jivaka went to see the Buddha. It occurred to Jivaka that it was not suitable to give a strong purgative to the Buddha. Instead he ground up three handfuls of lotuses and mixed them with various medicines.

The Buddha had only to smell the lotuses to make his bowels move. After a warm water bath, the Buddha was completely cured of his ailment. The discarded child then became a world famous doctor.