

## The Chinese Biography of Jīvaka, Buddhist King of Physicians

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### ABSTRACT

Jīvaka is a legendary physician frequently mentioned in Buddhist sources. Buddhist traditions from around Asia present him as a model healer and lay patron of the monastic order. The extant biographies can be divided into three relatively distinct streams of transmission (Pāli, Sanskrit-Tibetan, and Chinese), and regionally specific legends about Jīvaka have grown around this core narrative. While the other versions of the legend have been translated into English, the Chinese biography of Jīvaka has yet to be. Jīvaka's legend is found in Chinese in several different versions dating from the fourth to fifth centuries. The translation below is of the longer recension of the Chinese Jīvaka biography, called the *Āmrāpāli and Jīvaka Avadāna Sutra* (*Foshuo nainü Zhiyu yinyuan jing* 佛說棕女祇域因緣經), found in text number 553 of the *Taishō Tripiṭaka*.

**Keywords:** Chinese Buddhism, biography, Jīvaka, medicine, doctor, surgery, Āmrāpāli, goddess

Jīvaka Kumārabhṛta is a legendary physician frequently mentioned in Buddhist sources. Buddhist traditions from around Asia present him as a model healer and a lay patron of the monastic order. Extant in multiple languages, these stories invariably present him as an orphan who was raised in the royal household. When he comes of age, he studies medicine with a well-known master in the northwestern Indian city of Takṣaśīla, apprenticing with this teacher for a period of many years before returning back home. The biographies linger upon Jīvaka's travels and the healing adventures he has along the way, always

highlighting his generosity, his wondrous diagnostic abilities, and his skill in advanced abdominal and cranial surgeries.

Regionally specific legends about Jīvaka have grown around this core narrative. Among Jīvaka's patients were merchants and their wives, kings, and, in some versions, the Buddha himself. Different versions of the biography relate dozens of cases where Jīvaka heals patients using ghee, plants, and surgical procedures such as the opening of the abdominal and cranial cavities.

In the Theravāda tradition of Southeast Asia, the biography of Jīvaka is found in the eighth Khandhaka of the Mahāvagga section of the Pāli *Vinaya*, the monastic “basket of discipline.”<sup>1</sup> Other Pāli scriptures mention Jīvaka as the donor of a mango grove called Jīvakarama, which he donated for the use of the Buddha's order of monks as a retreat for the rainy season. He also on occasion is mentioned as a listener of the Buddha's preaching, including in one text named for him, the *Jīvaka Sutta*, a short text where the Buddha outlines how to be a model lay follower.<sup>2</sup>

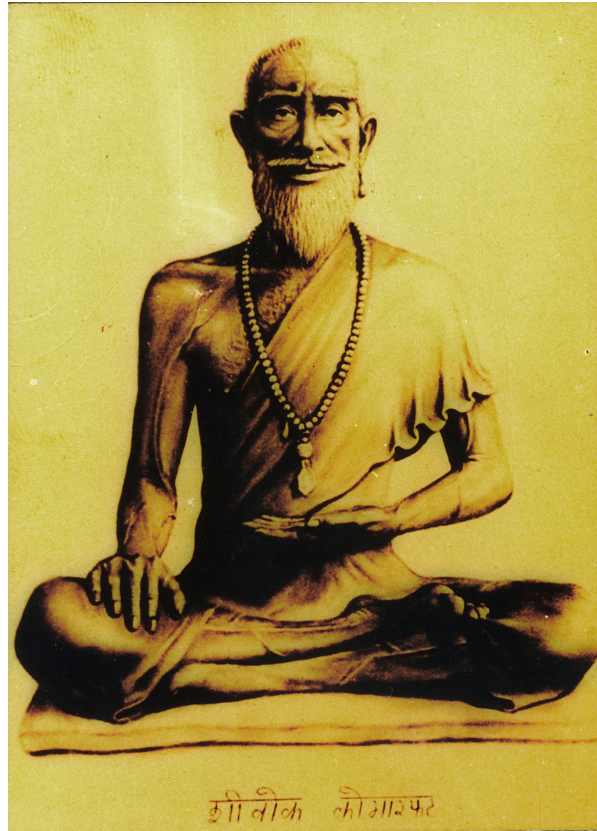
In Thailand since at least the early nineteenth century, Jīvaka has become something like the “patron saint” of traditional medicine. He is propitiated by patients to ensure a successful cure (see fig. 1) and is also viewed as a powerful spirit ally by traditional Thai healers, whose presence can be invoked in order to dispel disease and empower remedies.<sup>3</sup> Many practitioners of Thai healing arts believe that Jīvaka discovered traditional Thai herbal medicine, therapeutic massage, and

1. Translated in I.B. Horner, *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka)* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2000), 379–398. See discussion in Kenneth G. Zysk, “Studies in Traditional Indian Medicine in the Pāli Canon: Jīvaka and Āyurveda,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 5, no. 1 (1982): 70–86.

2. *Āṅguttara Nikāya* 8.26, translated in [https://www.dhammadata.org/suttas/AN/AN8\\_26.html](https://www.dhammadata.org/suttas/AN/AN8_26.html), last accessed Nov 11, 2023.

3. C. Pierce Salguero, *Traditional Thai Medicine: Buddhism, Animism, Yoga, Ayurveda*, 2nd ed. (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2016), 33–40; C. Pierce Salguero, “Honoring the Teachers, Constructing the Tradition: The Role of History and Religion in the Waikrū Ceremony of a Thai Traditional Medicine Hospital,” in *Translating the Body: Medical Education in Southeast Asia*, ed. Hans Pols, Michele Thompson, and John Harley Warner, pp. 295–318 (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2017); Anthony Irwin, “Making a Modern Image of Jīvaka: ‘First Encounters with Jīvaka Komārabhacca, the High Guru of Healers and the Inspiration for Sculpting His Image’ (1969),” in *Buddhism*

other healing practices himself and treat him as the progenitor of their lineage. Stories abound in the oral tradition about Jīvaka's teachings and travels in Thailand, although these are not found in the canonical Pāli literature. He is also attributed authorship of several texts in the traditional Thai medical corpus, particularly those connected with pediatrics.



**Fig. 1.** Thai icon of Jīvaka, purchased by Salguero in Bangkok in 1997. Artist unknown.

In other cultural contexts, Jīvaka's biography is extant in Sanskrit, embedded within the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* that was compiled

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& *Medicine: An Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Sources*, ed. C. Pierce Salguero, pp. 147–157 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

around the second century CE in northern India.<sup>4</sup> This version of the story especially focuses on his expertise in trephination, or the surgical opening of the skull. Jīvaka was also known along the Silk Roads later in the first millennium. A Khotanese and Sanskrit medical text attributed to him, the *Jivakapustaka*, was discovered at Dunhuang. Dating from the ninth or tenth centuries, this find demonstrates his importance as an authority in the medicine of this region.<sup>5</sup>

Looking elsewhere in Central Asia, the Tibetan version of the Jīvaka story closely parallels the Sanskrit.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, he is visually depicted in the Medicine Buddha mandala in the first *thangka* painting illustrating the *Blue Beryl* commentary written in the seventeenth to eighteenth century by Deśi Sangye Gyatso (see fig. 2).<sup>7</sup> Featured alongside other important figures from Buddhist and Āyurvedic medical traditions, this image iconographically cemented his status as a patriarch of the Tibetan medical tradition of Sowa Rigpa.

In East Asia, Jīvaka as known as Qipo 耆婆, Qiyu 祇域, or other combinations of characters that in the medieval period approximated the Sanskrit pronunciation. (Note that the King of Physicians is not to be confused with the second- to third-century monk or *luohan* 羅漢 who is also called Jīvaka.) While Sanskrit texts often refer to Jīvaka as a “royal physician,” in Chinese, this is often reversed to become the moniker “King of Physicians” (*yiwang* 醫王). Several medical formulas named after Jīvaka were compiled in medieval formularies by the famous doctor Sun Simiao, and his name thus appears in numerous medical texts from across East Asia.<sup>8</sup> Jīvaka’s legend is found in Chinese

4. Translated in Gregory Schopen, “The Training and Treatments of an Indian Doctor in a Buddhist Text: A Sanskrit Biography of Jīvaka,” in *Buddhism & Medicine: An Anthology of Premodern Sources*, ed. C. Pierce Salguero (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 184–204.

5. Chen Ming, *Dunhuang chutu huhua qipo shu yanjiu* 敦煌出土胡語《老婆書》研究 (A Study on Sanskrit Text of *Jivaka-Pustaka* from Dunhuang) (Hong Kong: Xinwen feng, 2005). See also *T. 620*, a fifth century text from Khotan that mentions Jīvaka multiple times.

6. Translated in F. Anton von Schiefner, *Tibetan Tales Derived from Indian Sources: Translated from the Tibetan of the Kah-Gyur* (London: Kegan Paul, 1906).

7. See [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Blue\\_Beryl-Medicine\\_Buddha.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Blue_Beryl-Medicine_Buddha.jpg), last accessed Nov. 11, 2023.

8. Chen Ming, “Qianjin fang zhong de ‘Qipo yiyao fang’ 《千金方》中的‘耆婆医药方,’” *Beijing ligong daxue xuebao (Shehui kexue ban)* 北京理工大学学报 (社会科学版) 5, no. 2 (2003): 91–96.



**Fig. 2.** Tibetan mandala of medical patriarchs, from the *Blue Beryl thangka*. Jīvaka is in the furthest upper right corner of the circle of figures. From Wikimedia Commons.

in several different versions dating from the fourth to fifth centuries, including both in independent texts (T. 553, 554) as well as embedded within the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* (T. 1428).

The extant biographies of Jīvaka can be divided into three relatively distinct streams of transmission: Pāli, Sanskrit-Tibetan, and Chinese. There are important differences between these, not only in terms of what therapies Jīvaka uses and who he treats, but also in details such as his parentage, his abandonment and adoption, his medical training, and other biographical details. Importantly, none of these three transmissions can be identified as the original that constitutes the basis for the others. It is likely that the story of Jīvaka was told orally for a long time, only to be written down in three different variations in different parts of Asia in the early centuries CE.

While the other versions of the legend have been translated into English, the Chinese biography of Jīvaka has yet to be.<sup>9</sup> Although historians have long considered this biography to be an example of the introduction of Indian medicine to China, the Jīvaka legend is more important as an example of the local processes of cultural translation that accompanied the Chinese reception of Indian religion and medicine.<sup>10</sup> The text mobilizes vocabularies and literary tropes from popular Chinese literature that effectively recast the hero as a miracle-healing “numinous doctor” (*shenyi* 神醫), along the likes of Bian Que 扁鵲 and Hua Tuo 華佗 and other luminaries of Chinese medical mythology. Notable details that help to make these connections include his divine parentage, the fact that he is born with acupuncture needles in his hands, his x-ray vision, and his infallible skill and cunning. Portraying the famous Buddhist healer in such a light was important to Buddhist proselytism in China. Consequently, the Jīvaka story became a well-known tale retold for centuries in China, and it still makes an occasional appearance in popular retellings to this day (see fig. 3).<sup>11</sup>

The translation below is of the longer recension of the Chinese Jīvaka biography, called the *Āmrapāli and Jīvaka Avadāna Sutra* (*Foshuo nainü Zhiyu yinyuan jing* 佛說棕女祇域因緣經), found in T. 553 of the *Taishō Tripitaka*.<sup>12</sup> The bibliographic details of the text are not reviewed here but have been treated extensively by one of the co-authors in a previous publication.<sup>13</sup> In sum it can be said that, while the translation is traditionally attributed to the second-century Parthian translator An Shigao 安世高 (fl. ca. 148 CE), it is more likely to be the product of

9. A French translation was done in Edouard Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues: Extraits du Tripitaka chinois et traduits en français*, vol. 3 (Paris: Librairie d’Amerique et d’Orient, 1962), 25–61.

10. C. Pierce Salguero, “The Buddhist Medicine King in Literary Context: Reconsidering an Early Example of Indian Influence on Chinese Medicine and Surgery,” *History of Religions* 48, no. 3 (2009): 183–210.

11. Lier Zheng, *Shejia de xiaohai zheme pi!* 誰家的小孩這麼皮！(Whose Brat Is That?) (Taipei: Fagu wenhua, 2006), 50–73.

12. The original Chinese is available at <https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T14n0553>, last accessed Nov. 11, 2023.

13. C. Pierce Salguero, “The Buddhist Medicine King in Literary Context: Reconsidering an Early Medieval Example of Indian influence on Chinese Medicine and Surgery,” *History of Religions* 48, no. 3 (2009): 183–210.

Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (fl. 266–317). An abbreviated version of this same text is available in T. 554, and an alternate version in T. 1428: 851–854. In the version of the biography translated here, Jīvaka’s story is combined with the story of the birth, rape, and past lives of his mother, Āmrāpālī, another legendary Buddhist figure alternately depicted as a courtesan, a goddess, or a combination of both. Subtitles have been added to the translation below to indicate the different sections of the text. The translation was completed by William Giddings, while this introduction was authored by Pierce Salguero.



**Fig 3.** Depiction of Jīvaka from a Taiwanese children’s book published by the Dharma Drum Buddhist organization. Artwork by Juzi.<sup>14</sup>

14. Zheng, *Shejia de xiaohai zheme pil*, 51.

### THE ĀMRAPĀLĪ AND JĪVAKA AVADĀNA SUTRA

Thus have I heard:

At one time, the Buddha was at Rājagṛha accompanied by a great gathering of 1,250 *bhikṣus*, *bodhisattva mahāsattvas*, *devas*, *nāgas*, and the other eight groups of non-humans. The mass gathering assembled there as the Dharma was to be discussed. It was a time when there were many people and countless donors. There was one poor man who only had a tattered hand towel which he wanted to donate but decided not to because it was disgusting.

#### [Āmrāpālī's Story]

Also there, sitting amongst them, was certain a *bhikṣuṇī* called Āmrāpālī. Getting up from where she sat, she arranged her robes and reverently approached the Buddha. Kneeling with [palms pressed together] and fingers crossed, she said:

“Bhagavat! I can remember a previous life in which I was born in Vārāṇasī as a destitute woman. It was during the time of a buddha named Kāśyapa. At the time I was in a gathering surrounding [him as he] spoke about the Dharma. As I listened to the transmission I was delighted and wanted to give [some form] of donation, but I was conscious that I had nothing to give, that I was too poor, and began to feel disheartened. I went straight to someone's garden to beg for some fruit that I could offer to that buddha.

“I got just a single mango. It was big and smelled good. So, I took a flask of water together with that piece of mango and presented it as an offering to Kāśyapa Buddha and the *saṃgha*. The Buddha understood my intention coming forward and accepted it as an expression of my vow. He then shared the water and mango with everyone else.

“On account of the blessings this generated, at the end of that life came birth as a *devī*, as the queen of the *devas*. Following that came birth in this world—but not from birth within a womb. After ninety-one eons of birth within a mango flower, perfect and pure, came the awareness of all those past existences that now lead me here, to the Bhagavat who has opened the eye of wisdom for me.”

Āmrāpālī then recited these verses:



The kindness of the Three Jewels is universal,  
 Its wisdom transcendent. There is no [difference between] man or  
 woman:

The effect of giving mere water and fruit,  
 Is the condition of being free from all miseries.

In this world, born in a flower,  
 And above, as the Queen of Heaven;  
 I take refuge in the sacred protectors,  
 A field of merit so deep and abundant.

Whereupon Āmrapālī *bhikṣuṇī* bowed, returned, and sat.

During the time of the Buddha [Śākyamuni] there was a single mango tree that had naturally grown in the garden of the king of Vaiśālī. With branches and leaves that were many and flourishing, its fruit was much larger than others [of its kind] and possessed a golden hue and an extraordinary fragrance. The king was fond of mango, so when he was not in the palace the nobles and ladies there were not allowed to take and eat the fruit of the mango tree.

In that country was a *brāhmaṇa* householder whose wealth was incalculable; there was no other like him in the entire country. Practical and capable, intelligent and insightful, [he was much] favored by the king and acted as a senior minister.

[At one time] the king invited this *brāhmaṇa* to dine and, as the dinner came to a close, he gave the [*brāhmaṇa*] a mango. As the *brāhmaṇa* looked at the extraordinarily fine scented mango, he asked the king: “Would it be possible to have a small twig, a cutting, from that mango tree?”

The king answered: “There is great a many such small twigs. I’m unsure which one as the tree is so big! I’ll just break one off. As this is what you want, I give it to you.” And so [the king] gave the mango twig to the *brāhmaṇa*.

The *brāhmaṇa* took it and planted it on his return. He watered it in the mornings and evenings, and day by day it grew bigger. It branched and flourished and, after three years, it bore fruit as big and beautiful as those of the royal mango. This made the *brāhmaṇa* very happy, and he thought to himself: “My family’s wealth is incalculable, no less than that of the king. It was only because I did not have that mango tree that I felt unequal. Now that I have one, I am like the king.”

He then took a fruit to eat, but it was very bitter and inedible. The *brāhmaṇa* became very upset, went away, but then thought: “It is because the soil is not fertile enough.”

So, he took the milk of a hundred cows and gave it to one cow to drink, then heated the milk from that single cow to make ghee. This was then used to water the roots of the mango tree. It was watered this way each day, and in the following year the fruit was beautiful and sweet, just like the royal mango. But then the side of the mango tree suddenly began to develop a lump, a burl. It was as big as a fist but grew bigger day by day. The *brāhmaṇa* then thought to himself: “This burl that has suddenly grown, it’s making me concerned over the fruit.”

He had the urge to cut it off but was then worried for the tree. He thought about it continuously for a day but eventually failed to make any decision. A branch then began to sprout from the burl. It grew upwards into a well-proportioned [trunk], shooting up to become the top of the tree and reaching seventy *vyāma* above the ground. The tip of this trunk then split into many smaller branches, the outside edges taking on the shape of an upturned canopy with its abundant leaves and flowers. [It looked so] much better than the rest of the tree. The *brāhmaṇa* marvelled at it, thinking: “I’m curious, what is on the top of the branches?”

So, he built a platform, climbed up, and took a look. He saw that in the upturned canopy at the top of the tree was a pool of water that was clear and fragrant along with a mass of vividly colored flowers. On spreading apart the flowers to see what was beneath them, there was a baby girl in the pool. The *brāhmaṇa* held the baby in his arms and carried her home. He fed and raised [the girl] and gave her the name *Āmrāpālī*.

By the time she was fifteen, *Āmrāpālī* was so beautiful that she was unequalled by anyone else in the world, something that was spoken of in distant countries. The kings of seven countries gathered at the same time at the home of the *brāhmaṇa* to propose marriage to the graceful *Āmrāpālī*, [as each desired] to take her as his wife.

The *brāhmaṇa* became very anxious as he didn’t know who to choose. So, he built a high tower in the middle of his garden, placed *Āmrāpālī* atop it, and then called out to the kings, saying: “This girl is not born of me; she spontaneously appeared at the top of my mango tree. I don’t know if she’s a *devī*, *nāginī*, or *yakṣiṇī*, or some kind of monster! You seven kings now present the same request, but if I side with one king, the others will be enraged. So, I dare not show any preference. The girl is now on top of the tower in my garden. You kings must calmly discuss this between yourselves; you decide who it will be, and I’ll let her go. It is not I who’ll decide.”

The seven kings then began to fight. [This created] confusion, and nothing was settled upon. When night fell, King Bimbisāra crept in through a ditch, climbed the tower, and spent the night there. At day-break [King Bimbisāra] was about to leave when Āmrāpālī said: “Great King! You took the chance of stripping me of my honor, you came to me, and now it appears that you want to desert me. If I were to have a child, it would be of royal seed, but who would it belong to?”

The king replied: “If you have a boy then it’s mine; if it’s a girl, it’s yours!”

The king then took a gold signet ring from off his finger and gave it to Āmrāpālī to serve as his bond. He then went outside and spoke to a group of his ministers, saying: “I spent the night with Āmrāpālī and took her. She is nothing special, and because she is just an ordinary woman there’s no reason [for me] to choose her.”

All of Bimbisāra’s soldiers shouted their hoorays and said: “Our king has already had Āmrāpālī!”

[When] the other six kings heard this, they returned, each of them [going their separate ways]. After King Bimbisāra had gone, [Āmrāpālī found that she] was pregnant. Āmrāpālī then gave instructions to the gatekeeper, saying: “If anyone comes to see me, then tell them I’m unwell.”

#### [Jīvaka’s Birth and Early Life]

The days and months passed and then, at full term, she gave birth to a well-proportioned and attractive boy. A child was born holding a bag of needles and medicines in its hand. The *brāhmaṇa* said: “This is the child of a king, and he is holding medical equipment. [He will] surely be the King of Physicians!”

After this, Āmrāpālī wrapped the baby in a white cloth and instructed a female slave to take him, to place him on the street and leave him there. At the same time Prince Abhaya had already set out upon his chariot with the intention to see the Great King [Bimbisāra] and directed others to go ahead and to clear the way. When, from a distance, the prince saw something white on the road, he stopped his chariot and asked a bystander, “What is that thing?”

The reply was: “It’s a small baby.”

[The prince] then asked: “Is it dead or alive?”

He was answered: “It’s alive.”

The prince then commanded that someone hold it carefully and find it a wet nurse to feed it because [the baby] was alive. The baby was then taken by a *brāhmaṇa* and returned to Āmrāpālī, whereupon he was given the name Jīvaka [lit. “one who is alive”].

On reaching the age of eight, [Jīvaka] was already clever, talented, and scholarly. His writing was exceptional, well beyond that of his peers. When he played with the local young boys, he always felt them to be measly children, and not the same as him. [Eventually] all the children sneered at him by saying: “Bastard, your mother’s a slut. How dare you look down on me.” Dumbfounded, Jīvaka never answered them back.

When he returned [home] he asked his mother: “I can tell that the other children are not like me, they are nasty and insult me, saying: ‘bastard.’ Where is my father? How could this happen?”

His mother said: “Your father? It is King Bimbisāra.”

Jīvaka said: “King Bimbisāra is in Rājagṛha; it is five hundred *yojanas* away! How come I was born? Mother, if what you say is true, how can I prove it?”

His mother took out the signet ring and showed to him, saying: “This is your father’s ring.”

Jīvaka looked at it closely and saw that it bore the text “Seal of King Bimbisāra.” Soon after, he took the ring and went straight to Rājagṛha.

Entering through the palace gates, there was no one there to challenge him, and he went straight before the king.

Approaching the king with respect, [Jīvaka] knelt and said: “I am the king’s son, born of Āmrāpālī. I am now eight years old and have learned that [I am of] the Great King’s line. I carry the signet ring [given] in trust and I have come a long way to join your family.”

The king looked at the inscription on the seal and recognized it as the token of his previous oath and accepted the boy as his son. Deeply moved and emotional, [Bimbisāra] proclaimed [the boy] his crown prince.

Two years went by after which the future King Ajātaśatru was born. This prompted Jīvaka to say to the king: “At the time I was born I held a bag of needles and medicines in my hand; on account of this, I should become a healer. Even though as king you made me crown prince, this has not made me happy. The king now has a rightful heir born of the queen. It is he who should be your heir as I wish to find training in the art of healing.”

The king listened and agreed. The king then said: “As you are no longer the crown prince, you cannot eat at the king’s expense for nothing. You must learn the ways of a healer.”

The king then ordered all the foremost physicians in his country to teach [Jīvaka] all their arts, but Jīvaka only wanted to play and have fun, never coming along to learn.

All the teachers became critical and said to him: “[Perhaps] the art of medicine is too petty and simple [for you]? It is certainly not a worthy study for a crown prince. However, we cannot disobey the Great King’s command. Since we first came here two months have already passed. From the outset the crown prince has not even remembered a half a sentence of these remedies! If the king were to ask us, how would we answer?”

Jīvaka said: “When I was born, I held the evidence of my becoming a healer in my hands. It was because of this that I said to the Great King that I relinquished my titles of honor in order to study the arts of healing. How could I have been neglectful all this while, to annoy my teachers to the point of scolding me! In fact, it’s because everything [I’ve] learned from all of you teachers is insufficient!”

He then took some classical texts on the use of medicinal herbs, needles, and pulse diagnosis, and then put some very difficult questions to his teachers, but the teachers were at a loss and without any answers. They all began to show Jīvaka respect and, with [palms pressed together] and fingers crossed, they said: “We now fully understand that the prince has extraordinary talent and, truly, we are not your equal. The questions on the topics presented to us identified those problems that our teachers couldn’t solve for generations. Please, Prince, explain everything to us, unravel a knot that has perplexed us for many years.”

Jīvaka then began to explain what was meant. All the physicians were satisfied and arose, bowed their heads in respect, and accepted this resolution.

#### *[Medical Training]*

At that moment Jīvaka thought to himself: “The king commissioned so many physicians, but I learned nothing; who can teach me, training me in the ways of a physician? I have heard that in the country of Takṣaśīla there is a healer from a family called Ātreya, whose

name is Punarvasu [i.e., the reputed originator of the Āyurvedic classic, *Caraka-Saṃhitā*], someone extremely good in the ways of a physician—he can teach me!”

So, then young Jīvaka went to that country, approached Punarvasu, and said: “Great teacher! I ask you, sir, for your direction.”

After training in the healing arts for seven years, he thought to himself: “I am still training and practicing healing, when will I finish?” So, he went to his teacher and asked: “I’m still learning the art of healing, when will I be finished?”

His teacher then handed to him a basket and other tools, including a trowel for uprooting herbs, [and said:] “You are to go ahead for one *yojana* around Takṣaśīla, examine all the plants there, and bring back a sample of all those that have no medicinal use.”

Jīvaka then did as his teacher instructed. He went straight out into Takṣaśīla for a distance of one *yojana*, looking for anything without medicinal properties. In the end, he did not find anything that could not be used medicinally. Every plant and tree that he saw, he could easily distinguish its properties and usage—there was nothing that had no medicinal value.

Obtaining nothing, he returned to where his teacher was and said: “Teacher, you know that I went out into Takṣaśīla to find herbs with no medicinal value; I travelled out for a *yojana*, but in the end I did not see anything that was not medicinal. Whatever plant or tree I saw, I distinguished them all and their usage.”

The teacher answered Jīvaka, saying: “You can now go, your knowledge of the ways of healing is complete. In Jambudvīpa I am foremost, but after my death, you will be my successor.”

From then Jīvaka began his career curing illness and, as those he treated recovered, he became renowned throughout the realm.

A while after, he wanted to enter the palace, but in front of the palace gate happened to be a small boy carrying firewood. As he looked upwards, Jīvaka could see the boy’s five solid organs, intestines, and stomach, all of which he could distinguish clearly. Jīvaka then thought: “A text on essential herbs talked of a tree, the King of Medicines, which reveals what is inside to the outside, [allowing one] to see the internal organs of someone. Could what this boy is carrying be something from the King of Medicines?”

He approached the boy and asked: “Is the wood for sale? How many *kārṣāpaṇas* [would you take]?”

The boy said: “Ten.”

So, he handed over the *kārṣāpaṇas* for the firewood. He put the firewood on the ground, but things became obscured, as Jīvaka could no longer see inside [the boy's] abdomen. Jīvaka then began to think: "I don't know, is there anything from the King of Medicines in the bundle?"

So, he opened the two bundles and took each piece one by one and touched them upon the boy's belly. Jīvaka continued to see nothing as he went further. He worked his way through both bundles of firewood until he tried the very last small piece, a twig no longer than two *vitasti* long, whereupon everything was illuminated, and he could clearly see the insides of the [boy's] abdomen.

Jīvaka was overjoyed as he knew that this was certainly a small twig of King of Medicines, so he gave all the other firewood back to the boy. As the boy had already gotten the money and [also got back] the firewood, he left happy indeed.

Then Jīvaka thought to himself: "Who shall I now heal? This country is small and on the borderlands. I would rather go back to the country where I came from and start practicing medicine [there]."

*[Jīvaka's First Cure: Nasal Irrigation]*

As he was going back, Jīvaka passed through the city of Sāketa. In the city of Sāketa there was an important householder whose wife had been suffering from continuous headaches for twelve years. Many physicians had treated her but couldn't change anything. When Jīvaka heard about this, he went straight to their home and said to the gatekeeper: "Tell your master that a healer is standing outside his gate."

The gatekeeper entered and said: "There is a healer outside the gate."

The householder's wife asked: "What does this healer look like?"

He answered: "Quite young."

She thought to herself: "Healers with many years of experience have treated me and it made no difference, what can someone so young do?" She then told the gatekeeper: "I don't want a healer right now."

The gatekeeper left and said: "I have spoken to my master and the master's wife said that she doesn't want a healer right now."

Jīvaka then said: "Could you tell your master's wife that if she follows my treatment and matters change [for the better, then she need only] reward me as [she considers] appropriate?"

The gatekeeper returned and said: “The healer said that if [his] treatment is followed and matters change [for the better, then only] reward [him] as [you consider] appropriate.”

After the householder’s wife heard this, she thought to herself: “If that’s the case, what is there to lose?” She then instructed the gatekeeper to call him in. Jīvaka went to where the householder’s wife was and asked: “What are you suffering with?”

She answered, saying: “What ails me is like this...” and “it’s like that....”

He next asked: “What triggers this condition?”

She replied saying: “It starts when...” and “whenever....”

He next asked: “Did this illness start recently or some time ago?”

She answered: “I’ve been ill with this for quite some time.”

After asking all these questions, Jīvaka said: “I can cure you.”

He then made an efficacious treatment with ghee and drizzled it into the woman’s nose. [The blockage causing] her illness began to dissolve [and drain] into her mouth, which she then spat out [into a bowl]. The patient then took the bowl and proceeded to separate the ghee from the spittle, which she then threw away. When Jīvaka saw her do this he was he was disheartened and thought: “It’s only just a small amount of ghee that’s dirty. If she is so stingy, how will she reward me?”

His patient saw [his reaction] and asked Jīvaka: “What’s upset you?”

He answered: “That.”

She then asked: “Why would this upset you?”

He replied: “I was thinking to myself, that was just a little dirty ghee. If you are so frugal, how would you reward me? This is why I’m upset.”

The householder’s wife answered: “It’s not easy keeping a household, what’s the point of throwing [this ghee] away? Lamps need to be filled; this is why I gathered it. You should just treat my illness, why bother yourself like this?”

So, he continued the treatments, after which her condition improved. In time, the householder’s wife gave him forty thousand gold *kārṣāpaṇas*, one male slave, one female slave, and a horse and chariot.

Then, after Jīvaka had obtained all these things he returned to Rājagrha and went straight to the gates of Prince Abhaya’s residence and said to the gatekeeper: “You go and tell the prince that Jīvaka is outside.”



The gatekeeper went and spoke to the prince. The prince instructed the gatekeeper to invite him in. After Jīvaka entered, he bowed his head in respect and moved to one side and explained to Prince Abhaya his past circumstances, and then said: “Everything that I have since obtained, I give to the prince.”

The prince said: “Stop, don’t! Although you may offer it, this is for your own use.”

This was the first cure that Jīvaka ever did.

*[Second Cure: Abdominal Surgery for Intestinal Blockage]*

Next, in Kauśāmbī, a son of a householder was playing the game “top the wheel,” which caused his bowels to become knotted internally such that whatever he ate and drank did not pass through. No one in the country could cure it. They heard that in Magadha there was a great physician, a capable healer of diseases, and sent someone to give this message to the king: “The son of the householder of Kauśāmbī is ill. As Jīvaka can cure him, please could the king send him to us!”

So, King Bimbisāra called Jīvaka and asked: “The householder of Kauśāmbī has a son who is ill, can you cure him?”

Jīvaka replied: “I can.”

[The king said:] “As you can, then you should go and treat him.”

Whereupon Jīvaka went straight to Kauśāmbī, riding in a chariot.

Just as Jīvaka was about to arrive, the son of the householder [appeared to be] dead, and music was being played as his body was being taken out. Jīvaka heard the sounds and asked: “Why is there the sound of drumming and music?”

Someone standing close by answered, saying: “You have arrived after the householder’s son died, this is why there’s the sound of this music.”

Somehow Jīvaka could distinguish what each of these sounds meant, and suddenly said: “Go back! This person is not dead!”

As soon as this was said, he was returned. Jīvaka then got down from the chariot and proceeded to choose a scalpel and make an incision into [the man’s] abdomen, which exposed a knot in the intestines, and this was shown to the parents. He then said, “Playing the game ‘top the wheel’ caused his intestines to bulge out like this. Even though he is not digesting food and drink, he is not dying.”

[Jīvaka] then released the intestines and moved them back into their original place, sutured the flesh and skin, applied a suitable

ointment, and allowed the wound to heal. A while later, body hairs began to grow back. There was no abscessing nor any complication.

The son of the householder then gave Jīvaka 400,000 gold *kārṣāpaṇas*, the son's wife 400,000 gold *kārṣāpaṇas*, with the householder and his wife doing the same—each giving a further 400,000 gold *kārṣāpaṇas*.

Jīvaka thought to himself: “My teacher must be rewarded with kindness. I will now take these 160,000 gold *kārṣāpaṇas* and give them to the great teacher Punarvasu in Takṣaśīla.”

After thinking this he took the gold straight to his teacher. He bowed at the foot of the teacher, held up the gold, and said: “Please, great teacher, kindly accept this gift!”

His teacher said: “This [gold that you are] offering, I do not need such wealth.”

Jīvaka was ardent until Punarvasu accepted the gold, after which Jīvaka bade farewell, bowed at his feet, and left.

*[Third Cure: Cranial Surgery]*

At that time, in the kingdom, there was the daughter of a noble family who was now fifteen years of age. On the day she was to marry she experienced sudden pains in the head and [appeared to be] dying. When Jīvaka heard about this he went straight to their house and asked the girl's father: “What illness does the girl have? What might be causing her to die so young?”

The father said: “Our daughter has experienced headaches since she was little. Over the days and months, they've gotten worse. This morning it began again only to get stronger and continuous until she passed out.”

Jīvaka promptly came forward and used the King of Medicines to reveal inside her head. He saw maggots gnawing: a hundred or so big ones and small ones, living together, eating away at her brain. Were her brain consumed any further, it would cause death. By means of a golden scalpel the head was opened; all the larvae were removed and put into a sealed clay pot. He then applied three sorts of ointment: one to heal the bone damage caused by feeding of the worms, one to revitalize the brain, and one to heal the external wound cause by the scalpel.

[Jīvaka] said to the girl's father: “Let her rest and be careful not to disturb her. After ten days she will have begun healing and will return to normal. On that day I will come back.”

After Jīvaka had gone, the girl's mother then began to cry even more and said: "My child will die all over again! How could anyone who has had their head and brain split open still live! How could any father let someone who just comes along do this to their child!"

The father stopped her, saying: "When Jīvaka was born he was holding needles and medicines. He later gave up the privileges of his rank in order to become a master physician for the sake of all others. It is his destiny to become the King of Physicians. So, how could this be possible?"

"He gave you instructions, saying: 'Take care not to disturb her.' But now you are howling and crying! This could upset her and result in our child never regaining her life!"

The mother heeded what the father has said and stopped. [She] did not cry again. They cared for and fed [their daughter], but she remained motionless for seven [sic] days.

On the seventh day, just as the day was breaking, the girl heaved, became conscious, and said: "I no longer feel any headache; my body is quite comfortable. Who helped me to become like this?"

Her father said: "You were at the point of dying, but Jīvaka the king of physicians came and saved you. He operated on your head and removed maggots, and then you recovered."

The pot that contained the maggots was opened, and when the girl saw them, she was shocked and horrified, but also delighted with being so fortunate. She said: "Jīvaka has worked a miracle! We must ensure that he gets rewarded for his kindness."

Her father said: "Jīvaka told me that he would be coming back today."

At the very moment Jīvaka arrived the girl was overjoyed and walked outside the gate to greet him. She bent her head in respect, knelt, and with palms pressed together pleaded, "Please, Jīvaka, let me become your slave, till the end of my life [I will] serve you, in gratitude for saving my life."

Jīvaka answered: "I am a healer, I go around healing the sick and have no permanent home, what use is a slave to me? If you wish to reward this kindness, then give me five hundred gold *kārṣāpaṇas*. I do not need the gold, but there is a reason. Every man who trains in an art must thank their teachers. Although my teacher no longer teaches me, I am forevermore his disciple. Any gold obtained from you would be given to him."

With both hands the girl held up 500 gold *kārṣāpaṇas* and passed them on to Jīvaka.

After accepting them he gave them to his teacher. He then said to the king: “I will return to Vaiśālī to spend some time with my mother.”

*[Fourth Cure: Abdominal Surgery for Dislocated Liver]*

At that time there was in the country the son of noble family who enjoyed training in the martial arts. As he was still learning how to mount horses, he built a wooden horse that was more than seven feet high and used it every day for training. Eventually he could mount a horse, and, over time, he became quite adept at it. But then he suddenly made a mistake, lost his grip, fell to the ground, and [appeared to be] lifeless.

When Jīvaka heard about this he went immediately, and the King of Medicine allowed him to see inside the abdomen. He saw that the liver had shifted and was facing backwards. As the flow of qi was blocked, this would be a cause of death. [Jīvaka] then took a golden scalpel to open the abdomen and, using his hands, made an internal examination, turned the liver to face forwards, and closed it up. He then applied three sorts of ointment: one to heal the places where the hands had touched, one to balance the circulation of the qi and breath, and one to mend the wound caused by the scalpel. When finished he said to the father: “Be cautious and do not cause him any disturbance. In three days, he will be recovered.”

The father complied with these instructions and quietly nursed and watched [over his son]. During the third day the lad heaved and woke up. Then, like someone just awaking up from sleep, he began to sit up. Jīvaka arrived a short while after, and the delighted son went outside the gates to welcome him. He then bowed his head in respect, knelt, and said: “Please, Jīvaka, let me become your slave, till the end of my life to serve you, in gratitude for giving me back my life.”

Jīvaka answered: “I am a healer and I go around healing the sick. The families of all those who are ill pledge to serve me, but what use have I for slaves? My mother raised me and endured much, but I have not yet rewarded the kindness of my mother in raising me. If you wish to thank and reward me in kindness, then give me 500 gold *kārṣāpaṇas* in order to reward my mother for her kindness.”

So, he took the gold, offered it to Āmrapālī, and then returned back to Rājagṛha.

Curing these four people made Jīvaka famous throughout the world; [there was] no one who had not heard of him.

*[Fifth Cure: Ghee for the King]*

[At this time] there was a large country, [Avanti,] which lay some eight thousand *yojanas* south of Rājagṛha, to which King Bimbisāra and the [kings] of the other smaller countries [in the region] were vassals. King [Caṇḍapadyota of Avanti] was ill for many years without any change. He was always irate, miserable, and bitter and had an angry glare. Anyone he stared at could be executed; anyone who had the temerity to raise their eyes and just look at him could be executed. Even those who held their heads down too, were [sometimes] butchered. Walking too slowly had gotten someone slaughtered, and someone else was killed for running quickly. Those serving around him did not know where to put their hands and feet.

Whenever a physician mixed a medicine for the king, he would suspect them of trying to poison him and so have them executed. He had already slaughtered countless ministers, courtesans, and physicians of all sorts. This affliction got worse day by day. [It was as though] something poisonous was burning away at his heart. He was depressed and dispirited, as though a fire was burning away in his body.

When the king heard of Jīvaka an order to King Bimbisāra was written and sent—it was a summons for Jīvaka to attend on him. Jīvaka was very afraid and apprehensive since he had heard that this king had executed so many healers. Bimbisāra was sympathetic because [Jīvaka] was young, and [was also] fearful of him being killed. He did not want to send Jīvaka but then neither did he want to see his son punished as a result. The father and son were both stuck. They worried about this by day and night and did not know what else to do.

So, then King Bimbisāra took Jīvaka to see the Buddha. In respect [Jīvaka] bowed and touched his face to the Buddha's feet and said: "Bhagavat, this king has an evil disposition and kills his physicians out of fear. Should I attend upon him?"

The Buddha told Jīvaka: "In a past life both you and I made the vow to come to the aid of everyone in the world. I would cure their inner

afflictions and you their outer illnesses. Now I am the Buddha. This is because of that original wish for me to be born in the future.

“This king is ill, far away, and has instructed you to come. So why haven’t you gone? Go to his aid, quickly! [But,] take your time determining the best method of treatment and then, for sure, the illness will be cured, and the king will not kill you.”

Jīvaka then became infused with such strength and certainty obtained from being in the presence of the Buddha that he went directly to the king. He took the king’s pulses, and through the illuminating power of the King of Medicines he saw that the king’s five organs, one hundred veins, the blood within them, and their vital energies were in disorder. It was as though the venom of a snake, a *mahoraga*, was circulating throughout his entire body.

Jīvaka said to the king: “The king’s condition is treatable. The treatment will bring recovery, but I will need suitable [permission] to see the queen mother to discuss the blending of the medicines. If I am not able to meet with the queen mother, then the medicines will not be effective.”

When he heard this said the king did not understand why. As he thought about it, he became angry. But, he was ill. He had heard of Jīvaka’s reputation and so invited him even though he was far away. [The king’s] expectations were high and he bore no grudge, so he would tolerate what he had just heard. [The king] then instructed a female servant and eunuch to take [Jīvaka] to meet the queen mother.

Jīvaka told the queen mother: “The king’s condition can be cured, but now we need to blend the medicines. The contents are secret and cannot be divulged with anyone else around.”

The queen mother then dismissed her female attendants and the eunuch. Jīvaka then said to the queen mother: “On examining the king’s condition I saw that within his body, blood, and vital energies is the venom of a snake, a *mahoraga*; it is due to something inhuman. Whose son is the king, exactly? If, Queen Mother, I am told the truth then I can cure this. If I am not told, then the king will never recover from this condition.”

The queen mother replied: “A long time ago I went for an afternoon nap in a room with golden columns when suddenly something dreadful was on top of me. I was transfixed. It was like a dream, but I was still awake. It was a nightmare! [I then] felt it enter me. I suddenly woke up, and then I saw a giant snake; it was more than 30 *vyāma* long.

As it slid away from being on top of me, I then realized that there was something inside my body. The king is the child of that serpent for certain. This is something I am ashamed of, [and what I have just said] has not left my lips until now. Young man, you had an inkling of this, that is miraculous! If his condition can be remedied then I want the king's life to be entrusted to you, young man. Now, this cure, what medicines are to be used?"

Jīvaka said: "All that is necessary is ghee."

The queen mother said: "What?! Young man, be careful. Do not ever suggest ghee [to the king]! The king loathes the smell of it. It makes him angry. He even loathes hearing the sound of the word ghee. [Up to now] those who have even mentioned ghee are dead; that's many hundreds of thousands of people. If you were to suggest that now, then you will be slaughtered. If you give the king any to drink, it will never go down. I wish that you could use some other medicine."

Jīvaka said: "Ghee is the antidote to this venom. The venom is what's causing this condition and his loathing the smell of ghee. If the king's condition was caused by some other poison, then some other form of medicine could be used as a curative. This snake venom is severe and has already [spread] everywhere in his body; I can't use anything other than ghee to absorb it. Right now, we need to simmer and clarify [butter] so that it becomes a liquid that is both tasteless and odourless."

He then left and went to see the king, and he said: "I have met with the queen mother and have already explained to her the course of treatment. Right now, she is preparing it and will finish in fifteen days' time. I now have five requests. If the king does what I ask, then the condition will be cured. If [the king] does not do as I ask, then the condition cannot be cured."

The king asked: "What exactly are the five things that you want me to do?"

Jīvaka said: "One: I wish to have new clothing from the royal wardrobe that has not yet touched your body.

"Two: I wish to be permitted to come and go freely, to do as I wish, without censure.

"Three: I wish to meet with the queen mother and the queen daily and alone, without refusal or criticism.

"Four: I wish the king to drink the medicine up completely in one go, without any hesitation midway.

“And, five: I wish to have access to the king’s ‘Eight Thousand Yojana’ white elephant, so that I can ride upon it.”

The king listened, became very angry, and said: “Boy! How dare you make such requests as these five wishes! Be quick, explain yourself! If you cannot explain this then I’ll have you clubbed to death! How dare you ask for my new clothing?! Is it because you want to kill me, that you want dress up in my clothes and pretend to be me!”

Jīvaka said: “The mixing of medicines requires skill, cleanliness, and purification. I started coming here many days ago, and so my clothes are dusty and dirty. I wish to have some clothes from the king in order to prepare the medicines.”

This was an explanation the king understood, and he said: “Just so, excellent! Why do you want permission to come and go through the palace gates as you please, without any challenge?! Is it because you want soldiers to come here to attack and kill me?!”

Jīvaka answered: “The king has already expended many healers; he has doubted and detested them all, did not trust [any one of] them, and killed them all without taking any of their medications. Various ministers have said that the king would execute me next. So, as your condition is severe, I was afraid that other people might become minded to [start] making trouble. If you permit me to come and go as I wish, without encountering any prohibition or challenge, outsiders both great and small will all know that the king trusts me, is certain to take my medicines, and that his condition is curable. They will not venture to give rise to any ideas of sedition and the breakdown of order.”

The king said: “Excellent! Why do you want to meet my mother and my wife alone each day?! Do you want to cause a scandal?!”

Jīvaka said: “So far, the king has slaughtered many people. Your subjects, whether great or small, are all terrified. No one else can be trusted because none of them care about the king’s well-being and safety. When this medicine is being mixed there may be a moment when I have to look elsewhere, and poison may be thrown in. I wouldn’t be aware of it, and it would be no small issue. When I think about those who can be trusted, there are no others; there is only your mother and your wife. This is why I need to go and meet with the queen mother and the queen; together we will mix the medicine. And then, because these will then need to simmer for fifteen days until ready, I need to come in each day to ensure that the fire is even.”



The king said: “Excellent! But why do you want, when I drink the remedy, to drink it in one gulp and without stopping in the middle? Isn’t it because you want to put poison in it, and that you fear that I will notice it!?”

Jīvaka answered: “The medicine is a blend of a number of things in which the odors and flavors work together; if there is any pause midway, then the odors will not remain combined and effective.”

The king said: “Excellent! Why do you want to have my elephant and ride it?! This elephant is the jewel of my country and can, in just one day, walk eight thousand *yojanas*. I depend upon this elephant to keep all the other countries under my control. This desire to ride him, is it because you want to steal and return home with it, and then with your father attack my realm?!”

Jīvaka said: “Upon the mountains in the southern regions is found a miraculous herb; this is four thousand *yojanas* away from here. When the king drinks the medicine this herb will be needed. It is an important part of the treatment. My purpose in riding this elephant is to [go and] collect it. I can leave in the morning and return by evening. In that way the taste of the herb will be consistent.”

The king understood this well and permitted every [request].

Jīvaka then began to heat and clarify the ghee, which was ready after fifteen days. After it was converted, five *prasthas* of clear liquid was obtained. Then, accompanied by the queen mother and the queen, he carried out the medicine held between both hands [and presented it] to the king, saying: “This can now be taken. Please have the white elephant brought to the front of the palace.”

The king complied [with the request]. When the king saw that it was as clear as water, with neither any odor nor taste, he did not realize that it was ghee. Moreover, as the queen mother and the queen had been there in person, he was confident that it was not poisoned and so, as previously required, drank it all in one go.

Jīvaka then mounted the elephant and headed straight back to Rājagrha. By the time Jīvaka had travelled three thousand *yojanas*, the age of Jīvaka and his lack of physical strength were such that he became travel sick and his head woozy. Exhausted, he stopped in order to sleep.

Just after midday, the king belched and smelt the stench of ghee. This made him very angry, and he said: “That kid dared to fill me with ghee! I wondered why he wanted to use my white elephant, it’s because he wants to betray me.”

Amongst the king's vassals was a fighter called Kāka, "The Crow." He had a miraculous walking ability that matched that of the elephant. The king summoned Kāka and said: "You chase after that kid and bring him back! He must be alive though, because I want to see him clubbed to death in front of me. Your nature has always been brash and greedy for food, this why you are called 'The Crow.' This healer is the sort that is very happy to use poison. So be careful, if the kid offers you some sort of food, just don't eat it!"

The Crow had received his orders and set out. He soon caught up with Jīvaka in the mountains, and said: "Why did you give the king ghee? How can you say that's medicine?! This is why the king ordered me to chase after you and bring you back. You will return with me, right now! If you confess your guilt and surrender, there is some hope of living. But, if you want to carry on fleeing then I will kill you right now for sure, as you'll never escape from me."

Jīvaka thought to himself: "I managed to find a way to get the white elephant, but now I can't escape. What trick can I now do? Why should I go with him?"

So, he asked The Crow: "I have not eaten since this morning. As I'm certainly returning to die, do you mind if I have a moment so that I can, while we are still in the mountains, chew on a few fruits and drink some water? When I'm full then I'll die."

The Crow saw that Jīvaka was still a lad, afraid of dying and terrified. As Jīvaka spoke, his words were troubled. When he heard this The Crow took pity on him, and said: "Eat quickly, we can't stay much longer."

Jīvaka then took a pear and ate a half. [He] then spread upon the other half a [powerful] purgative herb with [the tops of] his fingernails and then placed it on the ground. Next, he took a cup water, first drank half of it and then moved his fingertips in the remainder of the water, and again put it on the ground.

He then sighed and said: "This water and pear are celestial tonics; they are fragrant and are pleasing. Drinking and eating these makes for a healthy body. They are the remedy for a hundred ills, and they double one's strength! It's a shame that these aren't available in the capital as everyone there could then share in it. They don't know about such things because they're only found here, deep in the mountains."

[Jīvaka] then went straight back onto the mountain to search for and gather other fruits.

The Crow was greedy by nature and could not resist any food and drink. Added to this, he just heard Jīvaka praising these as “celestial tonics” and noticed that Jīvaka had just finished eating and drinking them. He thought that it couldn’t possibly be poisoned, so took the leftover part of the pear and ate it and finished drinking the rest of the water.

It gave him diarrhea—diarrhea that ran like water. He dropped to the ground and lay down. He tried getting up but was still dizzy and dropped back. He couldn’t budge.

Jīvaka said to him: “The king will have taken my medicine, and his condition will be cured. Right now, though, the action of the medicine will not have circulated fully and the poison within him not yet completely eliminated. If I were to go to him now, he’d kill me for sure. You did not know this, and your determination to find me is because of your commitment to duty. This is why I’ve made you ill, but this sickness is harmless. Take care not to move about as you’ll stagger for three days. If you get up and start to chase after me, it would kill you for sure.”

He then climbed onto the elephant and left. Jīvaka then passed through a market village and said to the section commander [stationed there]: “Back there is a messenger from King [Caṇḍapradya]. At the moment he has a sudden illness. You should go and carry him back home. Take good care of him, let him have a raised bed with a straw mat, give him congee, and take care that he doesn’t die. If he does die, the king [Caṇḍapradya] will have your country destroyed.”

After he said this, he left and returned home [to Magadha]. The section commander carried out the instructions to find and care for [The Crow]. After three days the effects of the purgative wore off and the Crow started back. When [The Crow] saw the king, he kowtowed and excused himself, saying: “I was deceived into failing to follow the king’s command. I believed what Jīvaka said to me. I ate and drank his leftover fruit and water. Whatever was in it caused me to come down with diarrhea for three days. I’ve only just started to recover; I know that I am to die.”

During the three days it took The Crow to return the king’s condition had change completely. King [Caṇḍapradya] had become considerate and regretted sending The Crow out in pursuit. On seeing The Crow return, [the king] was sympathetic and happy, and said: “[I] trusted you but the lad was not brought back; if you had, it would

have been when I was still angry and [I] certainly would have had him clubbed to death. I ought to have rewarded him and not wanted to take his life. If he was killed, then this would go against that is everything good.”

The king then felt grief and remorse about all those who he had wrongly killed in the past. He gave them all a lavish funeral and provided their families with cash and property. [The king] thought about seeing Jīvaka [again] as he wanted to thank Jīvaka for all that he’d done. So, he sent a messenger to invite Jīvaka back.

Although Jīvaka knew that the king had recovered from his condition, nonetheless he was still apprehensive and had no desire to return. Jīvaka then went straight to the Buddha and touched feet in respect. He then said to the Buddha: “Bhagavat! The king has sent a messenger asking me to return, should I go or not?”

The Buddha told Jīvaka: “In a past life you made a great vow, one accumulating merit; how can you stop midway? You should go now. You have already treated his external condition, so I will treat his inner malaise.”

Jīvaka then returned with the messenger. When the king saw Jīvaka he was very happy indeed and invited Jīvaka to sit next to him. The king took hold of Jīvaka’s arm and said: “I am deeply grateful for the benefits received from your compassion. I now have my life back. How can I ever reward you? Let me split my realm and give you half, along with palace courtesans and half of my treasury and wealth. Please, I hope that your good self will accept it.”

Jīvaka said: “I was once a crown prince. Even though it was of a small country, it was well populated and endowed with prosperity. I was not content to control a country because I wanted to become a healer. My career is to cure illness. What would I do with land, courtesans, and wealth? It’s all of no use to me. The king previously granted five wishes and his external illness was cured. If you grant me one more wish, then your internal malaise would also be healed.”

The king replied: “Just tell me and I’ll do as you ask. Please, I’d like to hear what it is you wish for!”

Jīvaka said: “I wish that the king would invite the Buddha here and that you get to understand his teachings.”

He then told the king of the Buddha’s meritorious qualities and majesty. Hearing about this made the king very happy, and he said: “If I now send The Crow and the white elephant to welcome the Buddha here, would he accept?”

Jīvaka answered: “There is no need for the white elephant. The Buddha understands everything. Although far away, he knows the thoughts in the minds of others. If you fast and are pure for a night, burn incense, pay respects to the Buddha from afar, and while kneeling request him to come, then the Buddha will come himself.”

The king did as was said. Whereupon the Buddha arrived the following morning accompanied by 1,250 *bhikṣus*. After eating, he spoke to the king about his teachings. Then the king’s mind opened up and he began to develop thoughts about unsurpassed complete awakening. And then the people of the country, from great to small, [came to] accept and uphold the five ethical and moral precautions, paid their respects, bowed, and left.

[*Āmrapālī, Sumana, and Padma*]

Not only was the birth of *Āmrapālī* something rare, but she also grew up to be clever, had a good understanding of the teachings, and [her knowledge of] the movements of the stars surpassed that of her father. Moreover, she could sing with a voice like that of a *brahmadevī*. The daughters of many noble and *brāhmaṇa* families, altogether some five hundred girls, came to study with her. Because of this she became a great teacher.

*Āmrapālī* was always accompanied by these five hundred disciples, and she gave them teachings in [various] ways. Sometimes they would go together to enjoy her park and its pool, and to sing. There were those in that country who did not understand the reason for this; they started to slander and defame [*Āmrapālī*], calling her “the courtesan” and her five disciples the “gang of sluts.”

When *Āmrapālī* was born, two other daughters were born in that country at the same time; they were *Sumana* and *Padma*. *Sumana* was born amongst flowers of a *sumana* shrub. There was in this country a noble family whose [trade was] pressing *sumana* flowers in order to extract their aromatic oils. Unexpectedly, a burl, a lump, appeared on the side of one of the stones they used. [At first] it was as big as a pellet but then, day by day, it grew bigger. When it became as big as a clenched fist the stone suddenly broke apart and there, within the pieces of stone, a glow could be seen like that of a firefly. It then shot out and sank into the ground. After three days a *sumana* shrub then sprouted, and after a further three days it flowered. When the flowers were fully open, amongst them was a tiny baby girl. The *kulapati* [family] took her

in and raised her. They called her Sumana. As she grew, she became very beautiful, capable, and clever, second only to Āmrapālī.

At the same time as this there was a *brāhmaṇa* family in whose bathing pool a blue lotus suddenly appeared. The flower stood alone and grew bigger. Day by day it grew more and more, until it was as big as a five-*prasthas* pot. When the flower opened a [baby] girl could be seen at its center. The *brāhmaṇa* [family] took her in and raised her. They called her Padma. As [Padma] grew up she also became beautiful, capable, and clever, just like Sumana.

The kings of the [neighboring] countries heard of the matchless beauty of the two girls and got together to come and ask for them in marriage. However, both of the girls said: “I was not born of any womb but came from within a flower. I am not like any other ordinary girl. What need is there for me to follow the ways of worldly people and wed?”

When they heard about Āmrapālī, of her intelligence, that she had no family or forebears, that there was no suitable match for her, and that they she was born in the same way, they left their parents and went to serve Āmrapālī. They wanted to become her disciples, to understand the wisdom of her teachings and become foremost amongst the five hundred [daughters].

There was a time when the Buddha was on his approach to Vaiśālī and Āmrapālī took the opportunity to lead her five hundred disciples out to welcome the Buddha. She bowed in respect, knelt, and said: “Please, we wish the Buddha to come to our park and eat lunch tomorrow.”

The Buddha accepted in silence. Āmrapālī then returned and started preparing their offerings. But, just as the Buddha was entering the city, the king came out of his palace to welcome the Buddha. After the ceremonials had finished, the king knelt and asked the Buddha: “Please, we wish the Buddha to come to the palace to eat tomorrow.”

The Buddha replied: “Āmrapālī has already come and invited me, the king came afterwards.”

The king replied: “I am the king of this country and have sincerely invited the Buddha. I hoped that it would be accepted. Āmrapālī is a slut. Every day she takes her five hundred slutty followers, and they commit all manner of outrages. How can you accept her and reject my invitation?”

The Buddha replied: “This woman is not a slut. In previous lives she amassed great merit and has already presented similar offerings to three hundred thousand buddhas. In the past she, Sumana, and Padma were sisters. Āmrapālī was the eldest, Sumana next, and Padma the youngest. They were born into a family of great substance, with wealth in abundance. Together the sisters led the presentation of offerings to five hundred *bhikṣuṇīs*. Every day they gave them food, drink, and clothing. In accord with whatever they lacked, all would be provided, and they did so till the ends of their lives. The three of them always generated this vow: ‘I wish, during the time of some future buddha, to obtain a spontaneous birth, not from a fetus in a womb, but as far away from exposure to anything impure.’ Now, in accord with their original vow, they have been born at time when they can meet me.

“Although in the past they had presented these offerings to the *bhikṣuṇīs*, they were the children of powerful and wealthy [families] and so spoke in an excessively spoilt manner. Occasionally they would joke around and giggle at the *bhikṣuṇīs*, saying: ‘You’re all so noble, and miserable. You must want to be married, but are held back by the offerings we give, and not [permitted to] have unbridled ideas and emotions.’ Because of this they are now chastised. Even though they praise the teachings of the path each day, they are falsely accused of depravity. Their five hundred disciples are those others who, at that time, made the effort to help present those offerings and felt happy about it. This is why they are now born together. It is the outcome that follows [from those past actions].

“At that time Jīvaka [in a previous life] was the son of a poor man. He saw Āmrapālī make those offerings and the idea of it inspired him. As he had nothing of value, he would always sweep up and clean for the *bhikṣuṇīs*. After sweeping up each time he would make this vow: ‘Let me have the ability to quickly sweep away the illnesses and impurities in the bodies of everyone!’

“Āmrapālī pitied his poverty yet [admired] his efforts. She always called him “Son.” Whenever a *bhikṣuṇī* was ill, she would always send Jīvaka to fetch a healer and [he would] help prepare the potions. She would say: ‘May you and I in a future age be blessed [due to these good deeds].’

“Whenever Jīvaka fetched a healer those treated were completely cured. This led him to make this pledge: ‘I wish that in some future age to become the greatest of all healers, a great king amongst physicians,

to always treat anyone afflicted with the dysfunctions of the four elements until they have completely recovered.'

"That day was the cause, with the present [time the providing the conditions] that have led to Āmrapālī giving birth to a son, [Jīvaka]. All this was due to those first wishes [and aspirations]."

On hearing the Buddha say this, the king regretted his error and knelt, and accepted the day after.

On the following day the Buddha, accompanied by the many *bhikṣus*, arrived at the park of Āmrapālī. He spoke of Āmrapālī's original aspiration and [of her past accumulation of] merits. As the three women listened to the teaching they began to understand. Then at the same time, along with the other five hundred disciples they joyously quit household life to practice the path. Striving with vigor they did not lapse, and all reached the path of the *arhat*.

[Conclusion]

The Buddha said to Ānanda: "You must receive and uphold these teachings, talk of them to the four groups, never let [my transmission] become broken. All living beings should be cautious over their [acts of] body, speech, and mind, and to never give rise to pride and [self-] indulgence. At some time in the distant past Āmrapālī had sneered at the *bhikṣuṇīs*, and because of this she is now slandered as being 'a slut.'

"You must cultivate those actions of body, speech, and mind that continuously give rise to well-wishes. Those who hear of such things are pleased, trusting, and accept you. Never slander or speak against [anyone], to do so is to fall down into a deep pit, or experience life amongst beasts. Then, only after one hundred thousand *kalpas* have passed, would life as a human result, but then amongst the poor and despised, not able to learn the right way of things, into a family with evil views, always subject to an evil king and with a malformed body. You must develop the practices that you have received. Recite them aloud and for all time to come, never let them become lost."

Whereupon Ānanda arose from his seat, knelt [down upon one knee], brought his palms together, and spoke to the Buddha, saying: "Bhagavat! This teaching is important, what should it be called?"

The Buddha [replied] to Ānanda: "The teaching should be called 'Teaching on the Lives of Āmrapālī and Jīvaka.' Cultivate the methods of practice previously [mentioned], present offerings to the *bhikṣus*



and *bhikṣuṇīs*. Donate medicines and fetch healers, and benefits will accrue forthwith. Receive and remember this.” The Buddha had completed giving this transmission. The great gathering of humans, *devas*, *nāgas*, and the other eight groups had learned what the Buddha had to say and happily put it into practice.

