

# An Account of Jivaka, the Physician

Compiled from ancient records by Paul Carus, 1894

## Jivaka, the Physician

Long before the Blessed One had attained enlightenment, self-mortification had been the custom among those who earnestly sought for salvation. Deliverance of the soul from all the necessities of life and finally from the body itself, they regarded as the aim of religion. Thus, they avoided everything that might be a luxury in food, shelter, and clothing, and lived like the beasts in the wood. Some went naked, while others wore the rags cast away upon cemeteries or dung-heaps. [1]

When the Blessed One retired from the world, he recognized at once the error of the naked ascetics, and, considering the indecency of their habit, clad himself in cast-off rags. [2]

Having attained enlightenment and rejected all unnecessary self-mortifications, the Blessed One and his bhikkhus continued for a long time to wear the cast-off rags of cemeteries and dung-heaps. [3]

Then it happened that the bhikkhus were visited with diseases of all kinds, and the Blessed One permitted and explicitly ordered the use of medicines, and among them he even enjoined, whenever needed, the use of unguents. [4]

One of the brethren suffered from a sore on his foot, and the Blessed One enjoined the bhikkhus to wear foot-coverings. [5]

Now it happened that a disease befell the body of the Blessed One himself, and Ananda went to Jivaka, physician to Bimbisara, the king. [6]

And Jivaka, a faithful believer in the Holy One, ministered unto the Blessed One with medicines and baths until the body of the Blessed One was completely restored. [7]



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At that time, Pajjota, king of Ujjeni, was suffering from jaundice, and Jivaka, the physician to king Bimbisara, was consulted. When king Pajjota had been restored to health, he sent to Jivaka a suit of the most excellent cloth. And Jivaka said to himself: *"This suit is made of the best cloth, and nobody is worthy to receive it but the Blessed One, the perfect and holy Buddha, or the Magadha king, Senija Bimbisara."* [8]

Then Jivaka took that suit and went to the place where the Blessed One was; having approached him, and having respectfully saluted the Blessed One, he sat down near him and said: *"Lord, I have a favor to ask of the Blessed One."* [9]

The Buddha replied: *"The Tathagatas, Jivaka, do not grant favors before they know what they are."* [10]

Jivaka said: *"Lord, it is a proper and unobjectionable request."* [11]

*"Speak, Jivaka,"* said the Blessed One. [12]

*"Lord of the world, the Blessed One wears only robes made of rags taken from a dung-heap or a cemetery, and so also does the brotherhood of bhikkhus. Now, Lord, this suit has been sent to me King Pajjota, which is the best and most excellent, and the finest and the most precious, and the noblest that can be found. Lord of the world, may the Blessed One accept from me this suit, and may he allow the brotherhood of bhikkhus to wear lay robes."* [13]

The Blessed One accepted the suit, and after having delivered a religious discourse, he addressed the bhikkhus thus: [14]

*"Henceforth ye shall be at liberty to wear either cast-off rags or lay robes. Whether ye are pleased with the one or with the other, I will approve of it."* [15]

When the people at Rajagaha heard, *"The Blessed One has allowed the bhikkhus to wear lay robes,"* those who were willing to bestow gifts became glad. And in one day many thousands of robes were presented at Rajagaha to the bhikkhus. [16]