

Jivaka Physician

(Physician appointed to the Buddha)



Jivaka Komara Bhacca

Introduction – We have learnt from Jivaka that:

1. When one takes refuge in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha – he is a lay follower.
2. When one observes the five precepts – he is a virtuous lay follower.
3. When he himself explores the meaning of the Dhamma he has heard but does not encourage others to explore the meaning of the Dhamma they have heard he is a lay follower who practices for his own benefit but not for the benefit of others
4. When he himself explores the meaning of the Dhamma he has heard and encourages others to explore the meaning of the Dhamma they have heard then to that extent he is a lay follower who practices both for his own benefit and for the benefit of others.

Take a look at this statement - He (Sakka) entered the body of Disapamok. Jivaka excelled in his studies? In this world we have some who are endowed with the capability to accept spiritual being in their body – Dat See Te – in Burmese. Some acquired knowledge beyond the cutting edge of the modern technology and made several inventions. Believe it or not, it is a well documented in Tipitaka. Some spoke dialects that have never learnt in real life.

Jivaka had aspired to be the physician in his past lives and that aspiration qualifies him to be the Buddha physician at the time of Buddha. That was the reason why even, the king of Deva (Sakka – Ta Gyar Min) had to take care of him to learn the celestial knowledge of medicine.

We also have learnt why Monks must wear the patched up robe to this day - This custom of wearing patched garments still remains among the Sangha's custom.

Jivaka is regarded as the Father of Medicine, a source of knowledge about the healing powers of plant, mineral, massage and so forth. His teachings travel to Thailand at the same time as Buddhism. Definitely a central figure in the Buddhist medical system, he is legitimately regarded as the aspiration for all practitioners of Ancient Massage.

Jivaka the Physician to the Buddha

Prince Abhaya, the son of King **Bimbisara**, was riding through the city when he saw a flock of crows circling and cawing loudly around a small bundle. Stopping his carriage, he investigated the sound and found a newborn baby boy who had been left to die amongst the garbage on the roadside. Upon inquiry he learned that a courtesan had discarded her illegitimate son whom she felt was a burden, and had left him to die.

Prince Abhaya was transfused with compassion for the newborn babe that still clung to life despite its ugly surroundings. He decided to adopt the baby as his own. The baby was named **Jivaka Komara Bhacca** – Jivaka, meaning 'life', because of his will to live, and Komara Bhacca, which meant 'adopted by a prince'.

Jivaka led a privileged life in the palace. His friends, however, often teased him as he had no mother. Jivaka, who was embarrassed by the teasing, questioned his father about his origin. When he heard about his origins and his will to live he decided that he would one day grow up to be a **preserver of life**. He felt that he had no real heritage or family as he was only the adopted son of the prince. Physicians, however, were treated with great respect. Determined to earn the respect he felt he lacked due to his birth, Jivaka decided to go to the University of Taxila to become a physician.

Jivaka approached Disapamok, a well-known scholar, for his training. At this time **Sakka**, the King of the Heavens, was observing the world. He realized that it was time for Jivaka, **who had in past births aspired to be the physician of the Buddha**, to begin his training. Sakka, however, wanted to ensure that Jivaka had more than just the best training available in India. This was the young man who would have the privilege to be the physician of the Buddha. Sakka decided to take a hand in the training of young Jivaka so that he would have **celestial knowledge in the art of medicine**. With this in view, **He entered the body of Disapamok. Jivaka excelled in his studies**. Disapamok, however, soon realized that the training that he was providing was being influenced by celestial beings. The knowledge that was being imparted through him far excelled his knowledge of medicine. Jivaka quickly learned medicines and cures of which Disapamok himself had no knowledge. Jivaka completed in seven years the physicians training which usually took eleven years.

Realizing that Jivaka's education was complete, Disapamok asked him to go forth and bring back a plant, herb or root that could not be used for medicinal purposes for the preservation of life. After traveling far and wide Jivaka returned to his teacher to inform him that no such plant, herb, or root existed. All of nature's treasures were beneficial for the preservation of life. The joyous teacher then praised his pupil by informing him that his education was complete. Jivaka had surpassed his teacher in knowledge.

Jivaka decided to go back to Rajagaha to his adoptive father. On the way he stopped to rest in a city named **Saletha**. He soon heard that the young daughter of the city's wealthiest nobleman was sick. Despite the ministering of many well-known physicians, she had suffered from severe headaches for seven years. Jivaka approached the nobleman, as he was confident that he could cure the maiden. The maiden, however, was not impressed by the very young man who claimed he could cure her when older well-known physicians had failed. Offering his services for free, Jivaka continued to declare boldly that he could cure her.

Gathering herbs and roots, Jivaka prepared the medicine which he then administered to her through her nostrils. Before long the maiden's headaches disappeared. The grateful nobleman showered Jivaka with gifts and gold and provided him with a golden chariot. Jivaka approached Prince Abhaya's palace in great style.

Handing over his newly earned wealth to his adoptive father, Jivaka thanked him for his love, compassion, and caring. Prince Abhaya, however, returned all the wealth to Jivaka and informed him that he owed him naught as he was his true son and heir. He then told him that during his absence he had found out the full story of his origin. His mother, **Salawathi**, was the sought-after courtesan of the kings and nobility. Wanting to retain her freedom, she had discarded the baby whom she felt would be a burden to her. Prince Abhaya had unknowingly adopted his own child as he had loved his son dearly even prior to knowing that he was in fact his own child. Prince Abhaya built a palace to serve as Jivaka's residence and provided him with many servants.

Jivaka's second patient was none other than his own grandfather, King Bimbisara. The king had a huge growth in his stomach that bled from time to time on his royal robe. So prominent was the growth that his consorts had started to tease the king by saying that he was with child. The king had been treated by all the great physicians of the country to no avail. Prince Abhaya informed Jivaka of his grandfather's plight.

Diagnosing the disease sight unseen, Jivaka immediately prepared the suitable medicine. Then hiding it on his person, he visited the king. After examining the king he administered the medicine that he had brought with him. Before long the king's growth shrank and his wound healed. The grateful king called his entourage of five hundred consorts who had teased him unmercifully by asking if his first-born was to be a boy or a girl, and commanded them to give all their jewelry as a gift to Jivaka. Before long a mound of precious jewel higher than Jivaka himself was placed at his feet. However, Jivaka refused this payment and requested permission from the king to return the ornaments back to his consorts. Even more impressed by Jivaka's deportment, the king showered him with wealth, gifted him with the royal mango grove and made him the royal physician.

Jivaka's reputation as a great physician grew quickly. He was the physician of kings, noblemen and the Buddha. The text mentions that he operated and successfully removed two tumors from the brain of a rich merchant who was a good friend of King Bimbisara. He also operated successfully to remove a blockage in the intestines of a nobleman. *In one instance when the Buddha was afflicted with stomach problems, Jivaka prepared the medicine, and applying it on a blue lotus flower, offered it to the Buddha. Jivaka then asked the Buddha to inhale the essence emanating from the flower. The medicine which Jivaka had prepared with devotion and presented so beautifully, cured the Buddha's stomach ailment.*

Jivaka had in one instance risked his life to attend a very cruel and vicious king named *Chanda Pradyotha*. One of the King Pradyotha's subjects had offered him a shawl that had been dropped by a Deva in the forest. Admiring the very beautiful shawl, the king had reflected that he should gift it to Jivaka who had risked his life to save him. Jivaka, however, felt that there was only one person worthy of such a shawl. He in turn offered it to the Buddha. The Buddha accepted the *celestial shawl* and, as requested by Jivaka, dispensed a sermon on the giving of robes. After listening to the discourse, Jivaka attained the first stage of enlightenment, *Sotapanna*. The Buddha felt that keeping such a valuable shawl in the monastery would attract thieves, which would endanger His monks. *Addressing Ananda, he requested that the shawl be cut into strips and sewn so that it would be of little value to thieves. This custom of wearing patched garments still remains among the Sanghas.* Even their new robes are made of strips of material that are sewn together so that even the robe they wear would help them in the practice of non-attachment.

Jivaka built a monastery in his mango grove so that he could be close to the Buddha when attending to His needs. *It was Jivaka who attended to the Buddha's foot when it was cut by the sliver of rock that Devadatta rolled down the hill at Gijjhakuta. It was also Jivaka who treated the Buddha in His last days, when He was overcome by stomach pains.*

The Buddha dispensed the *Jivaka Sutta* when Jivaka questioned him on the *controversial question of the kammic effects of eating meat*. The Buddha explained that the eating of meat was not in itself an unwholesome act if the following conditions were met:

Adittha One has not seen the slaughtering of the animal.

Asuta One has not heard that it was killed for his or her consumption.

Aparisamkita There should be no doubt at all in the mind of the person consuming the meat that the animal was not killed for the purpose of his or her consumption.

The Buddha said:

"Taking life, beating, cutting, binding, stealing, lying, fraud, deceit, pretence at knowledge, adultery; this is unseemliness and not the eating of flesh.

When men are rough and harsh, backbiting, treacherous, without compassion, haughty, ungenerous and do not give anything to anybody; this is unseemliness and not the eating of flesh.

Anger, pride, obstinacy, antagonism, hypocrisy, envy, ostentation, pride of opinion, interacting with the unrighteous; this is unseemliness and not the eating of flesh.

When men are of bad morals, refuse to pay their debts, are slanderers, deceitful in their dealings, pretenders, when the vilest of men commit foul deeds; this is unseemliness and not the eating of flesh.

When men attack living beings either because of greed or hostility and are always bent upon evil, they go to darkness after death and fall headlong into hell; this is unseemliness and not the eating of flesh.

Jivaka, I have declared that one should not make use of meat if it has been seen, heard or suspected to have been killed on purpose for a monk. I allow the monks meat that is quite pure in three respects: *if it has not been seen, heard or suspected to have been killed on purpose for a monk.*"

Amagandha Sutta

The Buddha's teaching is known as the middle path. He did not go to extremes or command anyone to do anything. While he gave permission for His monks to be vegetarians if they so wished, He did not state this to be a discipline rule as he felt that doing so would cause unnecessary hardship to His monks.

Buddhists should refrain from eating meat that has been seen, heard or suspected to have been killed for them. Buddhists should also refrain from killing, instigating others to kill or from a livelihood that involves the breeding of animals for killing. Monks have also been instructed in the Vinaya Pitaka to refrain from eating certain types of meat such as snake and elephant flesh, because wild animals are attracted to the smell of such flesh and tend to attack those who have partaken of such meat.

The Buddha has declared that kamma is intention. As such one should not condemn a person just because he is eating meat to sustain himself. This is not the same as a person who is eating meat as a result of intense greed for meat and enjoyment in killing for the palate. Neither should one discourage those who have chosen to refrain from eating meat. A balanced diet can be achieved without meat. Many Buddhists have opted to become vegetarians as it assists them in the practice of loving-kindness.

It was also at Jivaka's request that the Buddha established that monks should sweep the compound of the monastery and attend to other duties that would exercise their bodies. Jivaka, seeing the benefit of exercise for a healthy life, requested this and other mild duties to be performed by the monks to ensure their health. With

foresight, love and compassion the devoted Jivaka took care of the physical health of the Buddha and His Sangha.

Appendix A

Anguttara Nikaya VIII.26

Jivaka Sutta

To Jivaka

(On Being a Lay Follower)

Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.
For free distribution only.

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying in Rajagaha, at Jivaka's Mango Grove. Then Jivaka Komarabhacca went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: "Venerable sir, to what extent is one a [lay follower](#)?"

"Jivaka, when one has gone to the [Buddha](#) for refuge, has gone to the [Dhamma](#) for refuge, and has gone to the [Sangha](#) for refuge, then to that extent is one a lay follower."

"And to what extent, venerable sir, is one a [virtuous lay follower](#)?"

"Jivaka, when one abstains from taking life, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from lying, and from fermented & distilled drinks that lead to heedlessness, then to that extent is one a virtuous lay follower."

"And to what extent, venerable sir, is one a lay follower who practices for his own benefit but not that of others?"

"Jivaka, when a lay follower himself is consummate in conviction but does not encourage others in the consummation of conviction; when he himself is consummate in virtue but does not encourage others in the consummation of virtue; when he himself is consummate in generosity but does not encourage others in the consummation of generosity; when he himself desires to see the monks but does not encourage others to see the monks; when he himself wants to hear the true Dhamma but does not encourage others to hear the true Dhamma; when he himself habitually remembers the Dhamma he has heard but does not encourage others to remember the Dhamma they have heard; when he himself explores the meaning of the

Dhamma he has heard but does not encourage others to explore the meaning of the Dhamma they have heard; when he himself, knowing both the Dhamma & its meaning, practices the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma, but does not encourage others to practice the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma: then to that extent he is a lay follower who practices for his own benefit but not for the benefit of others."

"And to what extent, venerable sir, is one a lay follower who practices both for his own benefit & the benefit of others?"

"Jivaka, when a lay follower himself is consummate in conviction and encourages others in the consummation of conviction; when he himself is consummate in virtue and encourages others in the consummation of virtue; when he himself is consummate in generosity and encourages others in the consummation of generosity; when he himself desires to see the monks and encourages others to see the monks; when he himself wants to hear the true Dhamma and encourages others to hear the true Dhamma; when he himself habitually remembers the Dhamma he has heard and encourages others to remember the Dhamma they have heard; when he himself explores the meaning of the Dhamma he has heard and encourages others to explore the meaning of the Dhamma they have heard; when he himself, knowing both the Dhamma & its meaning, practices the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma and encourages others to practice the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma: then to that extent he is a lay follower who practices both for his own benefit and for the benefit of others."

Ref: <http://www.accesstoinight.org/canon/anguttara/an08-026.html>

JIVAKA—SUTTA

(DISCOURSE ON JIVAKA, THE DOCTOR)

Translated by the Editors of 'The Light of the Dhamma'.

Thus I have heard. At one time the Bhagava was staying at Rajagaha in the Mango Grove of Jivaka Komarabhacca, the adopted son of Abhaya, the king's son. Then Jivaka Komarabhacca approached the Blessed One. Having approached and made obeisance to Him, he sat down at one side and having sat down, Jivaka Komarabhacca asked the Blessed One:

Lord, I have heard that animals are slaughtered on purpose for the recluse Gotama, and that the recluse Gotama knowingly eats the meat killed on purpose for him. Lord, do those who say animals are slaughtered on purpose for the recluse Gotama, and the recluse Gotama knowingly eats the meat killed on purpose for him speak the Word of the Buddha, or **do they falsely accuse the Buddha** ? **Do they speak the truth according to the truth?** Are your declarations and supplementary declarations not thus subject to be ridiculed by others in any manner ?

Jivaka, those who say "Animals are slaughtered on purpose for the recluse Gotama, and the recluse Gotama knowingly eats the meat killed on purpose for him" do not say according to what I have declared, and they falsely accuse me. Jivaka, I have declared that one should not make use of meat if it is seen, heard or suspected to have been killed on purpose for a monk. ***I allow the monks meat that is quite pure in three respects: if it is not seen, heard or suspected to have been killed on purpose for a monk.***

Jivaka, in this Sasana a monk resides in a certain village or suburb with a mind full of Loving-kindness pervading first one direction, then a second one, then a third one, then the fourth one, just so above, below and all around ; and everywhere identifying himself with all, he pervades the whole world with mind full of Loving-kindness, with mind wide, developed, unbounded, free from hate and ill—will.'

A certain householder or his son approaches that monk and invites him to the morning meal in his house the next day. Jivaka, the monk willingly accepts the invitation. Having passed that night, early the next morning that monk puts on his inner robe, dresses himself and having taken a bowl goes to the householder or his son's house. Having reached the house of the householder he sits down at a place specially meant for him. Then the householder or his son offers him a delicious meal. To that monk no such thought arises : **"How good it would be if this householder or his son were to offer me a delicious meal"**, or **"How good it would be were this householder to offer me such a delicious meal in future."** That monk has no craving for that meal, does not brood over the matter, and has no attachment for it; on the contrary, he contemplates the miseries in connection with material food, and having possessed himself of Wisdom pertaining to the finding of a way to Freedom, he eats the meal.'

Jivaka, what do you think about him in the matter? Has he caused ill-will towards himself or another or both ?

No ; Venerable Sir.'

Jivaka, did not that monk eat a meal that was free from blemishes at that time ?'

Yes ; Venerable Sir.

Lord, I have heard that the Brahma lives with Loving-kindness. Lord, I have now seen with my own eyes that the Bhagava is that very Brahma because He lives with Loving-kindness.'

Jivaka, ill-will is caused by **raga** (greed), **dosa** (hatred) and **moha** (delusion); but the Bhagava has already eradicated raga, dosa and moha, and as they have been cut at the roots, they will never arise in future. Jivaka, if you really speak in that light. I shall accept your words.'

Lord, I really spoke in that light.'

Again, Jivaka. in this Sasana a monk resides in a certain village or suburb with a mind full of Compassion, of Altruistic Joy and of Equanimity directed first in one direction, then a second one, then a third one, then the fourth, just so above, below and all around ; and everywhere identifying him self with all, he pervades the whole world with mind full of Equanimity, with mind wide, developed, unbounded, free from hate and ill-will.'

A certain householder or his son approaches that monk and invites him to the morning meal in his house the next day. Jivaka, that monk willingly accepts the invitation. Having passed that night, early the next morning that monk puts on his inner robe, dresses himself, and having taken a bowl goes to the householder's house. Having reached the house he sits down at a place specially prepared for him. Then the householder or his son offers him a delicious meal. To that monk no such thought arises: "How good it would be were these householders to offer me a delicious meal", or "How good it would be were this householder to offer me such a delicious meal in future". That monk has no craving for that meal, does not brood over the matter, and has no attachment for it; on the contrary, he contemplates the miseries in connection with material food, and having possessed himself of Wisdom pertaining to the finding of a way to Freedom, he eats the meal.'

Jivaka, what do you think about him in the matter ? Has he caused ill-will against himself or another or both?'

No ; Venerable Sir.'

Jivaka, did not that monk eat a meal that was free from blemishes at that time ?'

Yes ; Venerable Sir.'

Lord, I have heard that the Brahma lives with Equanimity. Lord, I have now seen with my own eyes that the Bhagava is that very Brahma because He lives with Equanimity.'

Jivaka, ill-will is caused by raga (greed), dosa (hatred) and moha (delusion); but the Bhagava has already eradicated raga, dosa and moha, and as they have been cut at the roots, they will never arise again in future. Jivaka, if you really speak in that light, I shall accept your words.'

Lord, I really spoke in that light.'

Indeed, Jivaka, if the householder slaughters an animal on purpose for the Tathagata or His disciples, he performs the following five kinds of unwholesome volitional actions : —

1. "*Go and bring such and such an animal here*", orders the householder. Thus he has firstly committed **an unwholesome volitional action**.
2. Secondly, this householder has committed an unwholesome volitional action by causing the animal to be dragged by the neck thus making the animal suffer disagreeable mental sensations.
3. Thirdly, he has committed an unwholesome volitional action by ordering his men to kill the animal.
4. Fourthly, he has committed an unwholesome volitional action by having the animal killed, thus causing it disagreeable mental sensations.
5. Fifthly, he has committed unwholesome volitional action offering the Tathagata and disciple's meat slaughtered purpose for a monk."

This being said, Jivaka Komarabhacca, the adopted son of Abhaya, the king's son, said to the Bhagava : 'It is wonderful; O Gotama, it is wonderful; Just as, O Gotama, one should set upright that which is upside down or lay bare that which is concealed, or tell the way to a man who has lost his way, **or hold a lamp in the dark so that those who have eyes might see things; even** so, the Dhamma has been revealed to me in many ways by the Venerable Gotama. I take refuge in the Venerable Gotama, in the Dhamma and the Order of monks ; may the Venerable Gotama accept me as a lay disciple who has taken refuge from today onward as long as my life lasts.

Reference –

1. *Translated by the Editors of 'The Light of the Dhamma'*
2. **Relatives and Disciples of the Buddha** by Radhika Abeysekera