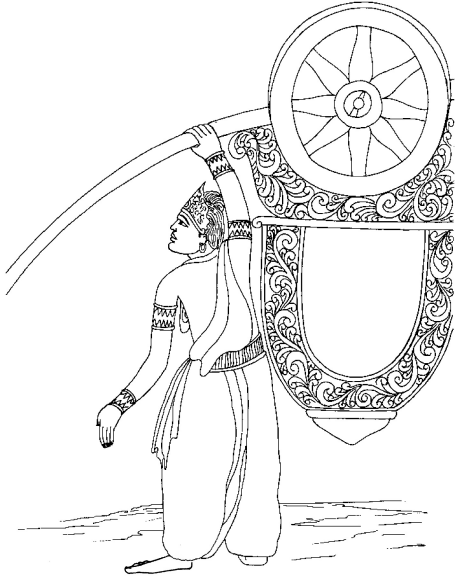


Prince Temiya *Mūgapakkha Jātaka*



It was while staying at Jetavana that the Buddha told this story about the Great Renunciation.

One day, in the Hall of Truth, the bhikkhus were talking about the Blessed One's Great Renunciation. When the Buddha heard what they were discussing, he said, "No, Bhikkhus, my renunciation after fully realizing the Ten Perfections was not so remarkable. Long ago also, when my wisdom was still immature, while I was still striving to attain the perfections, I left my kingdom and renounced the world." At their request, he told this story of the past.

Long, long ago, in Bārānasi, the king of Kāsi had sixteen thousand wives, but not one had given birth to a son or a daughter. The entire kingdom was upset at the lack of an heir. The citizens urged the king to pray for a son. The king in turn urged his wives to pray. Even though the women ardently worshiped the moon and other deities, none became pregnant.

Then the king approached his chief queen, Candādevī, daughter of the king of Madda, who was devoted to good deeds. He earnestly encouraged her to pray for a son to succeed to the throne.

On the full-moon day, Queen Candādevī observed Uposatha. As she was reclining on her couch, she reflected on her virtuous life and proclaimed, "If I have never broken the precepts, by the truth of my vow, may a son be born to me."

This asseveration of truth and the power of her piety caused the seat of Sakka, king of the devas, to become hot. Sakka quickly ascertained the cause and declared, "Queen Candādevī is asking for a son. I will give her one!"

At that time, the Bodhisatta, after having reigned for only twenty years in Bārānasi and having suffered for eighty thousand years in Ussada hell, was living in Tāvātimsa. His time there was expiring, and he was hoping to be reborn in the higher heavens. Sakka approached him, however, and said, "Friend, if you are born in the realm of men, you will be able to attain the Ten Perfections, which will be of great benefit to mankind. At this moment, Candādevī, the chief queen of Kāsi, is praying for a son. Please agree to be born to her."

The Bodhisatta reluctantly consented. At the same time, five hundred other devas descended to be reborn to the wives of the king's ministers.

The queen felt as if her womb were full of diamonds. She immediately announced her pregnancy to the king, who ordered that everything possible be done for the well-being of the unborn child. After a full term, she gave birth to a beautiful son who had all the auspicious characteristics of a great person.

As soon as the king heard that his son had been born, joy arose in his heart, and he felt great paternal affection. He called together all his ministers and asked whether they could share his happiness. "Sire," they cried in one voice, "the entire kingdom has been uneasy, but, now that the kingdom has a successor, we rejoice with Your Majesty! We are overjoyed."

The king arranged for sixty-four nurses to care for the heir apparent. After paying honor to his son, he offered the queen a boon, which she gratefully accepted, asking that she be permitted to redeem it at some future time.

The king then called his commander-in-chief and announced, "My son needs a retinue. Find out how many babies have been born to noble families today." The general reported to the king that the wives of five hundred ministers had also delivered sons. To each of them the king sent princely garments and ordered five hundred nurses to care for them.

On the day of the prince's naming, the king invited brahmins to examine the baby's horoscope and asked whether there was any danger threatening him. The brahmins replied that the child showed every sign of good fortune. They were unanimously of the opinion that the prince would rule not just one continent but the entire world. Overjoyed to hear this, the king handsomely rewarded all the brahmins. The prince was named Temiya, because it had rained all over the kingdom of Kāsi on the day of his birth, and he had been born wet.

When Prince Temiya was one month old, attendants dressed him and brought him to the king. The king hugged him, cradled him on his lap, and played with him.

At that time, four robbers were brought before the king. With the baby still in his arms, the king sentenced the thieves. The first thief was to be given one thousand strokes with a whip barbed with thorns; the second was condemned to prison in chains; the third was to be executed with a spear; and the fourth, impaled.

When the baby heard his father's harsh words, he was terrified. "My father," he thought, "because he is the king, is committing cruel deeds, for which he will suffer the consequences! These are the sorts of grievous acts which condemn men to hell!"

A little later, the nurse took the baby from his father and laid him on a sumptuous bed under a royal white umbrella. After a short nap, the infant awoke. When he opened his eyes, the first thing he saw was the white umbrella, and his fear increased. As he lay there,

the prince pondered, “How did I come to this palace?” At first, he recalled that he had come from the realm of the devas. Then he remembered that, prior to that, he had endured horrible tortures for ages in hell. At last, he recalled that, before being reborn in hell, he had been a king in that very city. “I was king here for only twenty short years,” he recalled, “but, for that, I suffered for eighty thousand years in hell. Now here I am again, reborn in this wicked house! I just saw my own father utter cruel speech and pass the kind of sentences that lead to perdition. If I become king, I will again be reborn in hell and suffer great pain there!” This realization so alarmed him that his lovely golden body became pale and faded like a crushed lotus petal. He thought as hard as he could about how he might escape that house of criminals.

At that moment the deva of the royal umbrella, who in a previous birth had been his mother, spoke to him. “Darling Temiya, fear not. If you wish to escape, there is a way. Pretend to be a cripple. Even though your hearing is acute, pretend to be deaf. Pretending to be mute, utter no sounds. Show no sign of intelligence! If you can make everyone think you are a fool, you will never become king. If you can endure the contempt of others, you will escape the fate you fear.”

“Dear Mother, thank you for helping me,” the prince whispered. “Your advice is very good, and I will follow it.” From that moment on, the baby did exactly as the deva had suggested, and he stopped responding to anything that happened around him.

The prince’s sudden passivity greatly alarmed the king. He tried in many ways to rouse the baby, but to no avail. He had the five hundred young nobles brought to live in the palace, hoping that their presence would stimulate the infant. When the other babies became hungry, they immediately began crying for milk, but Temiya never uttered a sound. “Better to die of hunger and thirst,” he reflected, “than to reign and go to hell.” The nurses could not understand what was wrong and reported everything to the queen. The queen spoke to her husband, and the king called in the brahmins to look for omens.

“Sire,” they replied, “you must not feed the prince until he cries. When he becomes truly hungry, he will cry and then nurse.” The wet nurses tried to follow this suggestion, but the baby never cried. So strong was his resolve that, although he was parched and tortured by thirst, his fear of hell’s torment kept him from uttering even the tiniest noise. Afraid that the baby would die, his mother or one of the nurses invariably yielded and gave him milk, even though he hadn’t cried. During his first year, they repeatedly tried to force him to cry for milk, but he never did.

The prince’s nurses were thoroughly puzzled by the baby’s silence, his lack of response to stimuli, and his apparent inability to squirm or crawl. His hands and feet were normal. His eyes and ears seemed normal. He was perfectly formed without any visible

handicap. For the first month, they recalled, he had been an active, ordinary baby. He had not suffered any illness or fever to account for this drastic change. They reasoned that his passivity had to spring from another cause, and they resolved to find it.

They gathered the five hundred little boys around the prince and had servants bring in delectable sweets. The others scrambled for the cakes and devoured them eagerly. The prince did not even look at them. Sitting perfectly still, he steeled his resolve and warned himself, “Temiya, eat those treats, and you will go to hell!”

The nurses tried the same experiment with the sweetest fruit of the season, but the result was exactly the same. The other boys squabbled over the fruit and gobbled it up, but the prince never moved.

Servants presented the boys with an amazing assortment of marvelous toys, including model chariots, horses, and elephants. The ministers’ sons excitedly grabbed the toys and began playing with them. The prince seemed not even to notice.

When he was four years old, servants prepared special dishes which they knew were most popular with boys his age. The other children were delighted to receive such wonderful food. The prince, pretending that he was unaware of how good the food smelled, watched the feast and thought to himself, “Temiya, innumerable were the past births when you got no food at all.” His silence and lack of response pained his mother’s heart. Finally, unwilling to allow her son to starve, she fed him with her own hand.

When he was five years old, the servants decided to test the prince with fire. They built a large house with many doors and covered it with palm fronds. They set the prince and the other boys in the middle of the house and set fire to it. Shrieking in fear, the five hundred boys fled in every direction. The prince, without moving so much as an eyelid, watched the flames and thought, “Better to burn here than to burn again in the fires of hell.” The servants watched as the flames got closer and closer to where he was. Finally, realizing that the prince was, indeed, not going to move, they rescued him.

When he was six years old, servants assembled all the boys, with the prince in the center, in the courtyard of the palace. Suddenly, the gates flew open, and an elephant, trumpeting fiercely and striking the ground with its trunk, charged into the courtyard. The five hundred boys scattered in a panic. The prince, thinking only how much fiercer the guardians of hell were, remained motionless. The well-trained elephant ran straight toward the prince, picked him up with its trunk, and made as if to dash him against a tree. The prince did not respond in any way. At a signal from the hidden mahout, the elephant set the prince down gently on the ground and was led away.

When the prince was seven, servants released snakes, whose fangs had been extracted, into the area where the boys were playing. As the serpents slithered toward the

children, the ministers' sons ran shrieking in terror. The prince pretended not to be aware of the danger. He thought, "It is better to die by the bite of one of these serpents than to return to hell!" The largest cobra coiled itself around Temiya's body and spread its hood, but the prince remained motionless. Unsuccessful once more, the attendants caught and removed all the snakes.

Having repeatedly failed to tempt the prince with food or to frighten him in any way, the servants decided to try to amuse him. They decorated the palace for a party and invited a mime troupe to present their best performance. The other boys laughed, applauded, and shouted, "Bravo!" The prince, reminding himself that in hell there was never an instant's laughter, remained stone-faced.

At another time, they sent an actor into the courtyard where the boys were playing. Brandishing his sword, he charged wildly into the group. The man shouted, "Where is that devilish son of Kāsi's king? I will cut off his head!" The other boys shrieked in terror and ran away, but the prince recalled the horrors of hell and sat motionless, as though he were unconscious. The man stood over the prince and pressed his sword against the boy's neck, but the prince showed not the least bit of fear. At last, the man gave up.

When Temiya was ten years old, the servants decided to find out whether or not he was really deaf. They hung a curtain round his bed and surrounded it with conch-blowers. At a signal, they all gave a mighty blast of their conches, which created a noise loud enough to wake the dead. The boy gave no sign of surprise. The servants tried the same experiment with drums, but they were unable to break the prince's resolve.

One night, in order to test his sight, attendants simultaneously lit hundreds of lamps around his bed, creating a blinding blaze of light, but the prince did not move a muscle in surprise.

Certain that the prince would be sensitive to physical pain, the servants smeared his entire body with molasses, laid him in the open, and allowed fierce red ants to swarm all over him, biting his tender skin. Although the prince felt that he was being pierced with thousands of needles, he recalled how much worse the torments of hell were. He did not permit himself to show the slightest reaction. Finally, his attendants were forced to give up.

When the prince was fourteen, servants devised another test which they hoped would bring the prince out of his passive state. No one bathed him or rinsed his mouth or changed his clothes, and he was reduced to a filthy, stinking mess. The poor child looked like a prisoner in a dungeon, covered with dirt and crawling with lice. Then his attendants reviled him, saying, "Temiya, you are grown up now. Aren't you ashamed? Why are you lying there? Get up and clean yourself." The prince, remembering the torments of hell, lay quietly and endured his squalor and stench, until, at last, they relented and cleaned him up.

At another time, the servants placed pans of glowing hot charcoal all around and under his bed. Blisters and welts broke out all over his body, but the boy did not move. Although he felt considerable pain as the blisters swelled and broke, he reflected, “The fire of Avīci Hell flares up one hundred yojanas. This heat is much easier to bear than that.” At last, his parents relented, ordered the fires removed, and soothed his burns with ointment.

“Dear Temiya,” the king and queen tearfully implored him, “you were born to us only after many prayers. We waited many years for you. Please do not destroy us now. You are not disabled by any birth defect. Please behave normally, and give us hope!” The prince heard their heartbreaking pleas, but he lay still as if he had not heard anything at all. Unable to provoke even the slightest response from the boy, his parents went away disconsolate. Later, they approached him individually and pleaded with him to show some sign that he could hear or see or feel, but he never relented. His resolve to escape the torments of hell was unshakable.

When he turned sixteen, his parents hoped that he would respond to sensuous pleasures. They summoned beautiful, talented women and promised that whoever managed to make the prince laugh or succeeded in seducing him would become his wife.

Attendants bathed the prince in perfumed water, dressed him in royal garments, and laid him on a couch. The women gathered around him, singing and dancing seductively. The prince watched them without giving any indication that he was aware of their presence. He fully understood what the women were trying to do but was adamant in his resolve not to succumb to their charms. Afraid that they might touch his body, the prince held his breath. The women had been baffled when the prince had ignored them, but when he stopped breathing, they became alarmed. Calling his parents, they said that he was stiff and unresponsive as if he were a goblin instead of a boy.

Thus, for sixteen years the king and queen had tried in vain to elicit some response from their son. They had subjected the prince to sixteen great tests and innumerable smaller ones, all to no avail. The king summoned the brahmins who had seen auspicious omens at the prince’s birth and had unanimously predicted his good fortune. He demanded an explanation. How could they have said that the crown prince faced nothing but good luck in his life, when, in reality, he was an unresponsive, handicapped, helpless deaf-mute?

“Your Majesty,” a spokesman for the brahmins replied, “sixteen years ago, we knew the truth, but we were afraid to grieve you by telling you that your beloved son, born after so many royal prayers, would be like this.”

“What must be done now?” the king asked.

“Sire, if this prince remains here, there is a threefold danger: harm may come to you, to your kingdom, or to your queen. The best thing for you to do is to have some

ill-omened horses harnessed to an unlucky chariot. You must have the prince placed in the chariot, driven out of the city by the western gate, and buried in the charnel-ground!”

Alarmed by the peril he was in, the king immediately accepted their advice.

When Queen Candādevī heard the news, she rushed to the king and asked to claim the boon which the king had given her when the crown prince was born. The king immediately agreed and asked her what she wanted.

“Give the kingdom to my son,” she replied.

“My dear, I cannot do that,” protested the king. Your son is completely ill-fated. His presence is a great danger to us all.”

“Sire, if you will not give him the kingdom for life, then give it to him for seven years.”

“I cannot, my queen.”

The queen continued begging, reducing the length of time to six years, to five years, to four, to three, to two, and finally to only one year.

Each time the king repeated, “I cannot, my queen.”

“Then give it to him for seven months,” she pleaded.

“My queen, I cannot,” insisted the king.

Again, the queen continued begging, this time reducing the time to six months, to five, to four, to three, to two months, to one month, and even to half a month.

Each time the king repeated, “I cannot, my queen.”

“Then give it to him for seven days.”

“That much I can do,” the king conceded. “You have your boon.”

The queen had her son carefully groomed and richly dressed. Attired in royal robes and jewelry, he was placed on a royal elephant and led triumphantly clockwise round the brightly decorated city with a white umbrella held over his head. The procession was led by a drummer, and a crier proclaimed, “This is the reign of Prince Temiya!”

When the procession was finished, he was taken down from the elephant and laid on his royal bed. His mother implored him, “My darling Temiya, because of you, I have wept day and night. For sixteen years, I have had no sleep. My heart is pierced with sorrow. I know that you are not really crippled or deaf and dumb. I plead with you. Do not make me utterly desolate.” In this way, for five days she implored her son to show some sign of recognition.

On the sixth day, the king called his charioteer Sunanda and said, “Early tomorrow morning, hitch some ill-omened horses to an unlucky chariot, and put the prince in it. Take him out of the city by the western gate. Go to the charnel ground, and dig a hole there. Throw the boy into the hole. Kill him by breaking his skull with your spade. Scatter

dirt over his body, and fill up the hole. Heap the earth over his unmarked grave. Then, after bathing yourself, come back, and report to me.”

All that night, the queen tearfully implored her son to give her some sign. “My child, the king of Kāsi has given orders that you are to be buried in the charnel-ground. Tomorrow, you will certainly die, my dear boy.”

When he heard this, he thought to himself, “Oh, Temiya, your sixteen years of effort are almost over!” He was happy, but his mother’s heart was almost broken. Although he knew how she suffered, he didn’t dare to speak to her for fear that he might not attain his goal.

Early the next morning, Sunanda, the charioteer, prepared the ill-fated chariot. Entering the royal chamber, he spoke to the queen, “Your Majesty, do not be angry with me. It is the king’s command.” While the queen was still embracing her son, Sunanda pushed her away, lifted the prince as easily as a bundle of flowers and carried him out of the palace.

Left alone in the chamber, the queen beat her breast and bewailed her son’s fate. The prince wanted to call out to her, but, again, he dared not. “If I speak now,” he said to himself, “all my efforts will have been for naught. If I remain firm, I will save myself and my parents.”

The charioteer placed the prince in the chariot and announced, “Now I will drive this chariot to the western gate.” Unwittingly, he directed the horses to the eastern gate. When the wheel struck the gatepost, the prince heard the sound and knew that he had accomplished his goal. He became glad at heart.

Leaving the city, they entered the forest, but the devas made it appear to be the charnel ground. Believing that he had arrived at the proper place, Sunanda stopped the chariot. First, he removed the prince’s jewelry and tied it in a bundle. Then he picked up his spade and began to dig a hole.

“Now I must exert myself,” thought the prince. “For sixteen years, I have not moved my hands or feet. Do I still have control over them or not?” He sat up, rubbed his hands together, massaged his legs, and determined to get out of the chariot.

As his foot came down to step out of the chariot, the earth rose up to meet it. He stood up and walked back and forth several times. With each step his strength increased, until he felt that he could walk one hundred yojanas.

“If the charioteer struggles with me,” he wondered, “do I have the strength to deal with him?” To test himself, he took hold of the rear of the chariot and lifted it up as if it were a child’s wagon. Satisfied that he was sufficiently strong, he then realized that he needed to clothe himself properly.

At that instant, Sakka’s throne became hot, and he understood, “Prince Temiya has attained his desire! Now he wants to be appropriately dressed. Ordinary garments will not

do!” He immediately called Vissakamma, his assistant, and instructed him to take heavenly garments and the finest jewels for the prince.

Vissakamma dressed Temiya in ten thousand pieces of heavenly silk and magnificent jewelry so that he looked like Sakka himself. The prince stepped to the edge of the hole and spoke to the charioteer. “My good man,” he asked, “why are you working so hard to dig this pit? Pray, what is it intended for?”

Without looking up, Sunanda replied, “Our king has found that his only son is a crippled idiot. I was ordered to dig this hole to bury him in.”

Temiya answered him in a clear, firm voice. “I am neither deaf nor dumb, my friend. Listen to me! I am not crippled. I’m not even lame. Take a look at me. If you were to bury me in these woods, you would certainly be guilty of a great crime!”

Startled, the charioteer said, “What? The crown prince was in pitiful shape when I brought him here!” Stopping his digging, he looked up. When he saw the prince’s handsome figure, he couldn’t believe his eyes. “Are you a deva? Are you Sakka, lord of all? How should I address you?”

“No,” Temiya answered, “I am not Sakka. I am the son of your king, the king of Kāsi. I am the one you planned to bury in that hole. Think carefully about gratitude! After sitting and resting beneath a tree, enjoying its shade and shelter, I would never harm even a small twig of that tree. Only one who is very wicked harms his friends. Your king is like that sheltering tree, and I am a branch. You, my good man, are the weary traveler resting in its shade, so, how could you ever harm me?”

Sunanda could not recognize in this magnificent creature before him any resemblance to the pathetic youth he had brought in the chariot.

Then Temiya made the woods resound with his beautiful voice as he praised friendship. “He who is faithful to his friends may wander far and wide, but he will always find welcome, and his wants will always be supplied. Because he is faithful to his friends, he will be honored. He will be respected by warriors and unharmed by enemies. The man who is faithful to his friends is the best of kin. The one who is faithful to his friends will always be rewarded for his labor and will prosper. When in danger, he will find succor. Like the banyan tree, which defies the wind, strengthened by its branches which have rooted all around, the faithful man will weather even the rage of the fiercest foes.” As he described the benefits of friendship, the devas applauded.

Sunanda was not yet convinced, so Temiya stepped closer. When the charioteer realized that it was, indeed, the prince, he immediately fell at the royal feet and pressed his palms together in respect.

“Come, Your Highness,” he cried, “let me take you back to the palace where you will be welcomed. You can sit on the throne and reign as king. You needn’t remain here in the forest.”

“I don’t want the throne or wealth,” the prince replied. “Being king entails too many harsh decisions and cruel acts for me.”

“Come, Your Highness,” Sunanda repeated, unable to grasp the prince’s meaning. “The cup of welcome will be prepared for you. Your parents will be so happy to see you that, I am sure, they will give me great gifts as well. The entire kingdom will be grateful to me for taking you back, and I will be generously rewarded.”

“Have you forgotten that my parents abandoned me? Since my father condemned me to death and my mother gave me up, I no longer have a home. Forsaken as I am, I will undertake the ascetic’s vow here in this forest.”

As the prince said this, his mind filled with delight, and he uttered a hymn of triumph: “Even those who never hurry, if their desire is strong enough, can win sweet victory! Charioteer, today I have achieved great holiness. My effort has been crowned with success. I fear nothing!”

“Your Highness,” the puzzled charioteer said, “I don’t understand. You speak so clearly, and your voice is very pleasant to hear. Why were you silent for so long? Why did you never speak to your parents?”

“When I was born, I was a normal child. Then, one day, my father held me and played with me on his lap. While he held me, he passed sentence on four criminals. He sentenced two of them to harsh punishment, and the other two to be executed. This upset me terribly. I remembered that, once, long ago, I had also been a king. Because I also committed cruel acts like that, which are, after all, part of being a ruler, I suffered in hell. Although I reigned for only twenty years, I spent eighty thousand years of torment in hell. Recalling that indescribable suffering, I resolved never again to become king. That is why I never spoke, even though my loving parents were near. In order to avoid the throne, I pretended that I could not see, hear, or speak. Even though I had to wallow in filth, I played the idiot and cripple. When I had to suffer immense physical pain, I remembered that the tortures of hell were so much greater. Human life is short, but the lifespan in hell is very long. Knowing this, I will never let anger arise. I will never mete out justice, which is really just another name for vengeance.”

This story touched Sunanda deeply. He was impressed that the prince could discard his throne as if it were carrion. As he listened, the desire arose in him, as well, to become an ascetic, and he declared his resolve to the prince.

Temiya knew, however, that, if the charioteer did not return, the horses, the chariot, and the ornaments, for which he, the prince, was responsible, would be lost. His parents would never know the truth and would not come to see him, which would be a great loss for them. He reasoned that people might also believe that he had always been a yakkha and had devoured the horses and the charioteer.

“No,” he said to Sunanda, “you are not yet a free man. First, you must return the chariot, report everything that has happened here to the king and queen, and, as they say, pay your debts. Then you can follow me in the ascetic’s life.”

The charioteer fretted to himself, “What if he leaves while I am returning to the city? If his parents don’t find him here, they will punish me! I must get his promise to wait here until I return with them.”

“Since I am obeying your command, Prince Temiya, please stay here until I’ve fetched the king. He will be overjoyed when he sees your face!”

“I promise to wait here,” the prince assured him. “Please tell my parents how much I wish to see them. Hurry back!”

The queen, standing at her window, anxiously awaiting news of her son, was the first to see the charioteer return. “He comes back alone!” she cried. “My child is dead! His body lies in the charnel ground, under a heap of earth!”

Confronting the man, she wept, saying: “My worst enemy may now rejoice; my son’s murderer has come back. Tell me! Did my poor crippled child utter a cry as he struggled helplessly? Did he resist, even feebly?”

“Your Majesty,” Sunanda replied, “if you will promise to pardon me for all that I say, I will tell you exactly what happened.”

“Of course, I will pardon you,” the queen assured him. “Please give me all the details. I must know.”

“Your Majesty, your son is no invalid. He is not deaf, and his speech is clear. At home, he played a role for you, because he dreaded inheriting the throne. He remembered an old birth when he was a king; when he died from that life he found himself in perdition. Twenty years of luxury were followed by eighty thousand years in hell for his actions while he reigned. That bitter taste of royalty terrified him so much that he pretended to be deaf and dumb whenever you were nearby. Your child is perfectly sound; he’s straight and strong, and his wits are clear. Now he seeks liberation in the forest as an ascetic. If you wish to see your noble son, come with me at once. I will take you to Prince Temiya, perfectly well, strong, calm, and free.”

Alone in the forest, Temiya was eager to take the ascetic vow. Knowing this, Sakka summoned Vissakamma, and said, “Prince Temiya wishes to take the ascetic vow. Go and

make a hut of leaves for him, and see to all his needs.” Vissakamma swiftly built a hermitage with separate cells for meditation and for sleeping in a lovely grove of trees. He dug a tank for water and made fruit trees grow nearby.

When Temiya saw the hermitage, he knew that it was Sakka’s gift. Entering the hut, he put on his rough ascetic’s garments, tied up his matted hair, and picked up a staff. Walking to and fro in the grove, he kept repeating, “What bliss! What bliss!” and delighted in his renunciation. He returned to the hut, sat on a ragged mat, and meditated joyously.

In the evening, he went out to gather some leaves from one of the trees in the grove. He soaked the leaves in water and ate them as if they were regal fare. Then he resumed his meditation.

Meanwhile, as soon as the king heard Sunanda’s report, he ordered his general to prepare for the journey to meet Prince Temiya. The king took the entire court, along with his whole army, to the place where Temiya was staying in tranquil meditation.

When the king arrived at the hermitage, the prince greeted him warmly and inquired about his parents’ health. Then he asked whether the king was careful to abstain from drinking alcohol and to practice generosity. The king assured his son that he never drank and that he gave alms regularly. After more polite talk and inquiries about the welfare of the kingdom, the prince asked his father to sit on a couch, but the king, out of respect for his son, refused. He also refused to sit on a bed of leaves prepared for him but contented himself with sitting on the bare ground.

Temiya apologized that the only food he had was the leaves he had soaked, but he offered to share them with the king. “Oh, no,” the king protested, “no leaves for me! I dine on the finest hill rice prepared with tender meat!”

At that moment, Queen Candādevī arrived, accompanied by her royal attendants. Her eyes were filled with tears as she embraced the feet of her beloved son and sat at one side.

“My Lady, look at the food your son is eating,” the king said as he put some leaves in her hand and in those of her attendants.

“My Lord,” the women cried in amazement, “do you really eat such food? How can you endure such hardship?”

“Yes, my son,” the king said, “please tell us how you can live on such coarse food and still have a clear complexion and such good color?”

Answering his father, the prince said, “Sleeping on this bed of leaves is pleasant enough. There are no fierce guards near my simple bed. Neither regretting the past nor fearing the future, I meet the present as it comes. That’s how I keep my health.”

The king was extremely impressed by the prince's manner and speech. He thought to himself, "I will crown him king right here and take him back with me. I am ready to step down. He can have the kingdom!"

To Temiya he said, "Come, my son. You are my heir! My elephants, chariots, cavalry, infantry, and all my pleasant palaces, I offer to you. I am ready to step down and to give you the kingdom. Why linger in these woods? There is nothing for you here in this rude hermitage. Come back to Bārānasi, and rule over us. You will be obeyed in everything. Enjoy your kingdom and your youth to the fullest!"

With a clear voice, the prince answered, "No, Father. Let me leave the world with all its conceit. Wise men say that an ascetic life suits the young. All I want is to live as an ascetic; I have no need of a throne. I have seen the boy, crying for his mother and father. In no time at all, he himself fathers a son. Then he himself grows old and dies. The lovely young daughter soon ages and is cut down like green bamboo by death. I will not put my trust in mortal life and be cheated. Life is short. We are like fish in ponds that dry up. Our lives are blighted by old age before we are struck down, deprived of happiness, success, wealth, and title. Why talk of crown or throne? The lady sits at her loom, weaving, and, each day, her task grows less and less. In the same way, our lives waste away to nothing. Just as the river speeds onward to the sea, our lives rush onward toward death. Just as the river sweeps away trees from its banks, so are we swept and carried away to ruin by aging and death."

As the king listened to his son's speech, he felt himself also becoming disgusted by the secular life. In his enthusiasm, he exclaimed, "I will not go back to the city, I will become an ascetic here. Return to the palace, and accept the white umbrella. Become king instead of me. Rule happily!"

"Father," Temiya insisted, "I have seen through wealth, power, sport, and royal prestige. I have seen them for what they really are. Empty! What is wife or child to me? I am free from those traps. I know that death follows us like a murderer, intent on killing. What can power mean to one who sees the shadow of death? I am set free from all chains. Return to the capital with your crown. I do not want to be king!"

Upon hearing Temiya's ringing words, the king, the queen, and all the ladies of the court determined to adopt the ascetic life. The king issued a proclamation that all who chose to become ascetics with his son were free to do so. He ordered that the doors of his treasuries be thrown open. He had an inscription posted on a pillar declaring that anyone who wanted to, might take freely from his treasures. Citizens left their houses with the doors open and flocked round the king. The king, the queen, and the multitude took their ascetic vows together at Temiya's feet.

Vissakamma's hermitage extended three yojanas in length. Temiya assigned the huts in the center to the women so that they would be protected. The outer huts he gave to the men. Everyone gathered in the morning to eat the fruits of the trees which Vissakamma had planted. Temiya, knowing the minds of all and aware of the susceptibility of each of them to thoughts of lust, hatred, or greed, was able to offer teaching suitable to each person. Under his instruction, all of them made rapid progress in their meditation.

When a rival king heard the rumor that the king of Kāsi had become an ascetic, he decided to seize Bārānasi and to make it his own capital. When he entered the city, he found it lavishly decorated, just as it had been when the king left. Going to the palace, he saw heaps of precious stones lying about. Afraid that some sort of danger lurked in all this wealth, he asked some drunken revelers which direction the king had taken when he left. Accordingly, he left the city through the eastern gate and followed the river.

Aware, because of his extraordinary power, that the rival king was coming, Temiya welcomed him and taught him, as well.

This king and his entire army also took ascetic vows. Exactly the same thing happened with another king. Thus, three kingdoms were abandoned. State elephants and horses were freed to roam wild in the woods. Chariots crumbled and decayed. The money from the royal treasuries, having become worthless, was scattered everywhere.

All these ascetics achieved profound levels of concentration and, at the end of their lives, were reborn in the Brahma heavens.

Even the animals of the forest, their minds having been calmed by the presence of all those sages, were eventually reborn in various heavens.

Having concluded his story, the Buddha added, "Not only now, but also formerly, I left a kingdom and became an ascetic." Then the Buddha identified the birth: "At that time, Uppalavannā was the deva in the umbrella, Sāriputta was the charioteer, my parents were the king of Kāsi and his queen Candādevī, my followers were the members of the court, and I was the wise Temiya."

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