

BUTTEN DŌWA

Buddhist Stories for Children



HIGASHI HONGANJI

FOREWORD

The man who was to become the Buddha was born the son of a king during the sixth century BC in what is now Northern India.

His personal name was Siddhatta, and his family name was Gotama.

Discarding the luxurious life of a prince, Gotama sought enlightenment for six years, studying many different teachings and submitting himself to the most difficult of ascetic practices. In the end, he realized that the way to enlightenment was to consist in follow the “middle path” between a life of luxury and a life of asceticism.

After his enlightenment, Gotama (now the Buddha, which means “the Awakened One”) delivered his first talk in Deer Park at Isipatana (modern Sarnath near Varanasi). This is referred to as “setting the wheel of the Dharma (the Truth) in motion”. For 45 years thereafter, the Buddha taught all classes of men and women, making no distinctions between them.

The Buddha quietly closed his life at Kusinara (modern Uttar Pradesh in India) at the age of 80.

The teaching of Buddhism is presently found in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Viet Nam, Laos,

Butten Dōwa (Buddhist Stories For Children)
Copyright © 1993
English translation copyright © 2000
Written by Aiko Watanabe
Translated by Kenichi Yokogawa
Illustrated by Kokyo Hatanaka

Published by
Higashi Honganji Publication Department
Karasuma-dori, Shichijo-agaru
Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8505
JAPAN
All rights reserved
Printed in Japan

Tibet, China, Mongolia, Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Nepal and part of Pakistan. The number of those who follow his teachings is estimated to be over 500 million.

There is growing interest in Buddhism today, and numerous books have been written about it. Regretfully, however, many of those books are very technical, written by scholars for other scholars, and thus are not very meaningful to the average reader.

In this small book, I addressed those with little knowledge of Buddhism.

The stories included are based on the original Tipitaka (Three Collections of Writings) which has retained the Buddhist oral tradition and explores many different facets of Buddhist doctrine.

These stories were originally written for the Higashi Honganji Headquarters Temple, in connection with its general education program. The Dobo Shinbun (Shinshu Fellowship Newspaper) has published 48 of my stories so far. Ten of those stories are included in this book.

Kyoto
December 1999

Aiko Watanabe

Table of Contents

The Lamp That Would Not Go Out	5
A Drop of Honey	11
True Fragrance	16
A Flower	22
The Seed of Consolation	27
The Promise	33
The Panthaka Brothers	39
A Person's True Worth	46
The White Bird	52
The Offering	57
Appendix (the original text)	65

The Lamp That Would Not Go Out

A woman named Nandā once lived in the city of Sāvattḥī. She did not have a place to live, nor any relatives on whom she could rely. Her clothes were worn, and she spent her days crouched by the roadside, ignored by almost everyone passing by. A few people were moved by her meager circumstances, however, and gave her food so she was somehow able to sustain life.

Shakyamuni Buddha was then staying in Jeta Grove near Sāvattḥī with a large number of his disciples. The people of Sāvattḥī crowded into Jeta Grove every day, eager to hear his teachings. Their hands were full of offerings.

But Nandā just squatted in front of the people walking energetically by, wondering how she could fill her empty stomach. One day Nandā noticed the attitude of the people passing by her had changed. She was usually not in the

least interested in anything other than obtaining enough to eat, but her curiosity was aroused. Standing on unsteady feet, she asked a man passing by, "What is happening?"

"The Buddha is leaving Jeta Grove and moving to another town to spread his Dharma," the passerby said.

Nandā squatted down to think.

...the Buddha's talk might be sacred, but I have never gone to hear him because words will not help fill the emptiness in my stomach, Nandā thought. Still, I may never be able to see him again in my life. Although the seed of happiness to plant in the garden of my life is said to be right before my eyes, I haven't planted a single one, so there's nothing I can do but remain as I am...

But something she had neglected until then because of the emptiness in her stomach thrust itself up from the bottom of Nanda's being.

...I cannot remain like this, Nanda thought. I must make an offering of some kind to the

Buddha!

Although Nandā had watched everyone pass by with their offerings to the Buddha while squatted, she for the first time stood and went begging from house to house.

As evening approached, Nandā's hunger was the same as it always was, but she did not even think of eating the food that she had accumulated.

As she made her way back to Jeta Grove, Nandā saw the twinkling of many lamps given in offering to Shakyamuni Buddha. She stopped.

"How beautiful!"

Although she had seen lamps many times before, Nandā was suddenly moved by their beauty. She hurried to an oil shop.

The owner looked suspiciously at his shabby customer, but Nandā did not hesitate.

"Please give me as much oil as possible for this," she said.

The shop-keeper looked at the small amount

of food in Nandā's hands.

"What are you going to do with the oil?" the shop-keeper asked suspiciously. "You're not going to sell this precious food that you should use to nourish your body, are you?"

"Won't you accept anything other than food?" Nandā asked anxiously. "Or isn't it enough for even a tiny bit of oil?"

The shop-keeper was taken aback by Nandā's earnestness.

"Well, no," he said, "I'm in the business of selling oil, so I'll sell even a little bit, but what you are bartering it for won't give you very much..."

The shop-keeper measured out a small amount of oil.

"I heard that the Buddha is moving on to spread the dharma in another town," Nandā told the shop-keeper, "so I would like to light a lamp in offering before he leaves."

The shop-keeper was surprised by her words. He reopened the oil jar and ladled out another

scoop.

"I see," he said. "If that's what you are going to use it for, then you needn't pay me. Please eat that food yourself."

"No, I can't do that," Nandā said sternly. "Please accept this in payment," and forced the food into the shop-keeper's hand.

Nandā carefully carried the oil to Jeta Grove. This was the first time she had ever lit a lamp in offering. Both her hands and her heart shook with nervousness. The lamp wick fluttered for

