

The Buddha's Connection with his First Five Disciples

One time when the Buddha was staying in Sharivasti, Ananda wondered what kind of virtue had caused Kondinya and so forth (the Buddha's first five disciples) to be present when the Wheel of Dharma was first turned. These remarkable disciples were completely satisfied by the teaching of the Four Truths of the Aryas, and were able to realize arhatship thereby. With this thought, Ananda requested the Buddha to explain how this happened.

Buddha said, "Not only have I helped these five in this lifetime, but I have also dispelled their hunger and thirst in a previous lifetime by providing them my own blood and flesh. So, this happened now because of the power of the aspiration that I made then: when I attain enlightenment, may I establish them in the state of ultimate peace." Ananda requested him to related these events in more detail, so the Buddha told the story this way.

Limitless kalpas ago in this Jambudvipa, there was a king called Power of Loving-kindness, who ruled 84,000 different kingdoms. His nature was compassion itself and he persistently practiced the four limitless thoughts. He established all his subjects in the moral ethics of the ten virtues so well that not even the words "enemy" or "robber" appeared in that country. The people always enjoyed peace, happiness, and all types of glorious wealth. Because he established all these people's minds, bodies, and speech in virtue, no sickness or disease existed at that time.

Now yakshas are beings who eagerly desire others' flesh and blood. The pleasure of their lives is to send various plagues and diseases. But here, none of their wishes were accomplished so they were hungry and thirsty, and suffering from a lack of causing harm to others. So five of them approached King Loving-kindness and explained, "We sustain our life by eating the flesh and drinking the blood of human beings. But through the power of your rules of virtue by which all the people abide, we have no opportunity to harm anyone, not their lives nor their bodies. So now we are suffering thirst and hunger and draw close to the end of our lives. Have you no compassion for us?"

Limitless compassion for these beings arose in the king's mind. Saying, "You can drink blood from my body," he cut his hands, legs, and neck and allowed these five yakshas to drink blood from his five branches. They drank until they were completely satisfied. Afterward, the king said, "You yakshas, from now on you must always engage in virtuous action" and made this aspiration prayer:

This time, I gave them blood from my body to dispel the suffering of their hunger and thirst. By the power of this merit, may I establish them in moral ethics, meditative concentration, and wisdom awareness when I achieve enlightenment. Through that, may their suffering be ended and may they attain the unsurpassed state of nirvana.

The Buddha said to Ananda, "I myself am the former King Loving-kindness. The five yakshas are now my first five disciples, Kondinya and so forth. By the power of that aspiration prayer, they received my first teaching and had the opportunity to see the ultimate truth just by receiving those teachings. This is how the connection was made."

*An excerpt from a teaching by Khenchen Konchog Gyaltsen Rinpoche
at TMC, date unknown.*

Transcription and editing by Khenmo Trinlay.