

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK



STORIES OF THE
BUDDHA'S NOBLE DEEDS





1 Building of the Stupas

The Buddha teaches by demonstrating the results of his actions.

The Buddha describes several occasions when stupas were created in the past, such as the five-jeweled stupas built by the gods on a rocky mountain and the stupas built by a merchant at Baloksha and a householder at Patali after hearing the Buddha's teachings and requesting relics of his hair and nails. The Buddha also said that the future king Milinda would build a stupa, and many stupas would appear as pilgrimage places around the world. From them myriad bells would ring out, spreading the sounds of the glorious teaching and revealing the splendor of meritorious actions.

2 King Punyabala's Practice of Giving

The Buddha demonstrates the cycle of the Perfection of Giving.

The Buddha recollects the story of his previous life as King Punyabala (Power of Merit) who was a protector of many cities and ruled in wealth and glory. One day the king saw a man suffering from illness, and he felt a fierce compassion. He learned that hunger was the root of illness throughout the city, so he gave generously and provided the sick with nurses, physicians, and priests. He gave even to those who delighted only in material possessions and wealth. To investigate the depth of the king's moral strength, the god Shakra manifested as a blind mendicant who begged the king to give him his right eye. When the king gave him both his eyes, Shakra appeared in his own form and the king's sight was restored.



3 The Trials of Asoka's Son Kunala

The Buddha demonstrates the teaching for training as expressed through the results of his actions.

King Ashoka lived in the great city of Pataliputra. He and his queen had a son with beautiful eyes like those of a Kunala bird. Later, King Ashoka married another queen who became infatuated with the prince. When the prince respectfully turned away her affections, she vowed to take revenge. At that time Ashoka sent his son with the army to the kingdom of Taxila. The king of Taxila invited the prince to his palace and they became good friends.

Meanwhile, Ashoka became very ill and thought to pass his rule to the prince, but his second wife intervened. She searched for a man with the same illness as the king's. She killed the man and used his body to learn a way to cure the sickness. When she did, she cured King Ashoka and demanded that she rule the country for seven days as her reward. During her rule, she sent a royal letter to the king of Taxila, ordering him to blind and expel the prince. To save the kingdom of Taxila from her wrath, the prince took his own eyes out and became a wandering ascetic, surviving by singing and playing the lute.

Ashoka wondered what happened to his son. Eventually he heard a beggar's singing and recognized his son's voice. The evil action of the queen was revealed and Ashoka wanted to kill her, but the prince said that this was his karma to experience, and nothing in him would delight in the suffering of another. He swore that if this was true, his eyes would become as they were. As soon as he said this, his eyesight was restored.

Kunala felt that blindness was his karma because, in his previous lives long ago, he was a hunter who blinded five hundred deer and was a merchant's son who plucked out the eyes of a statue in a stupa.