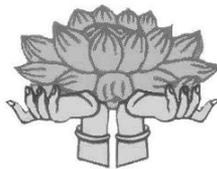


# KING BIMBISARA THE GREAT: *A Father's Unremitting Love*



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## About the Author



Ambassador Dato' Dr. G.K. Ananda Kumarasiri has had a distinguished diplomatic career (1966–1995). He had the rare distinction of setting up and heading the Centre for International Relations and Strategic Studies. The assignment stimulated his interest in education, human resource development and professional training. In 1984, he was appointed High Commissioner to Nigeria. He retired in 1995 as Director-General ASEAN. Apart from being an Adjunct Professor at University Utara Malaysia, he is an active Dhamma Speaker in Malaysia and abroad and has authored several landmark books:

- Professional Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs Management: An Ambassador's Insight
- My Alphabet Book: Holistic Education
- My First Word Book: Holistic Education
- A Compendium of Buddhist Personal Names: Heritage and Significance of Adoption
- Living Buddhism: The Way Forward
- Living Buddhism: Advancing from **Knowing** to **Being**
- The Terrifying Drug Menace
- Welcoming the Birth of a Child
- Angulimala: Transforming Life
- Mothercare and Parenting: Key to Social Structuring
- SIDDHARTHA: Prince of Peace
- SIDDHARTHA: My First Story Book
- SIDDHARTHA: My First Colouring Book
- The Moving Story of Matu Posaka
- Matu Posoka: Joy of Honouring Parents

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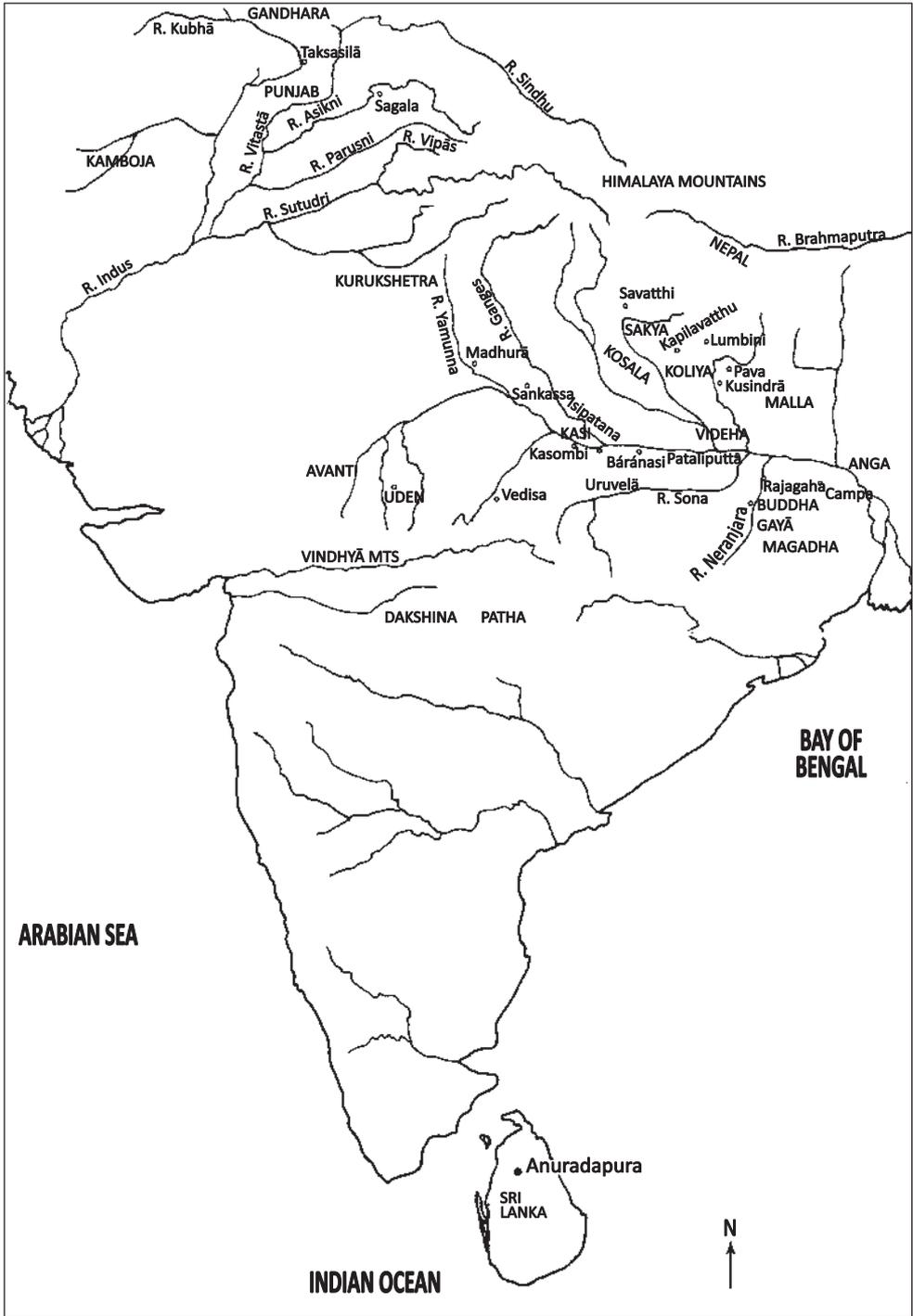
## CHAPTER I

### THE KINGDOM OF MAGADHA

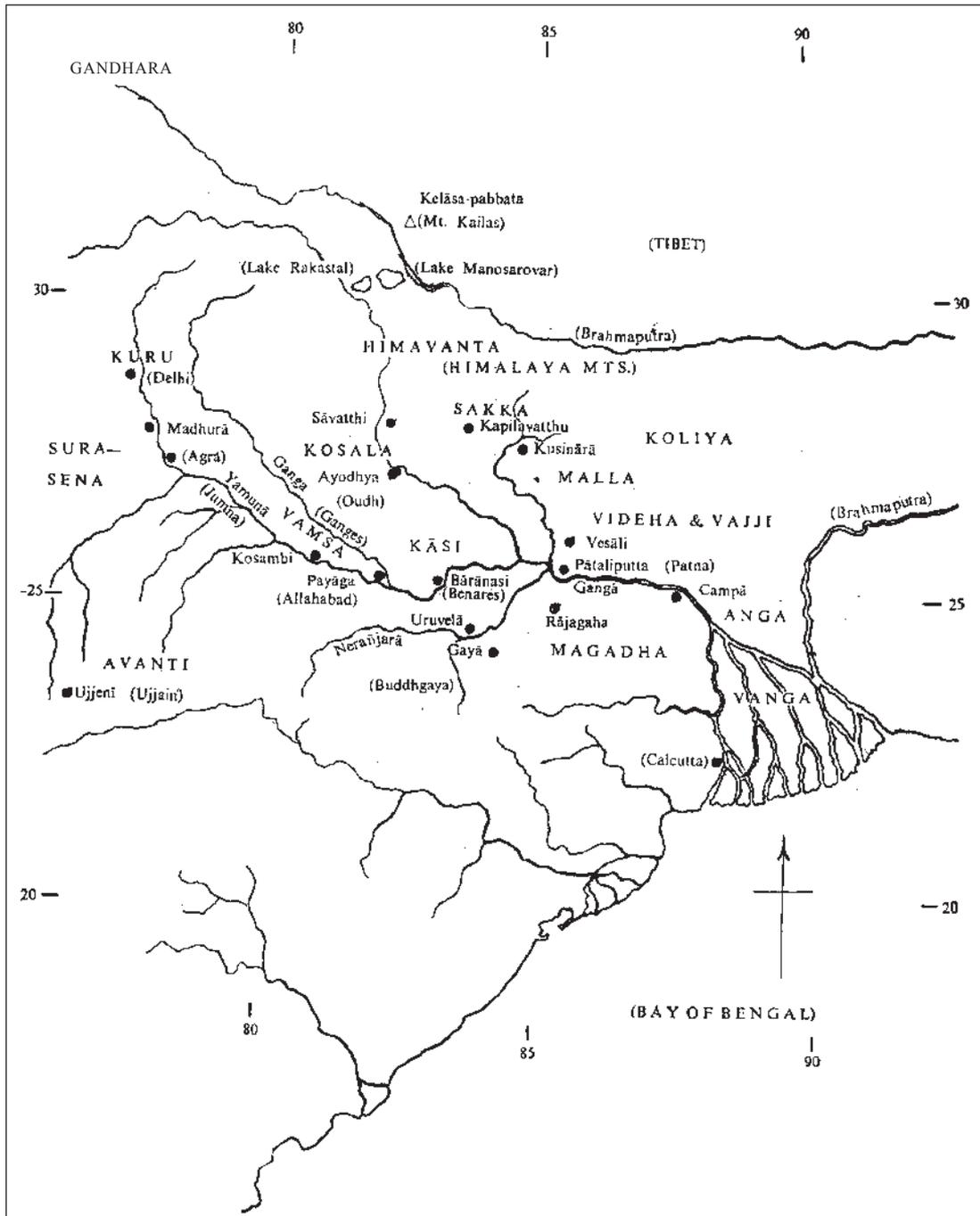
**A**round 2,600 years ago, north-eastern India, commonly referred to as Majjhima Desa (The Middle Land), comprised several Indo-Aryan States. The early Indo-Aryan political entities adopted different forms of government and administration. Most of them were kingdoms ruled by a Raja (ruler or king). Some were ruled by an oligarchy formed by a group of noble families such as the powerful Republic of Vajji. A few adopted a democratic system similar to what is practised today.

The prosperous Kingdom of Magadha was among the more powerful kingdoms in the region. The kingdom was bordered in the North by the River Ganges, in the East by the River Campa and by the River Sona in the West. From its capital city Rajagriha or Rajagaha (modern-day Rajgir), the kingdom expanded in all directions to include other major cities such as Nalanda. Three centuries later, its capital city which was renamed Patliputta became the heart of the Maurya Empire. This came about as a result of the bloody conquests of Emperor Asoka the Great in the 3rd. Century B.C.E.

Other powerful kingdoms included Kosala, Anga, Gandhara, Avanti and Vamsa. The Kingdom of Kosala was bordered by the great Ganges River in the South and extended North towards modern-day Nepal. Its main city was Savatthi. Anga was located east of Magadha. Gandhara was situated in the North, above the Sindhu Basin. Its capital, Takkasila (Taxila), was a renowned



*Political Map of India circa 6th. Century B.C.E.*



*Majjhima Desa circa 6th. Century B.C.E.*

university town of ancient India. The Kingdom of Avanti was located to the North of the Vindhya Mountains. To the Southwest of the mountain range was the Kingdom of Vamsa. Its capital Ujjeni was a major trading centre.

The early Indo-Aryan states competed with each other for supremacy and prestige. The political culture of competition and rivalry led to constant warring for territorial expansion and hegemony among states. As a consequence, some of the smaller political entities fell under the sovereignty of the more powerful states under a collective political framework known as Gana Sangha (federation or confederation). The dominant state assumed a position of overlordship over the subdued state similar to the political status of Kapilavattu and Koliya. The subdued state observed various forms of subservience in its relations with the dominant state.

Our historic episode revolves around the political fortunes of King Seniya Bimbisara the Great of Magadha. The King hailed from the Hariyanka Dynasty that lasted from the early 5th Century till 326 B.C.E. The kingdom stretched over three hundred leagues in extent, that is, roughly the size of the present-day states of Bihar and Bengal combined. It was well endowed with wealthy traders and bankers. Five mountain ranges named Pancagiri surrounded the capital city Rajagaha. Its extensive stretches of forests formed natural abodes for ascetics, hermits, philosophers and Seekers in search of spiritual uplift.

Around the beginning of the 6th. Century B.C.E., King Bhattiya ruled Magadha. This was about the time Alexander the Great invaded North India. During his reign, relations with the powerful Kingdom of Anga, located east of the River Champa which formed their common border was rendered increasingly strained. The deterioration in relations reached the point where King Bhattya



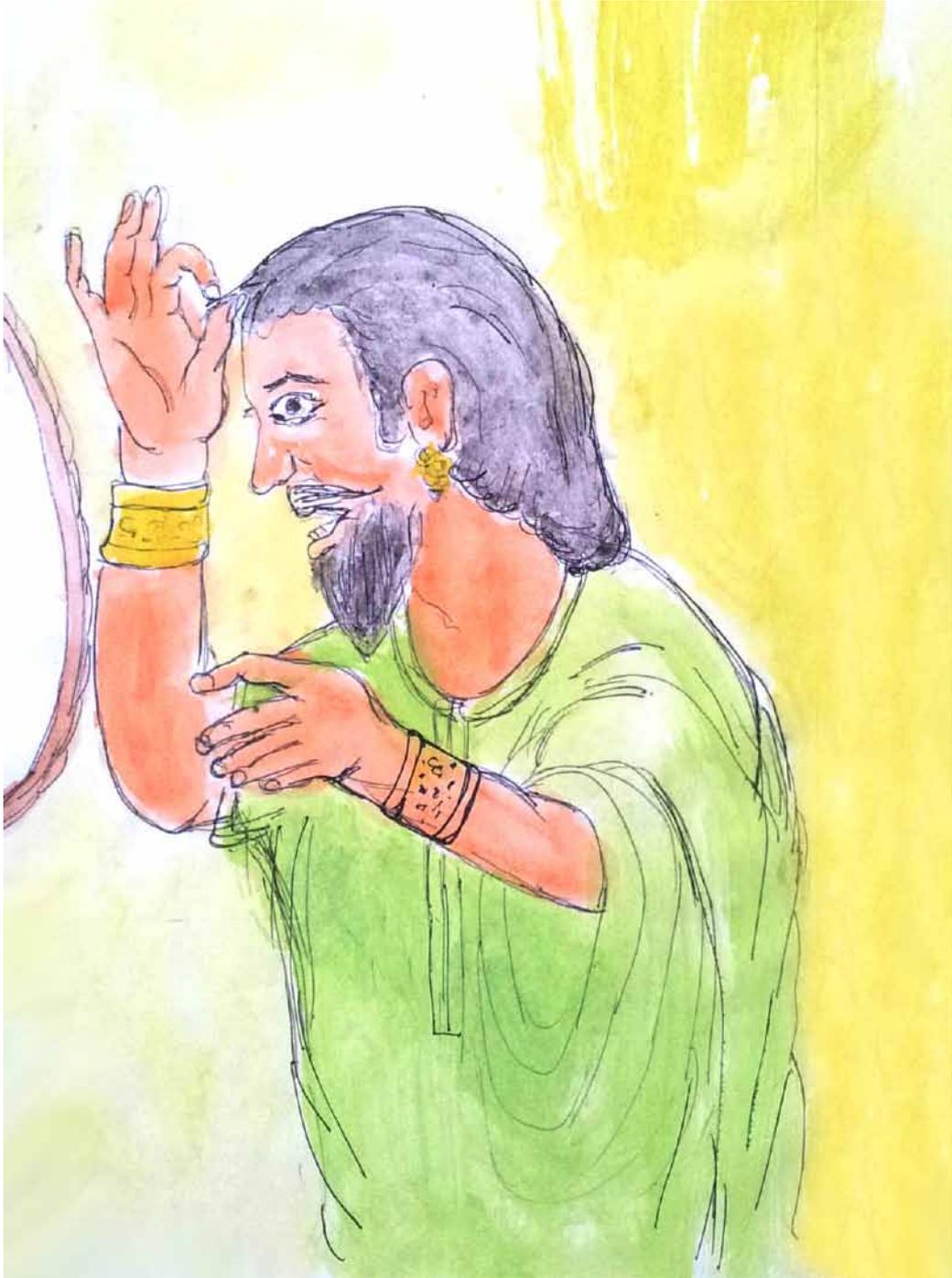
*Young Bimbisara Saddened Over his Father's Defeat*

felt compelled to wage war against King Brahmadata of Anga. King Bhattiya suffered a terrible defeat. His territorial and political ambitions as a consequence were shattered.

At that point in time, King Bhattiya's youngest son, Seniya Bimbisara, was still only a child. On seeing his father return from the war, he ran out of the palace with great excitement to greet him. He was terribly saddened to note that the King was not in his usual good cheer. Rather, he appeared thoroughly dejected and forlorn. Though only a child, Bimbisara could sense his father's great distraught over the military defeat. Little Bimbisara was so saddened that he solemnly vowed he would avenge Magadha's defeat when he grows up, by decidedly vanquishing Anga.

King Bhattiya's ignominious military defeat deeply troubled his mind. The King was particularly worried because he was already old. Yet, his three sons were still young. He feared that King Brahmadata would take advantage of the weakness in the kingdom's leadership upon his death and mount a brutal attack. He dreaded that this could well wipe out Magadha forever. He was also concerned that apart from the increasingly serious military threat from neighbouring Anga, Magadha had to contend with the political and territorial ambitions of other powerful states such as the Vajji Republic and the Kingdom of Kosala. The serious security concerns drove him to ponder deeply about the future succession to the Magadha throne.

One morning, while getting ready to preside at the Royal Court, King Bhattiya discovered a few strands of grey hair appear just above the middle of his receding forehead. The telling signs of old age heightened his nagging worry over the future succession to the Magadha throne. That night before retiring, the King confided in his principal consort, Queen Kanthi, the troubling thoughts



*King Bhattiya Worried over his Old Age.*

on the future of Magadha and his anxiety as to whom among his four sons should succeed him. He explained that it would be imprudent, even irresponsible on his part, if he failed to appoint the right successor and groom him from a young age to rule the kingdom successfully. He sought the Queen's opinion as to whom she considered the most suitable among their four sons to take over the reigns of Magadha.

Queen Kanthi suspecting that King Bhattiya entertained an unconventional succession plan, inquired tactfully:

*Your Majesty, isn't it a customary Aryan practice for the eldest prince to be the heir to the throne? Since this has been the long-established tradition, there should be no second guessing as to who should succeed Your Majesty, but our eldest son, Prince Premjit.*

After a moment of reflection, King Bhattiya disclosed to Queen Kanthi his inner-most thoughts about the future fortunes of Magadha. The King explained that he had given the matter of succession a great deal of thought because of the serious threats Magadha faced. He felt strongly that his successor should be one who is both intelligent and courageous. The King expressed his belief that their youngest son, Seniya Bimbisara (Seniya means possessed of a large following and Bimbi means one of golden hue. Bimbisara's complexion was described as being radiant like the morning sun), was the most suitable to succeed him.

King Bhattiya elaborated that it was incumbent upon him to give the matter of the future security of Magadha the highest consideration. Based on this exigency, he had decided to overlook the conventional practice of appointing their eldest son as successor. He added that although Prince Bimbisara was the youngest, he



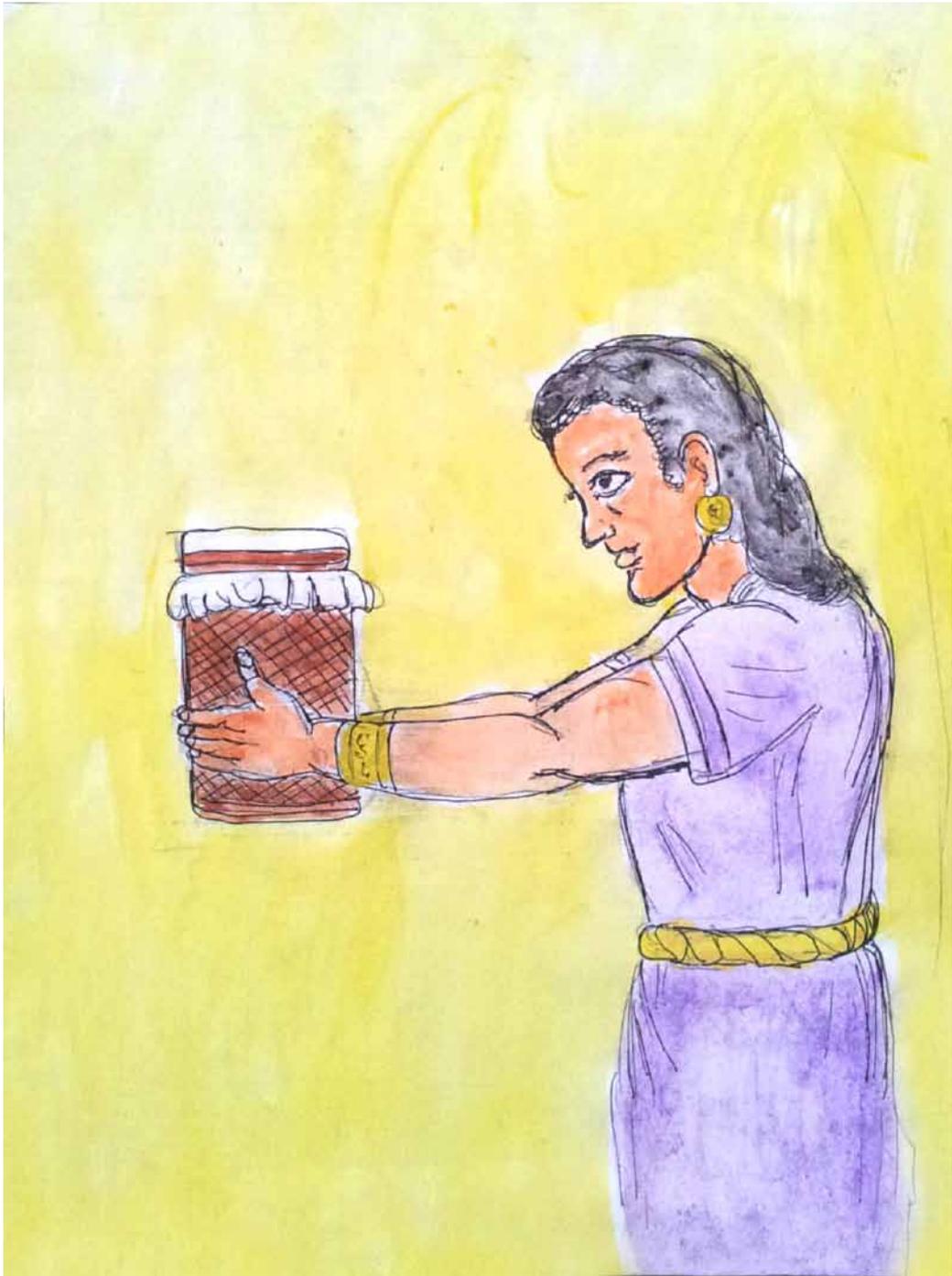
*Prince Premjit Holds the Container Upside-Down*

was more intelligent and courageous than his three elder siblings. He expressed confidence that Prince Bimbisara would prove a great Raja. However, to be fair, he thought it best to put all four of his sons through two tests. The first was to establish their intelligence and thinking prowess. The second was to evaluate their courage.

The following morning, King Bhattiya requested his four sons's to assemble at the Royal Court. The King explained to them that he wished to know how they were progressing in their royal grooming. He was keen to find out what they had learned so far from their specially appointed acariya (tutor or teacher). Towards this end, the King set up an intelligence test for them. Each of his sons was to enter a room where a straw vessel containing powdered cashew and an empty plate were placed on a table. Their task was to empty the cashew flour on to the plate, but without opening the lid or breaking the straw container.

Prince Premjit, the eldest son, took hold of the straw container and turned it upside-down as one would normally empty the contents in a vessel. But nothing spilled out. He then thought long and hard as to how he could empty the powdered cashew. But the harder he taught, the more he doubted the possibility of emptying the vessel in any other way than by opening its lid. After grumbling for some time, he gave up the test in utter frustration. He emerged from his room and lamented to his father:

*Your Majesty, you have set us an impossible test to accomplish. It is simply not possible for anyone to empty the powdered cashew from the sealed straw vessel. I am sure my brothers too would give up trying to empty the vessel. This test must be a prank Your Majesty is playing on us in jest.*



*Young Bimbisara Examines Closely the Straw Vessel*

A little while later, just like Prince Premjit, his two younger brothers Princes Vimala and Kaushek came out of their respective rooms. Disappointment was written all over their faces. Both princes insisted that there was no way the powdered cashew could be emptied without removing the lid of the container. Moments later, Bimbisara, emerged from his room. To the surprise of all his older brothers, he appeared jubilant. He wore a wide smile that lit up his face like the bright morning sun. He was known to be innovative in his thinking and attitude. It was clear as daylight that he had succeeded in emptying the powdered cashew. His bewildered brothers could not believe their eyes. They asked him in astonishment as to how he had managed to accomplish what they had perceived as an impossible task.

Little Bimbisara explained that first he convinced himself that it was possible to empty the cashew flour. Otherwise the King would not have arranged the test. Armed with this positive mind-set, he took stock of the task set before him. It was all too clear to him from the very outset that the test demanded a novel approach. So he resorted to think laterally or think out-of-the-box on how to empty the vessel. First he examined carefully the make-up of the straw vessel by holding it at eye-level and turning it round very slowly. He noted that the vessel was made out of overlapping fine strips of straw. He recognised very fine gaps between the overlapping strips of straw and exclaimed to himself excitedly:

*Alas! I have discovered the way to empty the powdered cashew, though this entails a tedious process. I am confident that if I were to turn the vessel round vigorously the cashew flour would escape through the narrow gaps between the strips of straw.*

Contemplating thus, Bimbisara started to turn the vessel with his



*Bimbisara Empties the Cashew Flour*

right hand. To his immense delight, little bits of the flour seeped through the tiny gaps and fell on to the plate. As he turned the vessel more vigorously more of the cashew flour escaped. Before long, he was able to empty the vessel and prove his superior intelligence over his older brothers. The King was thoroughly delighted with Bimbisara's ingenuity and congratulated him with a warm fatherly hug.

The next day, King Bhattiya requested his four sons to adjourn to the parlour for their morning meal. None of them were aware of the next test their father had secretly arranged. The King had ordered the palace dog handler to unleash a hound after the four sons had taken their respective seats for their morning meal. In the meantime, he and the palace guards were to observe the reaction of the four princes from an adjoining room.

The hellish-looking hound came charging from the far end of the parlour. Prince Bimbisara remained calm. He advised his three elder brothers to stay still and not to run because this would only encourage the hound to give full chase after them. But his advice was ignored. All three brothers immediately took to their heels and bolted as fast as they could for dear life.

Bimbisara remained unrattled. He focused his attention on the charging hellish-looking hound. He stared hard at it without flinching a single muscle of his body. The hound slowed down as it approached him. It growled like a ruthless fiend. The young prince kept his cool and remained as calm as ever. He confidently held out his plate of food and offered it to the ferocious animal. The hound's fierce growls ceased. It sniffed the food and began to delightfully lap up the delicacies. He then quickly took the plates of food his brothers had abandoned and served them to the hound. The hitherto ferocious hound now began to wag its tail in

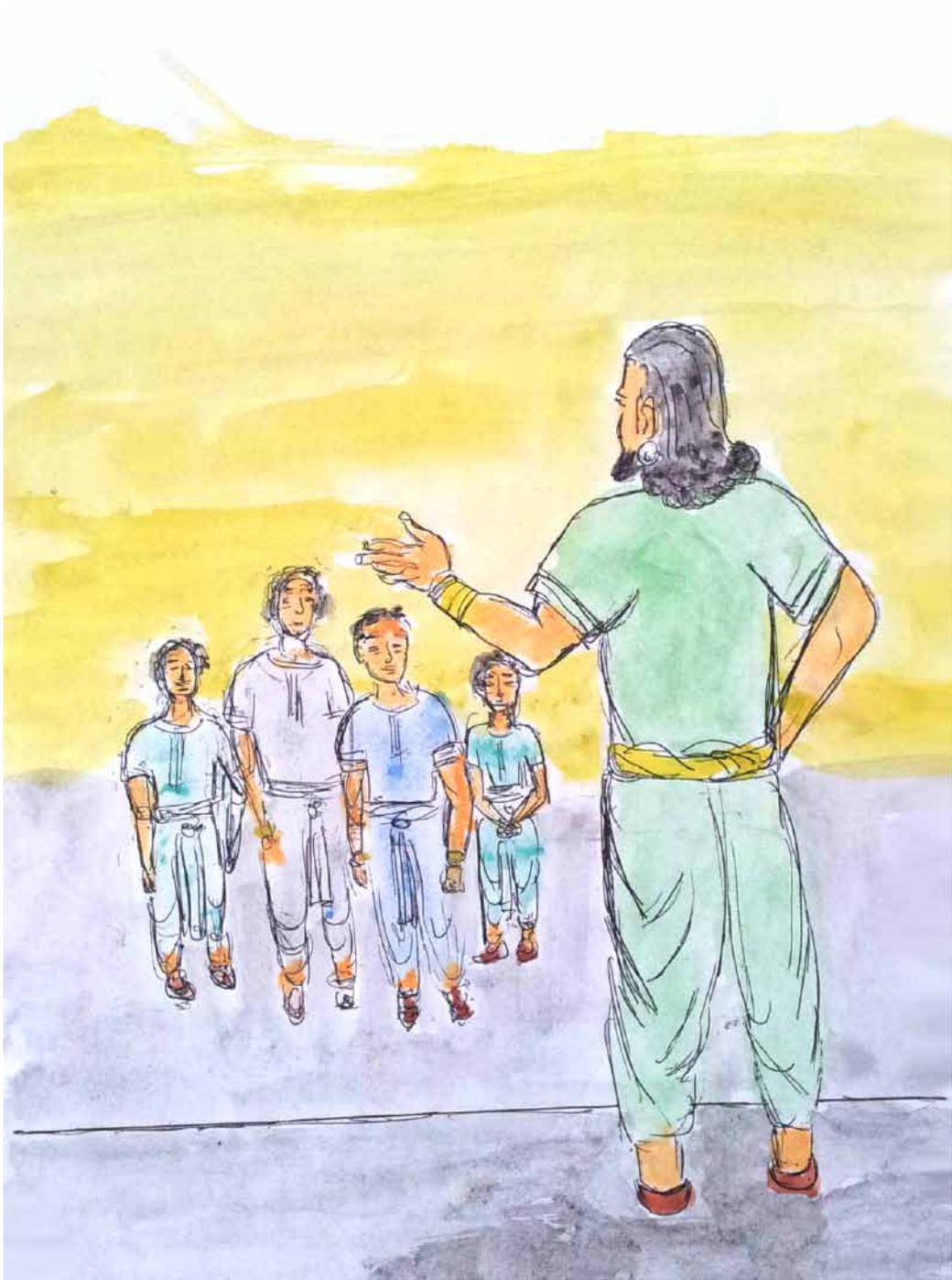


*Bimbisara Calmly Feeds the Ferocious Hound*

appreciation of the sumptuous food. Feeling confident that the hound no longer posed a threat, the brave Bimbisara quietly got up and left the parlour without any harm.

King Bhattiya was highly impressed by the courage his youngest son had displayed in the face of danger. This contrasted so strikingly with the fear and heedlessness his three older sons had displayed. The King was totally convinced that Bimbisara was the most intelligent and bravest of his sons. The King felt confident that not only would Bimbisara succeed in perpetuating the Magadha Dynasty, he also possessed the capability of leading the kingdom to greater heights of glory.

The following day, King Bhattiya assembled his four sons in his chamber. He disclosed that he had deliberately put them through the two tests to decide who was to succeed him to the throne. He declared that it was clear to him that Prince Bimbisara proved the most suited to be appointed Crown Prince, although he was the youngest. He requested his older sons to give him their undivided loyalty and unstinted support as the anointed heir to the throne. The three older sons concurred with their father's decision and agreed to abide by his royal command. They readily acknowledged that Bimbisara was the one most capable of reviving Magadha's waning power and prestige in the region.



*King Bhattiya Desides on Bimbisara as Crown Prince*

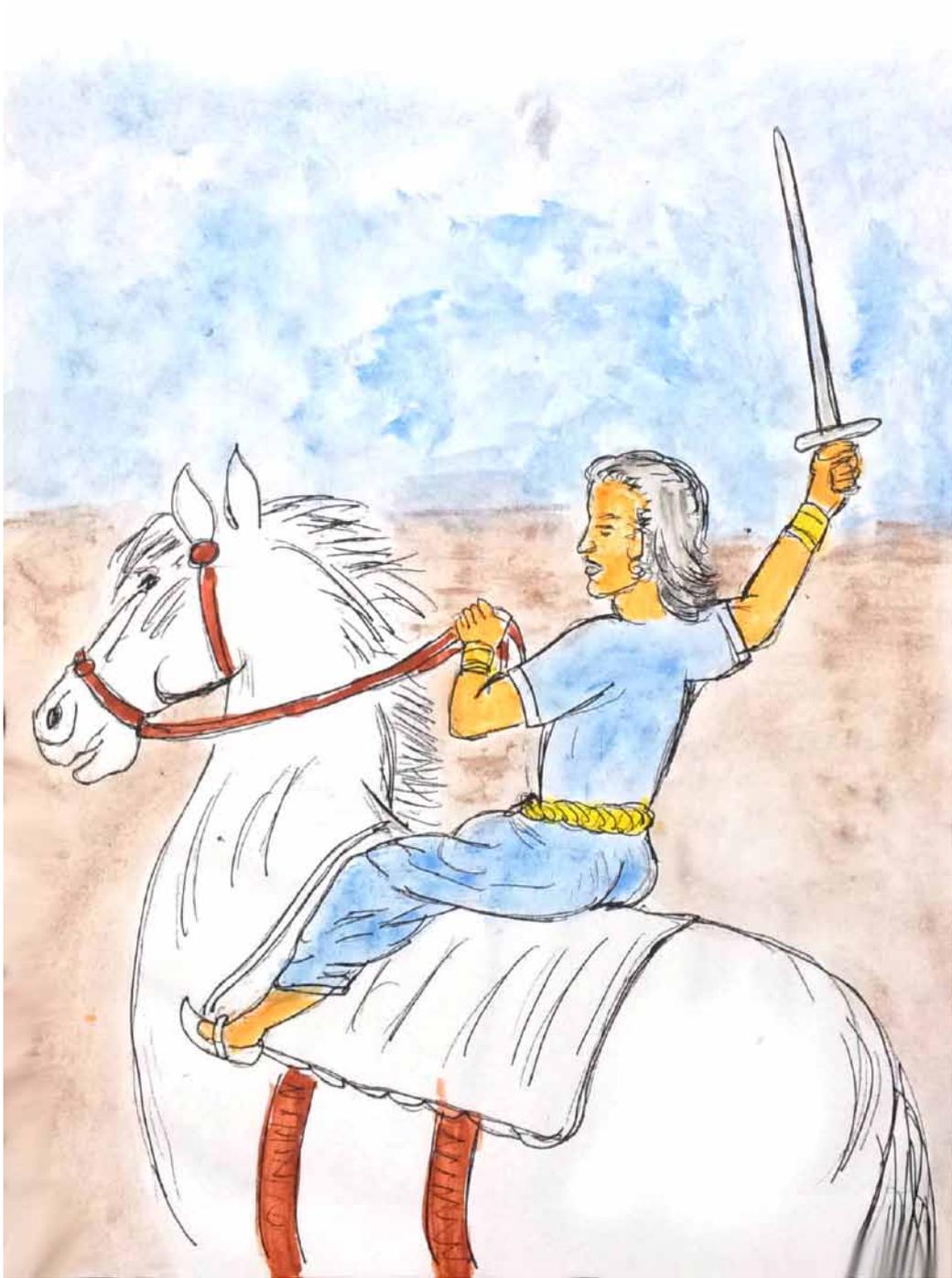
## CHAPTER II

### Accession of Seniya Bimbisara

In accordance with the Indo-Aryan court culture, King Bhattiya convened the Royal Council of Accession. He briefed the Council that the time was propitious for him to appoint a successor. He stressed that this was pertinent and urgent because of the serious threats Magadha faced from its powerful neighbours. He announced that he had chosen Prince Bimbisara to be the Crown Prince. The King explained that though he was the youngest in line to the throne, he was the most capable of perpetuating the Hariyanka Dynasty and of restoring Magadha's supremacy and prestige.

There were murmurings among the Royal Court over the unprecedented appointment of Prince Bimbisara as heir to the Magadha throne. However, after a brief exchange of views, the Mukhya Mentri (Prime Minister), Sri Abeshek, declared the King's decision as endorsed. In keeping with established custom, the Purohita Brahmana (Grand Chaplain), Suriyanath, chose an auspicious day for the Installation Ceremony, based on the readings of Prince Bimbisara's horoscope. In addition, he conducted a special *puja* (religious offering) to invoke the blessings of the Gods for the Crown Prince's protection and glorious future.

Young Bimbisara continued to demonstrate his intelligence. His acariyas were highly impressed by his thirst for knowledge and abiding eagerness to learn. King Bhattiya also made it a point to put him through a rigorous regime of training for his eventual kingship. He was tutored in matters of statecraft, martial skills, military strategy, government and administration and on



*Prince Bimbisara Excels in Warrior Skills*

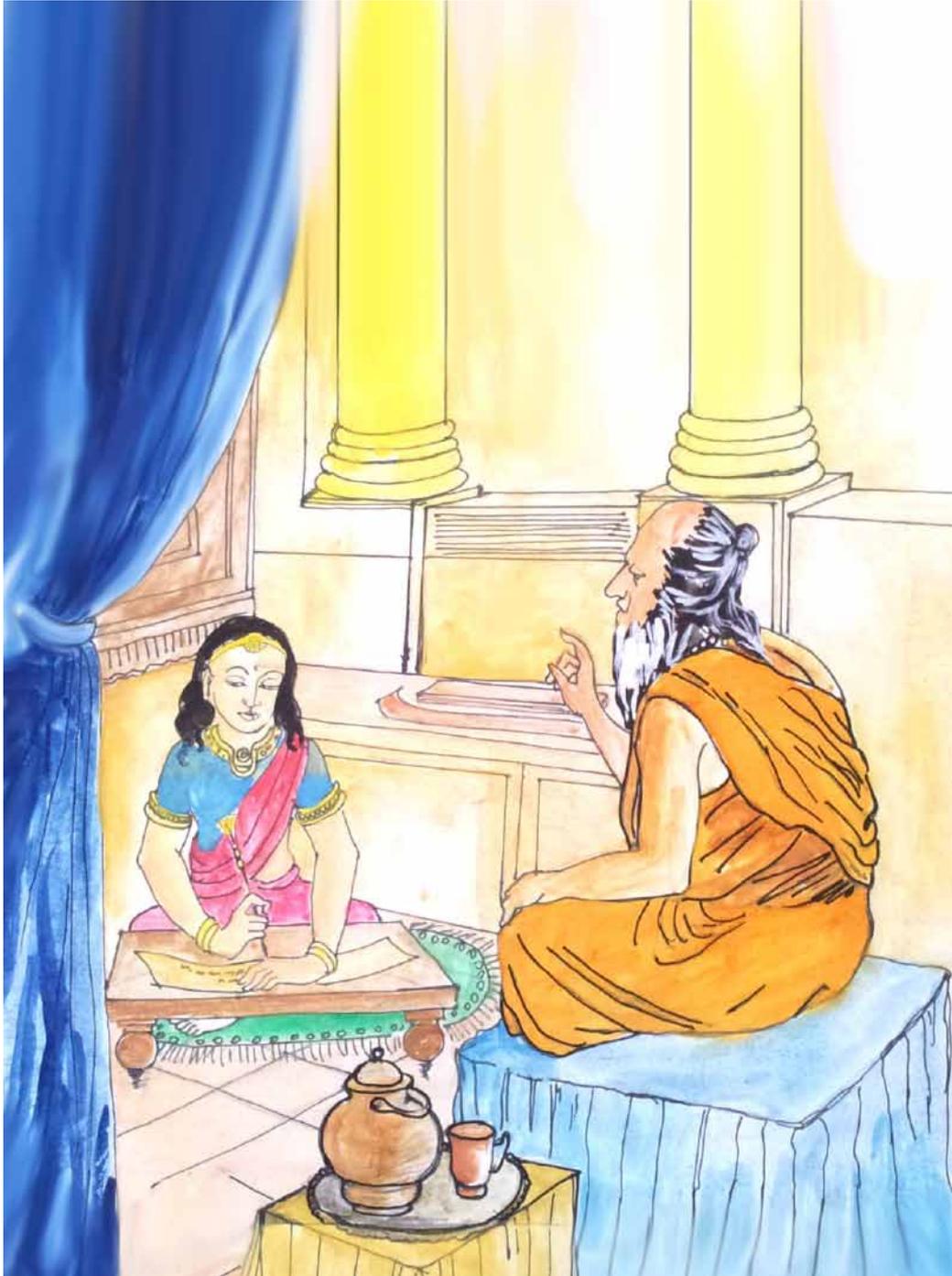
leadership. In the intensive training he underwent in the art of warfare, he proved a highly athletic and brave lad. To the delight of his father and popular expectation among the ruling nobility, he grew up to be a highly skilled warrior. In addition, he possessed a keen aptitude for military tactics and strategy.

One day, while discussing military matters, King Bhattiya casually inquired from Bimbisara “*Crown Prince, what would you like to accomplish most when you assume the reigns of Magadha?*” Young Bimbisara responded confidently:

*Your Majesty, my greatest ambition is to avenge Magadha’s past military defeat by conquering Anga and bringing King Brahmadata to his knees. This is critical if we are to ensure that Magadha is secure and free from military threats. Next, I would strengthen the security of the rest of the borders of the Kingdom before leading Magadha to higher vistas of political ascendancy in the region.*

King Bhattiya no doubt was delighted with Bimbisara’s lofty political aspiration and resolve to regain Magadha’s past glory. The King, however, cautioned him that he was still young and had a lot to learn about matters of statecraft and military tactics. Furthermore, he should not be hasty, but be mindful of all possibilities and probabilities before deciding on important matters of state. The King advised him to meticulously plan his strategy before embarking on a military adventure against Anga or for that matter against any adversary, regardless of its size or military strength:

*Crown Prince, you must always bear in mind the fact that Anga is no ordinary military power. Be cautious and vigilant at all times. We were defeated by King Brahmadata not so long ago. So you have to tread very*



*Young Bimbisara Proves a Diligent Student*

*carefully before you engage in any military campaign against our powerful neighbour. Military action against a state calls for meticulous preparation and thorough training of your soldiers. Equally important is the need to ensure that none of the neighbouring states would take advantage of your military campaign and declare war against Magadha at the moment of military engagement. Patience and forbearance too are of critical importance in the art of warfare. So is the factor of timing. You must seize the moment and mount your attack at the most opportune time.*

Bimbisara assured his father that he would not in any way be hasty, much less, act rashly in military matters. Instead, he would err on the side of caution in his judgement and actions. As regards military campaigns and other important matters of state, he would arrive at a decision only after weighing all pertinent factors. Concerning his vow to seek vengeance against Anga specifically, he assured his father that he would only launch a military campaign after ensuring that the political and military situation in the region was favourable to Magadha. In addition, he would see to it that the soldiers were fully prepared for a military venture. He stressed that he was mindful of the importance of military preparedness. As such he would see to it that his commanders and foot soldiers had thorough training in the art of war and military tactics. As a matter of fact, his primary goal was to see that Magadha possessed one of the best, if not indeed, the very best fighting forces in the whole of Majjhima Desa.

When Bimbisara was barely fifteen, his father died. Although he was only a young lad when ascending the throne, he possessed great military skills. Further, he proved a highly astute leader and statesman. His grasp of warfare and statecraft were honed through hands-on training under his late father's close guidance.



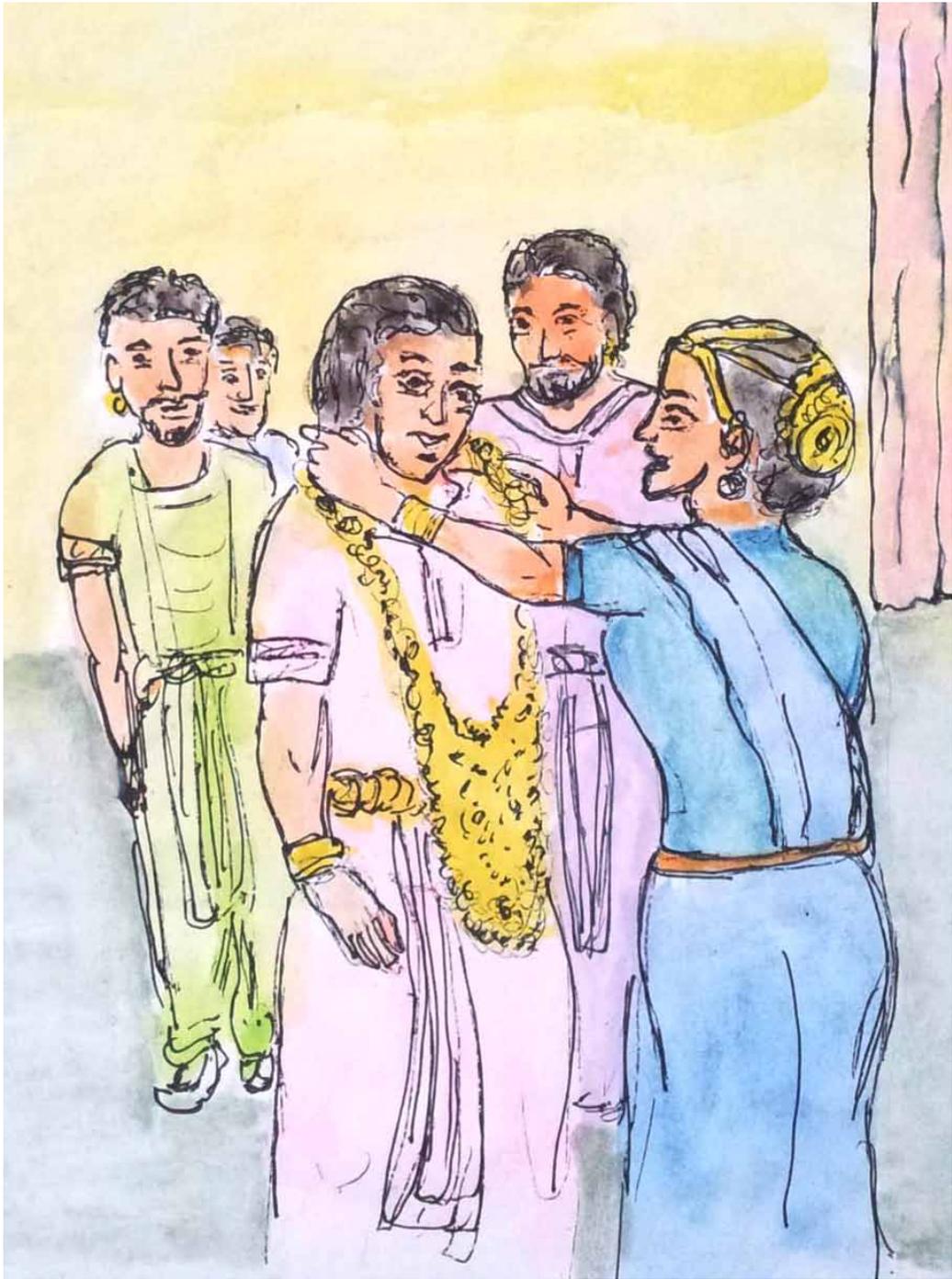
*King Bimbisara's Astute Statesmanship*

So by the time he ascended the throne, he had acquired a sound knowledge of the intricacies of warfare as well as on matters of statecraft. This enabled him to rule Magadha with a firm grip notwithstanding his young age. In addition, the youthful king showed a keen political sensitivity in conducting Magadha's relations with other states in the region.

King Bimbisara's first task was to carefully formulate a comprehensive strategy to consolidate Magadha's political power. He began by focusing his attention on reinforcing his authority and concurrently strengthening the Kingdom's military capability. This was essential in order to ensure both the kingdom's political cohesiveness and military preparedness. Next, through his astute leadership he succeeded in securing Magadha's borders against potential adversaries. Upon consolidating his power-base, he turned his attention to expanding the boundaries of the kingdom through a series of successful military campaigns against small neighbouring states.

A unique feature of King Bimbisara's able leadership was that he did not rely entirely on war to assert Magadha's political ascendancy. The King supplemented and complemented his well-planned and meticulously executed military campaigns with his astute statesmanship and adroit diplomacy. Being the consummate statesman, he successfully forged important alliances with neighbouring states through a number of diplomatic initiatives. This enabled him to establish cordial relations with neighbouring kings such as with King Rudrayana.

Of particular significance was King Bimbisara's diplomacy of entering into what may be termed as the diplomacy of forging political marriages. This diplomatic initiative resulted in Magadha cementing durable alliances through his '*marriage diplomacy*' with princesses from a number of prominent States.



*King Bimbisara's 'Marriage Alliance' through Queen Videhi*

The pattern of matrimonial alliances was set off with King Bimbisara's marriage to Princess Queen Videhi. She was the beautiful daughter of Maha Kosala, the ruler of the powerful Kingdom of Kosala. She was also the sister of the soon-to-be-famous Kosala King, Prasenadi. King Bimbisara was granted Kasi (present day Varanasi also known as Benares), as part of the marriage dowry. To attest the high importance he accorded to the marriage alliance, Queen Videhi was appointed as his principal consort.

Through this '*political marriage*', King Bimbisara succeeded in defusing the hitherto fierce rivalry and conflict between Kosala and Magadha for military supremacy and political hegemony in the region. Their keen contest for overlordship over the numerous smaller states in Majjhima Desa was as a result neutralised. Equally important, the marriage alliance gave the King a relatively free hand in dealing with Magadha's other neighbours. In a few cases, he succeeded in annexing some of the smaller political entities as part of Magadha.

Another classic example of King Bimbisara's '*marriage diplomacy*' was the alliance he forged with Raja Chetaka of the powerful Lichchhavi Republic. This astute political move too was initiated as part of his strategy to wage a war against Anga at an opportune time. Having either subdued or conquered Maadha's immediate neighbours, the King set his mind on declaring war against the powerful Lichchhavis which comprised a confederation of republics.

On learning the military ambition of King Bimbisara, the leaders of the Lichchhavi Republic met at their capital Vesali. After much deliberation about the options that were open to them, they were persuaded by their Chief, Raja Chetaka, that it would be in their interest not to engage in a war with Magadha. He counselled that it would be more prudent for the two states to promote



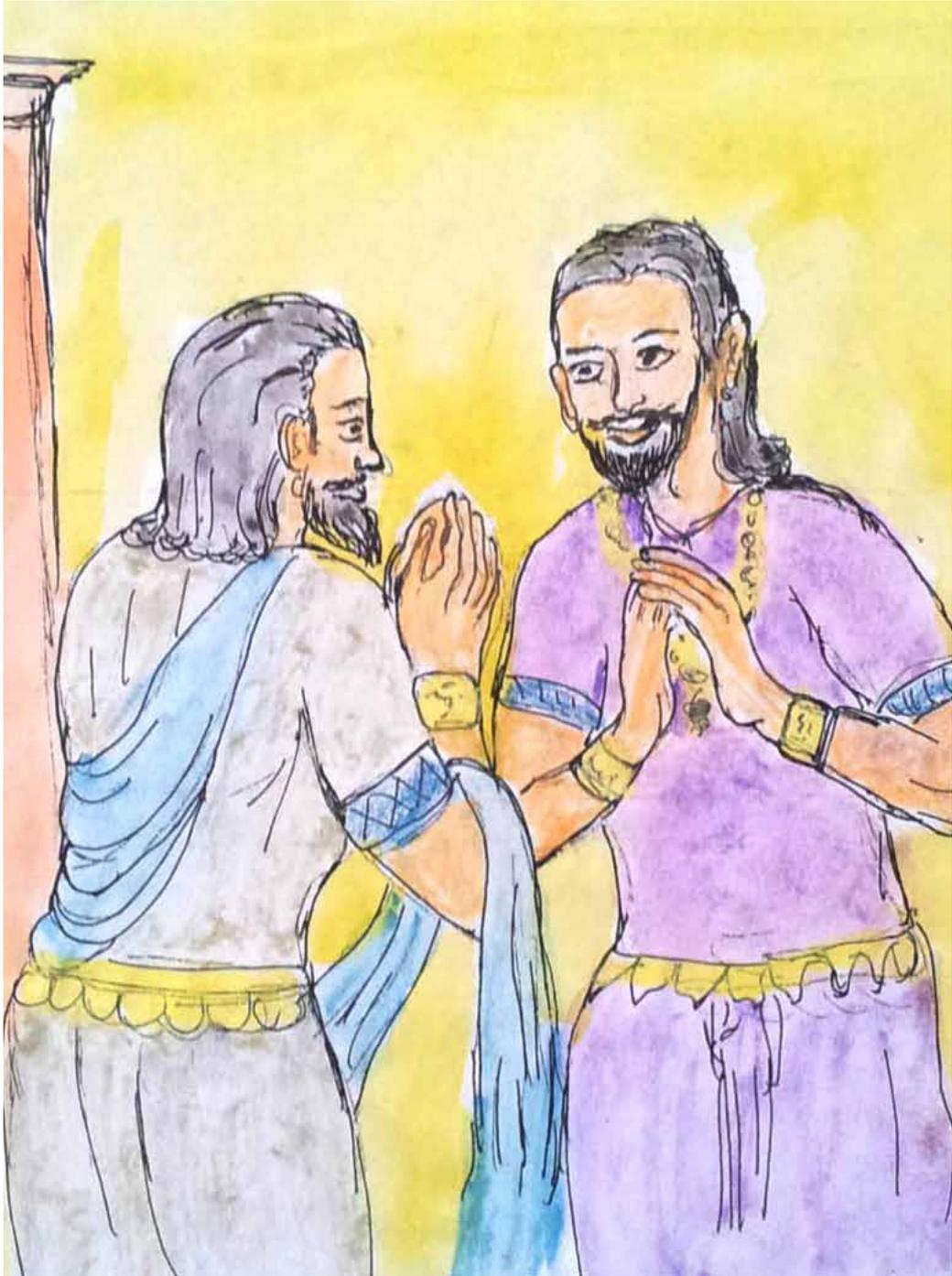
*King Bimbisara's 'Political Marriage' to Princess Ksema*

friendly relations by entering into a mutual non-aggression pact. He emphasised that this would help to forestall a bloody military campaign which would clearly be detrimental to both states, the vanquished and the victor as well. After protracted discussions, the leaders of the Republic endorsed Raja Chetaka's judgement. They granted him the mandate to negotiate a peaceful settlement of their differences with Magadha.

Based on the collective decision of the Lichchhavi leaders, Raja Chetaka undertook a state visit to Magadha. He was warmly received by King Bimbisara personally and was extended the highest honour accorded to a Head of State. King Bimbisara demonstrated his diplomatic adroitness and keen political sense. Raja Chetaka was highly impressed by his statesmanship. The Royal Visit ended on a high note that marked a new chapter of friendly relations between Magadha and the Lichchhavi Republic. As a personal gesture to underline the important milestone of friendship and goodwill established between the two states, Raja Chetaka gave King Bimbisara the hand in marriage of his beautiful daughter, Princess Chhallana.

To reciprocate Raja Chetaka's gesture of goodwill, King Bimbisara appointed Princess Chhallana as his second principal consort. This timely '*political marriage*' had the effect of further consolidating the power-base and prestige of Magadha. This marriage was soon followed by another '*political marriage*' namely, to Princess Ksema, the daughter of the Chief of the Modra Clan of Punjab. The King's other consorts through whom he secure '*matrimonial alliances*' included Princesses Silava, Jayasena and the famous courtesan, Ambalapali, who upon her marriage, assumed the name Vimala Kandanna.

To further reinforce the security of Magadha's boundaries, King Bimbisara used his diplomatic skills to establish cordial relations



*King Bimbisara's Adroit Diplomacy with Raja Chetaka*

with the surrounding States over which he did not entertain territorial ambition. The King's astute statesmanship was especially evident in his efforts to strengthen Magadha's relations with King Candappajjota of Ujjain. When the latter was seriously ill he despatched his personal physician, Jivaka Komabacca, to attend to the ailing monarch. This act of goodwill on the part of King Bimbisara struck a positive chord in the Royal Court of Ujjain. King Bimbisara's compassionate act triggered a train of warm and friendly exchanges between the two kingdoms at the highest level. This helped to further reinforce the cordial relations between the two kingdoms. Thus, within a short period since ascending the throne, King Bimbisara's prestige and political power in the region increased appreciably.

Having secured the borders of Magadha through his astute statesmanship and diplomatic acumen, King Bimbisara turned his attention to his burning ambition to avenge the defeat of his father at the hands of King Brahamadatta. With his army well equipped and in full military preparedness, he sprang a surprise attack on Anga and completely routed its forces. This dramatic military victory formed the crowning glory of King Bimbisara's reign. Upon annexing Anga, he appointed his son, Prince Kunika, as Viceroy and made Champa its capital. Historians contend that King Bimbisara's annexation of Anga bears great significance in Indian history. This historic military victory is regarded to have paved the way for the establishment of the Mauryan Empire which came into being, under the leadership of King Chandragupta Maurya in the 3rd Century B.C.E. The Mauryan Kingdom eventually expanded across the Indian sub-continent under his son, Emperor Asoka the Great, to become one of the greatest Empires the world has ever known. Further, Emperor Asoka became the greatest patron of Buddhism and helped to spread the Buddha Dhamma all across India and beyond its shores.



*King Bimbisara Historic Victory over King Brahamadatta*

## CHAPTER III

### Spiritual Uplift

**B**eyond question, King Bimbisara was an intensely ambitious monarch. He was bent on expanding Magadha's hegemony in the region through military conquest. At the same time, he possessed a strong spiritual streak. Right from a young age, he had associated closely with numerous religious leaders. During his youth he was a disciple of the much revered Mahavir Jain (the spiritual founder of Jainism) who was a contemporary of Gautama Buddha.

King Bimbisara had the good fortune of meeting the Buddha even before He attained Supreme Enlightenment. This historic encounter took place not long after Prince Siddhartha had '*gone forth*' (renounced the householder's life) and embarked on his spiritual pursuit as a homeless, penniless *shramana* (renunciant or ascetic) to attain *Bodhi* or Supreme Enlightenment. The King's initial acquaintance with Shramana Siddhartha left an indelible impression in his mind which merit recalling.

One morning, a senior minister in King Bimbisara's Royal Court, Mantri Suryasena, came across Shramana Siddhartha going on alms round in the capital city. The Minister was awe struck by the supremely serene and peaceful countenance of the lone *shramana* who walked in a most graceful gait. He was completely captivated by the *shramana's* saintliness. In great excitement, he dashed to the Royal Court and reported to the King his inspiring encounter:



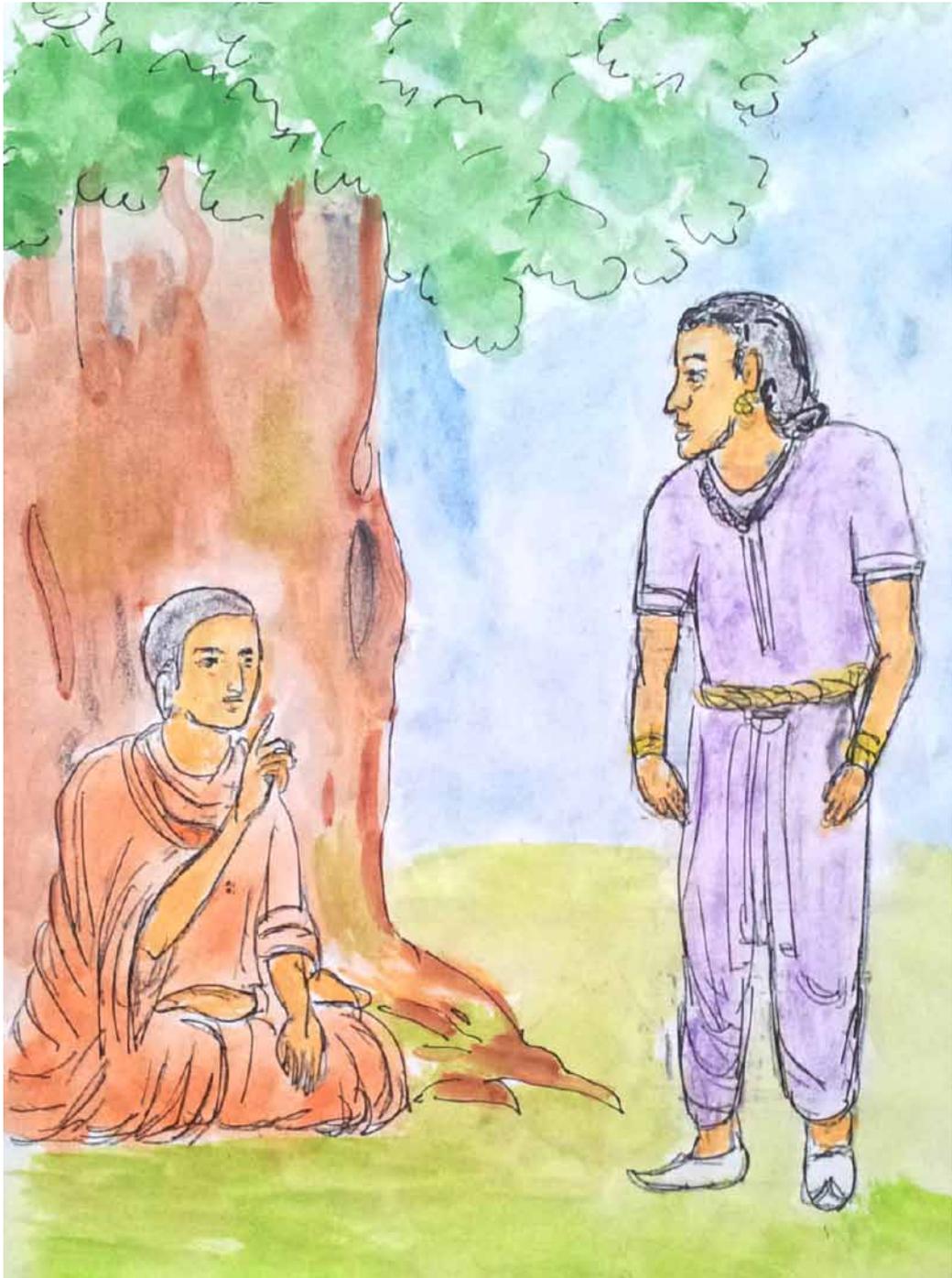
*Shramana Siddhartha on Alms Round in Rajagaha*

*Your Majesty, just now while riding through the city, I came across a saintly shramana of unsurpassed spiritual bearing, going on pindapata (alms round).*

*The incomparably serene figure appeared more like a celestial deity than a sharamana. His profile was far removed from the wandering, homesless ascetic we commonly come across. Without a doubt, he possesses a strong determination to succeed in his spiritual quest. He cast such a majestic aura as he carried himself in a highly dignified gait that betrayed a divine countenance. The lone sharamana walked mindfully with his eyes downcast, looking only a plough-length distance. He has headed towards Pandavabbata (Pandava Rock) to partake his alms food.*

*Though clothed only in a simple robe that is of a soothing saffron hue, the majesty of his persona was ill-concealed by the poverty of his possessions. His brilliant blue eyes beamed with blazing zeal. Shraddha (confidence or faith) glowed from his serene face and signalled an unshakable resolve to attain spiritual perfection. The beauty of his youth was transfigured by the holiness that shone around his head like a glorious halo. All the city folk who witnessed this amazing sharamana gazed at him in awe. Those who were in haste in doing their daily chores at once arrested their steps. They stood still in great wonder to take a good look at his saintliness. I can vouch that there were none who were not captivated by this hugely mesmerising spiritual mendicant.*

*Families gladly offered him alms food as he went from house to house. They bowed before him soaked in great reverence. Their hearts were filled with gratitude*



*King Bimbisara's Meets Shraman Siddhartha*

*for the rare opportunity to accrue merits from their acts of generosity towards him.*

*Young and old were visibly moved and remarked, 'This is indeed a noble sharamana! His very presence brings bliss to our hearts. What a great joy it is for us to be so fortunate as to be able to offer him alms food!'*

King Bimbisara was greatly taken up by Suryasena's account of the inspiring lone sharamana and was moved at heart to meet him at once. He rode out in his royal chariot with an entourage of noblemen and wise old councillors to see for himself the magnificence of the spiritually inspiring *sharamana*. When he arrived at the foot of the Pandava Rock, he alighted from his royal chariot and headed straight towards Shramana Siddhartha's resting place. The King found him seated under the cool shade of a large Nuga tree, resting after taking his mid-day meal.

King Bimbisara was spellbound by his absolutely serene , calm and friendly composure. He greeted him reverentially and sat on his right side, at a respectable distance. He at once recognised that the *shramana* before him was no ordinary ascetic but one who betrayed a royal bearing. On bringing his palms together in respectful salutation, he inquired:

*Most Venerable, I am King Bimbisara of Kosala. I am delighted to say how thoroughly impressed I am by your majestic bearing. You carry a distinct hallmark of a royal lineage. Indeed, your majestic gait betrays a royal descent. Your hands are fit to grasp the reigns of an empire and not merely a mendicant's bowl. I am deeply amazed to see you devote your precious youthful vigour and vitality to spiritual pursuit. Pray tell from whence do you hail?*



*Sharamana Siddhartha Espouses his Spiritual Goal*

Shramana Siddhartha lifted his down-cast eyelids and replied with striking humility:

*Oh, Great King, I am sprung from the Gautama Royal family which by clan belongs to the Surya Dynasty (Solar Dynasty). By birth I am a Sakya and heir to the Sakya Kingdom. I aim to attain Bodhi and unravel the path to liberation from dukkha (unsatisfactoriness of life or absence of complete happiness), for the happiness of all humankind.*

King Bimbisara was thoroughly impressed with the absolute trustworthiness so visible in Shramana Siddhartha's bearing. The King spontaneously extended an invitation to him to remain in Rajagaha and help to govern one half of his vast kingdom.

Shramana Siddhartha politely declined King Bimbisara's high honour explaining that he had renounced all worldly desires. He declared that he had no yearning whatsoever for material gains, political power, high social status or any other worldly things thus:

*Great King, you are renowned to be a liberal and wise ruler. It may surprise you to know that I have renounced a luxurious princely life for attaining the ultimate spiritual goal of Bodhi. My earnest spiritual search may astonish you, Great King, as you see me in the prime of youth and hailing from a distinguished royal lineage. But tell me truthfully, Great King, would you advise a sick man suffering from fever and seeking a cure to ingest something which will surely worsen his ailment?*

*Pity me not Great King. I have renounced my royal inheritance preferring to be free from the unsatisfactoriness and imperfections of life. I crave not for sensual pleasures*



*Shamana Siddhartha Promises to Return to Teach the Path to Sukha*

*for they are insatiable and also are never everlasting. Rather, they are fleeting. On realising that 'going forth' is the answer to real lasting happiness, I am determined to attain Bodhi.*

*I have come to Magadha to seek out renowned religious teachers for guidance in my noble spiritual quest. Great King, may your kingdom enjoy peace and prosperity and may wisdom continue to shine throughout your kingdom under your sagacious rule like the brightness of the mid-day sun. May righteousness be the sceptre of your benevolent kingship under which your subjects may bask in happiness and peace. As for me, I have renounced all worldly aspirations and am determined to serve humanity.*

King Bimbisara understood Shramana Siddhartha's total commitment to his spiritual exertion and unshakable resolve to attain *Bodhi*. The King brought his palms together in respectful salutation. He expressed great reverence and wished Shramana Siddhartha every success in his Noble Spiritual Search. Before taking his leave, the King obtained a promise from Shramana Siddhartha to return to Rajagaha after attaining *Bodhi* and teach the path to *sukha* to him and his subjects.

A few days later, while setting out on his alms round in a nearby village, Sharamana Siddhartha noticed a thick cloud of dust gathering along the cart track. He heard a distinct rumbling of hoofs of animals. The rumbling grew louder and louder. Soon, he witnessed large flocks of sheep being driven by shepherd boys to the city. He noticed a little lamb bleating in pain as it struggled alongside its mother. Sharamana Siddhartha took pity on the suffering little lamb, picked it up and nursed its injured foot. He then inquired from the shepherd boys the reason for the sheep



*Shamana Siddhartha Cradels the Little Lamb*

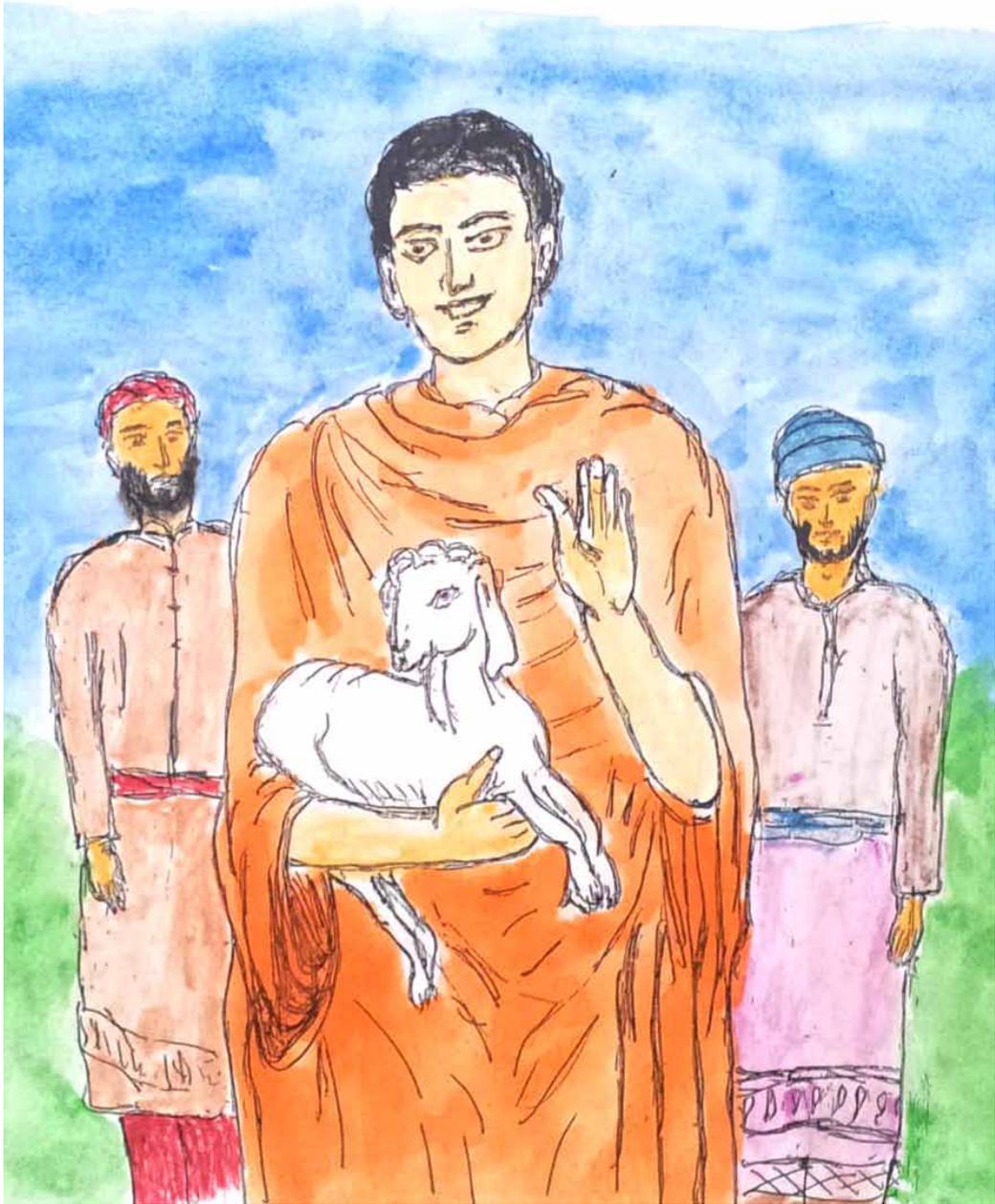
being driven to the city centre instead of to the countryside to graze in the open pastures. The head boy explained:

*Holy shramana, today is the Annual Festival of the Bhramana Fire Worshippers Sect. The King has commanded each of our villages to offer one hundred sheep to be sacrificed to God Agni, the Fire God, at the city centre.*

Shramana Siddhartha could not bear the thought of hundreds of sheep being slaughtered as sacrifice. He decided to stop the Fire Worshippers from carrying out their cruel animal sacrifice ritual. With his heart burning in anguish, he rushed to the city. When Sharamana Siddhartha arrived at the pavilion set-up for the King and leaders of the Fire Worshippers Clan, he was just in time to witness a sheep about to be sacrificed. He rushed forward spontaneously to stop the senseless slaughter and pleaded passionately:

*Great King, Bimbisara, you are honoured and highly respected for your wisdom and sense of justice. All forms of life are precious, regardless of whether it is that of a human being or of an animal or any other creature. Once a life is ended, it cannot be replaced. We are all fortunate to be born as humans. We should therefore be compassionate to unfortunate beings from the animal world. Furthermore, we must understand that we can never expect to gain happiness or any other benefit merely by killing innocent animals as sacrifice. I earnestly urge you to abandon this senseless ritual of slaughtering hundreds of animals.*

*Oh, Great King, be always mindful that all living beings are an integral part of Nature. We are all inter-*



*Shramana Siddhartha Stops the Animal Sacrifice Ritual*

*dependent and inter-twined with Nature. We must all live in mutual respect and amity with all living things. Spare the lives of these hundreds of sheep. I offer my life for your Annual Fire Worshippers' Ceremony in place of these innocent animals.*

King Bimbisara and the religious leaders of the Fire Worshippers Sect were profoundly moved by Shramana Siddhartha's boundless compassion. They were equally struck by his impassioned plea against the practice of animal sacrifice. They realised the irrationality of their belief and the cruelty entailed in their religious practice and decided to abandon it forthwith.

King Bimbisara took the opportunity to once again request Shramana Siddhartha to give up his spiritual search and remain in Magadha and help him to rule the kingdom. Shramana Siddhartha, politely declined the offer, reiterating that his single-minded mission was to find the path to *sukha* for the benefit of all humankind. So saying, he took leave of the King to continue his alms round in the village.

Six years later, after Shramana Siddhartha had attained Buddhahood (gained Supreme Self-Enlightenment), he returned to Rajagaha to dispense the Dhamma to King Bimbisara as he had earlier promised. Before entering the heart of the city, the Buddha resided at Supatittha Cetiya in Latthivaruyyana. News of His arrival soon spread through Rajagaha. His reputation as a Great Muni (Sage) and the Reverence accorded to His Teaching by highly renowned religious teachers in the region drew people from all sections of society. They flocked to pay homage to the Buddha.

King Bimbisara accompanied by a retinue of excited courtiers, noblemen, Brahmana priests, counsellors and city folks proceeded



*Arahant Kassapa Pays Homage to the Buddha.*

to the city in a grand procession to formally welcome the Buddha. The Enlightened One was accompanied by Arahant Kassapa who cut a reverential and inspiring appearance of compassion and friendliness. Seeing the two saintly personages for the first time, the city folks were not sure as to who was the Teacher between the two.

The Buddha understood the doubt that had arisen in the minds of the gathering and wished to dispel it. With this object in mind, the Enlightened One tactfully posed the question to Arahant Kassapa as to why he had abandoned the Brahmanic practice of fire-worship and animal sacrifice. Arahant Kassapa replied respectfully:

*Enlightened Master, I gave up meaningless rituals and the cruel practice of animal sacrifice and have realised the peaceful state of Nibbana. I have fully understood the Dhamma You have unravelled to the world and am now able to bask in sukha. I am now completely immersed in peace.*

Declaring his faith in the Buddha's Teaching, Venerable Kassapa reverentially knelt at His feet and pledged, "*My Enlightened Teacher, worthy of homage is the Exalted One, I remain your disciple evermore.*" Everyone present was thoroughly inspired by Arahant Kassapa's absolute devotion to the Buddha. Whatever lingering doubts the city folks had as to who was the Master vanished.

King Bimbisara received the Buddha with great reverence and paid homage to the Enlightened One. While seated at a respectable distance to the Buddha's right, he listened with rapt attention to His *Dhammadesana* (sermon). The King experienced a great spiritual uplift and attained *Sotapanna* (First Stage of Sainthood). He felt a deep bliss in his heart upon understanding the Noble



*Consecration of Veluvannarama Park for the Maha Sangha*

Doctrine. He expressed immense joy on reflecting the fulfilment of all his spiritual aspirations. Foremost among them was the Buddha's fulfilment of the promise to visit Rajagaha to teach the Dhamma. Taking the cue from their monarch, the royal entourage and the city folks became lay followers of the Buddha. The King's heart was filled with great delight. He spontaneously extended an invitation to the Buddha and his disciple monks to the palace for *dana* (alms offering of food) on the following day. The King set aside royal protocol and served the Buddha and the monks alms food with utmost humility, deep reverence and profound affection.

After the *dana*, King Bimbisara inquired from the Buddha as to the type of place He would consider suitable for the Order of Monks to reside. The Buddha explained that an area which was secluded and quiet and not too far or close to the city would be satisfactory. The King considered that Veluvannarama Park (Bamboo Grove) which was covered with lush bamboo groves and had a clear crystal stream flowing in the vicinity would be congenial for a monastery. The monarch gladly offered the royal park to the Buddha. To symbolise this generous offering, the King stepped forward and poured some water from a golden vessel on the Enlightened One's palms.

The gift of Veluvannarama Park was the very first monastery of the Order of the Sangha. The King built plastered dwellings there for the Sangha Order to reside. The Buddha spent many *Vass* (lent-retreat during the three months rainy season) at Veluvannarama Park.

King Bimbisara's charitable act set the pattern for other monarchs, noblemen, businessmen, traders and affluent followers of the Buddha to extend their patronage to the Sangha Order. The King's *bhakti* (devotion) had a significant impact not only across India but



*The Buddha Teaches King Bimbisara the Dhamma*

also beyond her shores in the countries where the Buddha Dhamma spread. This is especially evident in Sri Lanka. So impressed were ancient Sri Lankan kings with King Bimbisara's devotion that they endeavoured to emulate his generosity towards the Maha Sangha. In time, it became an entrenched tradition among Sri Lankan kings to extend their royal patronage towards the *Buddha Sasana* (Dispensation of the Buddha Dhamma). It is acknowledged that the King's gift of Veluvannarama formed a model for the consecration of the Maha Tupa which King Devanampiyatissa of Sri Lanka donated to Arahant Mahinda (the son of Emperor Asoka the Great) who introduced Buddhism into the island in the 5th. Century B.C.E. This is borne out in the sculptural depiction of King Bimbisara's gift of Veluvannarama in the Relic Chamber of the Maha Tupa (the Great Stupa), in Anuradapura, the ancient capital of Sri Lanka.

King Bimbisara's strong spiritual streak and generosity blossomed like a fragrant lotus for all to enjoy its radiant beauty. He made it a point to regularly seek the advice of the Buddha on spiritual as well as on temporal matters. This included seeking the Enlightened One's guidance on pressing issues pertaining to the governance of his kingdom. With his embrace of the Buddha Dhamma, education and the expression of creative arts flourished under his personal patronage. Famous architects and sculptors such as the renowned Mahagovind built many magnificent buildings. These structures remained masterpieces of the architectural excellence and creativity of ancient India.

From the time he became a devout follower of the Buddha right up to the time of his death, a period spanning over thirty-seven years, King Bimbisara extended patronage towards the propagation of the Dhamma. His positive support was critical especially during the nascent years of the Buddha's Dispensation. This was all the



*King Bimbisara's Devout Practice of Dhamma*

more significant when considering the backdrop of entrenched dogmas, superstitions and arbitrary religious dicta, insisted upon by Brahmana priests. The King personally set the bar of *shraddha* (confidence or faith) for members of the royal family, the nobility and subjects who embraced the Buddha's Teaching in large numbers by devoutly practising the Dhamma in daily life. As a standard practice, he observed *uposatha* (the religious practice of observing eight precepts) on every sixth day of the lunar month. His devout observance of the Buddha's Teaching gave birth to a legendary streak of generosity and humaneness in government and administration. This was distinctly evidenced in the deep sense of justice he ensured in the governance and administration of the Kingdom.

So strong was King Bimbisara's *shraddha* in the Buddha and His Teaching that he proved to be one of the greatest patrons of the Enlightened One and the Order of the Maha Sangha. Without a doubt, his royal patronage played a most significant role in helping the spread of the Dhamma among the masses who for centuries had been struggling under the yolk of Brahminical orthodoxy.

Over and above his strong *shraddha* in the Buddha Dhamma, King Bimbisara possessed a boundless affection for the Buddha as demonstrated on several occasions. A good illustration was how he personally saw to the needs and comforts of the Exalted One. Once a famine followed by a terrible plague had afflicted the city of Vesali. The Lichchhavis felt that only the Buddha could save their capital city from the horrible epidemic. Thereupon their leaders despatched a request to King Bimbisara to arrange for the Buddha to visit Vesali and save the people from the terrifying plague.

The Buddha spontaneously consented to undertake to travel to



*Bimbisara's Boundless Devotion Towards the Buddha*

Vesali. Realising that the road from Rajagaha to Vesali was in poor condition, King Bimbisara at once ordered its repair from Rajagaha right up to the banks of the Ganges for the Buddha to tread with minimal inconvenience. The newly surfaced track spanned a distance of five leagues. At intervals of a league, the King built rest houses for the Buddha and his disciple monks to rest and have their mid-day meal, before journeying to get to their next point. It took them five days to get to the River Ganga.

In addition, Bimbisara accompanied the Buddha to personally attend to the Exalted One throughout the journey. He gladly offered the Enlightened One and the Maha Sangha the requisites they needed in the course of their journey. He regarded it a rare privilege as well as a great honour to be able to serve the Enlightened One and accompanying monks. Above all, the King drew tremendous *shraddha* and a deep sense of *bakti* or devotion from the belief that his services towards the propagation of the Buddha Dhamma were acts of great merit. Such was the King's devotion that even after the Enlightened One and procession of monks had set sail for Vesali, he camped on the riverbank till their return.

In Vesali, the Buddha and his retinue of monks were moved at the sight of the horrible suffering afflicted by the devastating plague. The Buddha instructed Arahant Ananda and the monks to prepare a vessel containing water and to invoke the intervention of the Devas and to recite the Ratana Sutta into it. They were to then sprinkle the Blessed Water around the city. Soon the sky was overcast with thick dark clouds. Moments later a heavy downpour followed and swept clean the city of all decaying corpses. The city folks were thus saved from the dreadful epidemic. The hitherto atmosphere of intense fear and despondency among the people was dramatically transformed to one of profound relief. The



*The Buddha Instructs the Ratna Sutta to be recited*

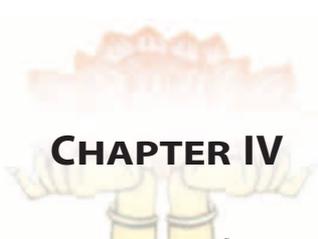
Lichchhavis joyously expressed their exaltation of the Buddha. Ever since, the Ratna Sutra has been recited to invoke the protection and blessings of the *Devas* on those reciting or listening the *sutta* (religious verse).

When the Buddha and his large retinue of monks returned from their highly successful sojourn in Vesali, King Bimbisara received them with the same sense of deep reverence and devotion. He then escorted the Buddha and this retinue of monks to Rajagaha in a grand procession.

King Bimbisara's embrace of the Buddha Dhamma marked a watershed of his glorious reign. Ever since becoming a devout lay follower of the Buddha, the King strove to be an exemplary monarch. His devout practice of the Buddha's Teaching had a direct impact of rendering a humane approach to his rule. He was guided by compassion in ruling Magadha and proved a just and popular ruler. Unfortunately, as events were to unfold, the glorious reign of the noble and pious king, Bimbisara, ended on a most tragic note. This sad episode in his life carries a profound moral ring. His tragic death by his son is often cited in Buddhist scriptures to remind us of the timeless Teaching of the Buddha: It is only after a son becomes a father himself that he truly comes to feel and understand the depth of paternal love. This tragic episode also underlines the Eternal Universal Law of Karma or the Law of Condition, Cause and Effect that can manifest not just in our future lives, but in our very present life as well.



*King Bimbisara: The Great Patron of the Buddha.*

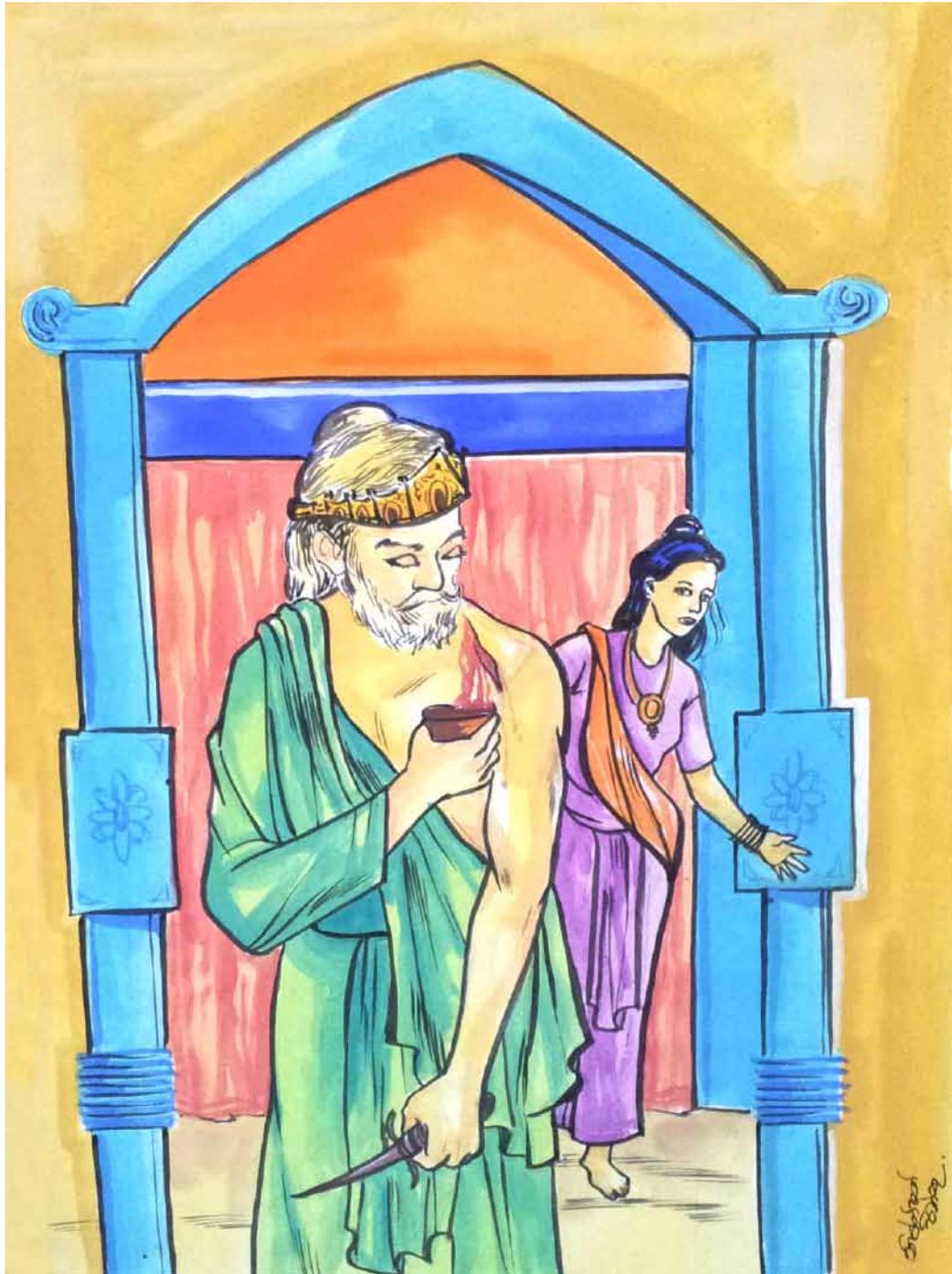


## CHAPTER IV

### **Ajatasattu: “An Unborn Enemy”**

**K**ing Bimbisara dearly loved his principal consort, Queen Videhi. They eagerly looked forward to have a child. When the Queen was expecting, a very strange *dola duka* (craving an expectant mother develops that is believed to be triggered by an uncontrollable desire on the part of her unborn baby) arose in her. She developed an irresistible desire to drink a cup of blood drawn from the left shoulder of the King. Out of deep love for her Bimbisara, she did not disclose her bizarre yearning to anyone. She could not bear the thought of her beloved having to suffer pain from a deep cut and lose so much blood. Much as the Queen tried to drive away her strange craving, the yearning grew stronger by the day. As she suppressed her strange desire, she became emotionally and psychologically troubled. She lost weight steadily. Her face turned pale and appeared like a parched leaf withering away in the sun.

King Bimbisara was greatly concerned over the condition of his expectant Chief Consort. The King insisted on knowing the cause of her steadily deteriorating health. He was also greatly disturbed that her poor health would affect their unborn baby. None of the royal physicians were able to diagnose the cause of the expectant Queen's condition. They declared that there was nothing physically wrong with the Queen except that she was tense, worried and emotionally disturbed over some phobia, directly associated with her pregnancy. They advised that such a condition was not uncommon among expectant mothers and that



*Bimbisara Gladly Offers a Cup of his Blood*

in time the Queen's health would improve. As it turned out, there was no sign of the Queen's health improving.

This caused King Bimbisara to be alarmed. In desperation, he strove to establish the real cause for her disturbed emotional state. Despite pleas to his beloved consort to disclose the cause for her troubled emotional and mental state, the Queen simply refused to divulge the reason. Only when she could no longer bear the agony she suffered in not being able to satisfy her strange yearning did she reveal her *dola duka*.

To Queen Videhi's astonishment, instead of being perturbed with her macabre desire, King Bimbisara spontaneously came forth to satisfy her strange craving. The King in fact expressed great relief that the cause of the Queen's ill health was not some impossible task to fulfil such as obtaining a very rare herb that is only found in some remote highly rugged mountain slopes or to obtain a cup of tigris's milk. Gladly, he called for a knife and a golden bowl to be brought that very instance. He sliced off a piece of flesh from his left shoulder and held the golden bowl just below the raw flesh to collect the blood that gushed out. He then gave the cup containing the blood to his beloved consort to drink. The very next morning, the Queen's health showed signs of marked improvement. She no longer felt stressed. She regained much of her strength within a matter of a few days. Soon her weight increased and both mother and baby were safe.

King Bimbisara, however, could not help but ponder over the significance of Queen Videhi's unusual craving. He sought the advice of his Mukhya Mantri, Sri Abeshek, on the matter. The latter in turn consulted the Royal Astrologer, Chandrajit, about the unusual craving of the Queen. After studying the constellation of the stars at the time of the prince's birth and upon checking his astrological tables, Chandrajit disclosed that the Queen's most unusual desire signalled a very inauspicious birth. He stated grimly that the houses of ambition and craving for power



*The Royal Astrologer, Chandrajit's, Troubling Prediction.*

stood dominant in the astrological chart, while the houses of righteousness, virtue and compassion appeared weak, in the prince's youth. This prediction was further validated by the *dola duka* that the unborn baby had created in the expectant Queen. He predicted that the Queen would bear a son who would grow up to become *ajatasattu*—an unborn enemy of his father. Worst still, he would kill the King to ascend the throne.

King Bimbisara dismissed outright, Chandrajit's prediction. However, Queen Videhi came to learn of the Royal Astrologer's ominous reading of the new born prince's horoscope. Out of great fear of such a horrendous thing happening to her beloved Bimbisara. She decided that it was best for her to abort her unborn baby. The King would have nothing of this. He insisted on the Queen going through with her childbirth.

Queen Videhi's apprehension of Chandrajit's grave prediction nevertheless lingered in her mind. The thought that her unborn baby would grow up to pose a danger to the King's life continued to trouble her deeply. The Queen's inner fear began to take hold of her. She contemplated putting an end to the life of her unborn baby. She frequented the royal gardens in search of herbs which would help to abort her pregnancy. The King discovered this and prevented her from taking such a course of action. She tried in a number of ways to bring about a miscarriage, but the King intervened and forestalled each of her attempts. King Bimbisara did not wish to take any chances with the Queen's intense fear that their unborn baby would prove to be *ajatasattu*. To pre-empt her from committing any rash act, he ordered a team of maids to keep a close surveillance on her every move. He also made sure that his emotionally troubled consort had adequate nourishment for herself and their unborn baby.

Apart from pacifying the expectant Queen's troubled mind, King Bimbisara pleaded to her not to do anything rash that would harm their yet-to-be-born baby. He implored that the prophesy



*Bimbisara Pacifies Queen Videhi of her Fear*

about their unborn baby could well be wrong. There was no gain saying that their child could very well turn out to be a princess and not a prince. He cautioned her that if anyone were to know of her cruel intention to deliberately cause a miscarriage, word of this would spread like wildfire throughout the kingdom and in neighbouring states as well. He stressed that such a heinous crime will be condemned and doubtless would bring great disrepute to the Hariyanka Dynasty.

Feeling reassured, Queen Videhi promised her beloved Bimbisara that she would abandon her intention to abort their unborn baby. Thence onwards her pregnancy progressed smoothly and she eventually gave birth to a wonderful prince. He was named Kunika, meaning unblemished or pure. This name was chosen by the Royal Astrologer to forestall the prediction that the new born prince would grow up to be *ajatasattu*.

King Bimbisara was overwhelmed with joy over the birth of a radiant-looking son. The King spent many delightful times proudly gazing at his new born son. He performed a grand Purification Ceremony and a *Namakarana* (Naming Ceremony) to celebrate the baby prince's birth and to announce his name. The Queen's motherly instincts and attachment for her son grew stronger by the day. Her apprehension over the prediction that he would grow up to be an enemy of his father faded away as the years passed. As for King Bimbisara, he refused to take any heed whatsoever of the Royal Astrologer, Chandrajit's, fearful prediction. The King smothered his new born son with deep fatherly love and constantly showered him with boundless affection and caring.

Prince Kunika grew up to be a handsome capable lad. He was well tutored from a young age. The finest *acariyas* in the kingdom were commissioned to educate and groom him. Being the scion of the Hariyanka Dynasty and in keeping with the Aryan tradition, he was well trained in warrior skills and military tactics as well as in matters of government and administration.



*King Bimbisara Overjoyed with the Birth of a Son.*

## CHAPTER V

### The Unholy Alliance

When Prince Kunika was of age, his father appointed him as the Viceroy of Anga. At that point in time, Venerable Devadatta the cousin and brother-in-law of the Buddha looked for ways and means to wrest the leadership of the Sangha Order from the Buddha. He had entered the Order of the Sangha together with a number of other notable Koliya and Sakya princes in the second year of the Buddha's Enlightenment. During the early years of his monkhood, Venerable Devadatta followed a strict monastic life by scrupulously following the *Vinnya* (Monastic Disciplinary Rules). However, he was unable to attain Arahant hood (Stage of Sainthood) for his motive and motivation in practising the Dhamma (The Buddha's Teaching or the Doctrine or Truth) were blemished with serious *kilesa* (mental defilements). So he strove instead to gain *iddhi* (mystical powers) in order to satisfy his worldly aspirations and to gain fame by displaying his super natural powers.

Through diligent practice, Venerable Devadatta succeeded in acquiring great mystical powers. The Buddha Himself and his senior disciples such as Arahants Sariputta and Moggalana acknowledged his powers of *iddhi*. They were, however, apprehensive about his dubious intention to gain such powers. Over time, Venerable Devadatta was able to attract a coterie of admirers. His powers of *iddhi* and the adulations he received only served to make him more conceited and simultaneously whetted his ambition for power and fame. His ambition to be the leader of the Sangha Order was thus inflamed to the point of a deep obsession.

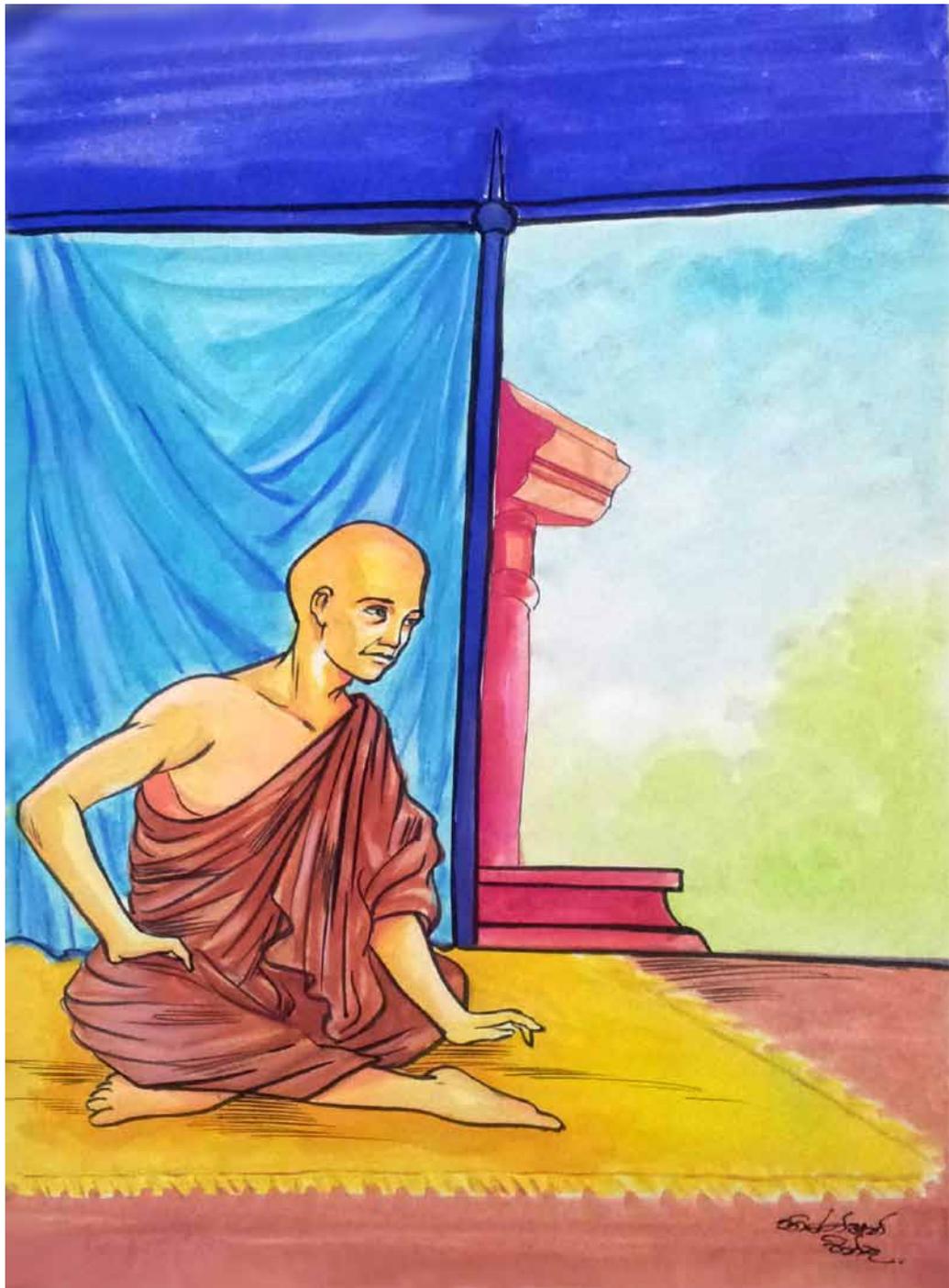


*Prince Kunika Appointed as the Viceroy of Anga*

Venerable Devadatta's intense desire to be honoured as Leader of the Sangha Order preoccupied his mind. He greatly resented being in the shadow of the Buddha. He was fiercely envious of the high reverence accorded to the Enlightened One from all quarters. This triggered in him a deep-seated envy of the Buddha's ever-increasing number of disciple monks. Likewise, the Buddha's burgeoning numbers of lay followers which included members of the royal families, the nobility and affluent members of society like the prosperous merchant, Anathapindika, upset him greatly. Above all, he loathed King Bimbisara's patronage towards the Buddha. He figured that the King's staunch support represented one of the greatest obstacles in his way to replace the Buddha as leader of the Sangha Order. Based on this calculation, he focused his attention on scuttling King Bimbisara's patronage of the Buddha. Whilst keeping his inner feelings close to his chest, he bid his time for an opportune moment to actualise his burning desire to wrest the leadership of the Sangha Order.

Just about this time, it so happened that Prince Kunika was becoming restless over his succession as the Raja of Magadha instead of remaining Viceroy of Anga. He grew increasingly impatient to ascend the throne and rule the kingdom. Venerable Devadatta understood Prince Kunika's burning ambition. He saw this as a great opportunity to exploit. Venerable Devadatta envisaged that if he were to win the admiration of Prince Kunika, he could manipulate him to realise his own obsession to be the Leader of the Sangha Order. He saw in the impressionable mind of the young and ambitious prince a very desirable accomplice whom he could exploit to his advantage and bid his every dictate. Thus was born a confluence of interest that saw the forging of an evil alliance between Devadatta and Prince Kunika.

Scheming thus, Venerable Devadatta focused his attention to winning Prince Kunika's confidence and worming his way into the Prince's heart. He felt confident that by winning Prince Kunika's



*Venerable Devadatta Schemes to Lead the Sangha Order*

trust, he would be able to secure the latter's royal patronage once he ascended the throne. He calculated that the best way to achieve this objective was by impressing the ambitious prince with an exhibition of his mystical powers. So he set himself to demonstrate to Prince Kunika that he had the power to help him to achieve whatever ambition he entertained. The evil Venerable Devadatta decided to cast a powerful spell to further arouse the Prince's innate lust for power.

One day, when Prince Kunika was seated all alone in a pensive mood, Venerable Devadatta created an illusion of himself as a child in a happy playful mood seated on his lap. The prince was thoroughly taken up by the cuteness and the affectionate, lovable feelings that came forth from the little child. He reciprocated his affection towards the little one. At that joyful moment, Venerable Devadatta transformed the loveable child into an illusion of a griddle of venomous snakes. Prince Kunika was shaken to the very core of his being. Terrified at the sight of the wriggling venomous snakes, he yelled out, "*Who are you? I order you to disclose your identity at once!*"

Venerable Devadatta responded with great delight that what Prince Kunika had witnessed was only a modest sample of his powers of *iddhi*. He boasted that with his mystical powers, he could transform himself into anything he wished. The Prince retorted, "*If you are really Venerable Devadatta, I command you to assume your true form at once!*" Thereupon, Venerable Devadatta transformed himself back to his real self and stood smiling in front of the astonished prince. The prince was totally amazed and remarked, "*Venerable Sir, I am highly impressed with your mystical powers. Truly, you are a monk of high attainment.*"

Upon dispelling the fear that had struck Prince Kunika, Venerable Devadatta strove to convince him to have complete faith in the special mystical powers he possessed. He asserted boastfully, "*Your*



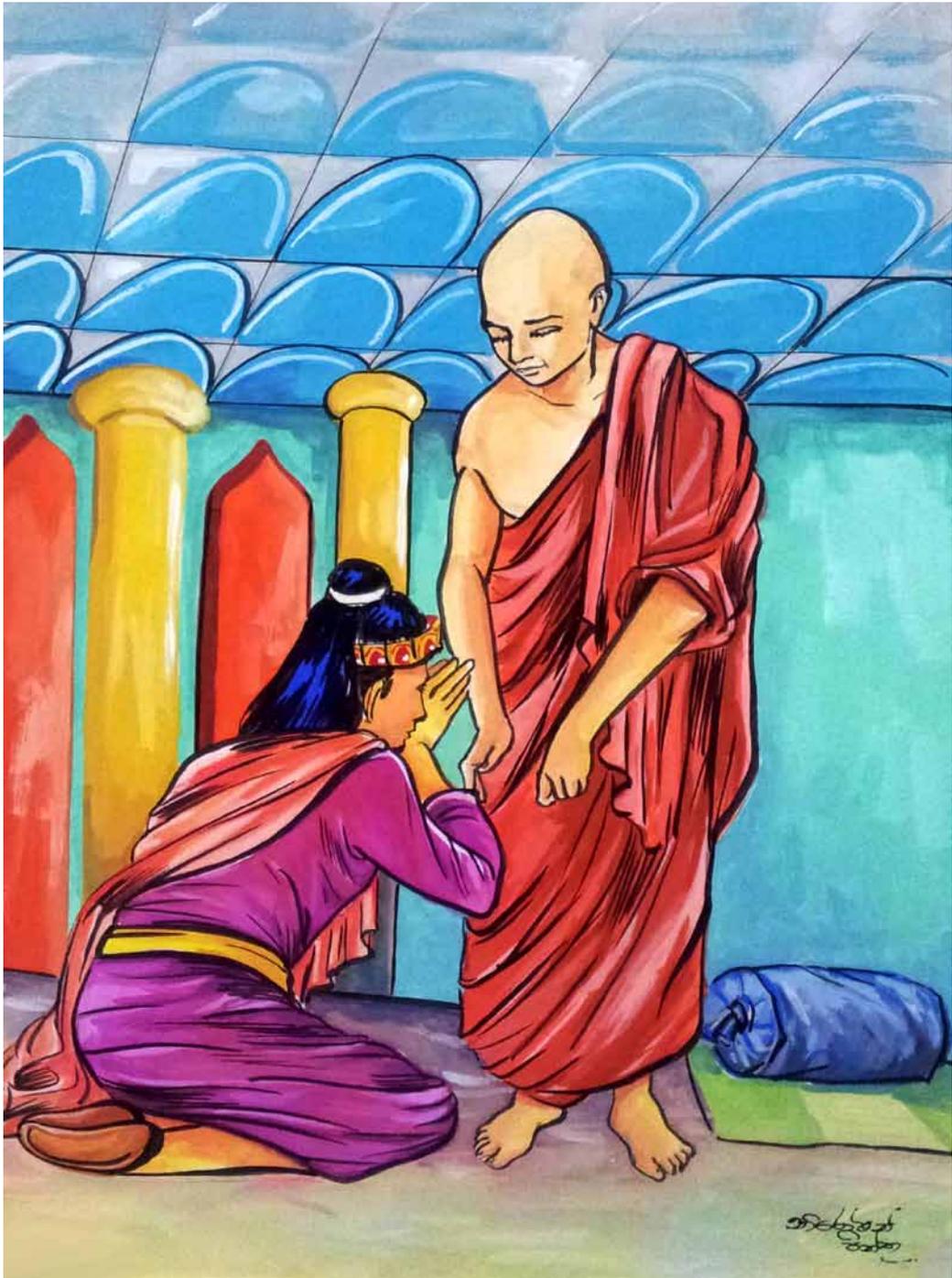
*Venerable Devadatta Subverts Prince Kunika's Mind*

*Royal Highness, what you have witnessed is only a mere sample of the great mystical powers I possess. As a matter of fact, I have the power to either destroy or prosper a person with my iddhi.”* He assured the prince that his supernatural powers could be used whenever required and that he could always rely on him to be a trusted ally. He enticed the prince by suggesting, *“Your Royal Highness, I can even fulfil your ambition to ascend the throne and become the Raja of Magadha instead of remaining indefinitely as Viceroy of Anga.”*

Though Prince Kunika was mesmerised by Venerable Devadatta’s mystical powers, he thought it prudent to establish from the outset what exactly his intentions were. He questioned him pointedly, *“Venerable, Devadatta, what is it that you expect from me in return for using your mystical powers to help me become the Raja of Magadha?”*

Venerable Devadatta seized the opportunity to subvert Prince Kunika’s mind. Using all the cunning and deceit in his repertoire he responded nonchalantly:

*Your Royal Highness, I am not expecting anything from you. All that I wish to do is to proffer sincere advice and help you become Raja of Magadha. Your destiny is not to remain indefinitely as the Viceroy of Anga. This is entirely your father’s narrow self-serving scheme. His object is to rule Magadha and keep you forever in Anga instead of handing over the kingdom to you though you are of age and possess all the makings of an able Raja. To put it plainly, there is no sign whatsoever that the King is slowing down and has plans to hand over the kingdom to Your Royal Highness. On the contrary, your father continues to remain hale and hearty. All indications are that he would live to a ripe old age. It is time for Your Royal Highness to recognise these realities and take appropriate measures to assume your rightful*



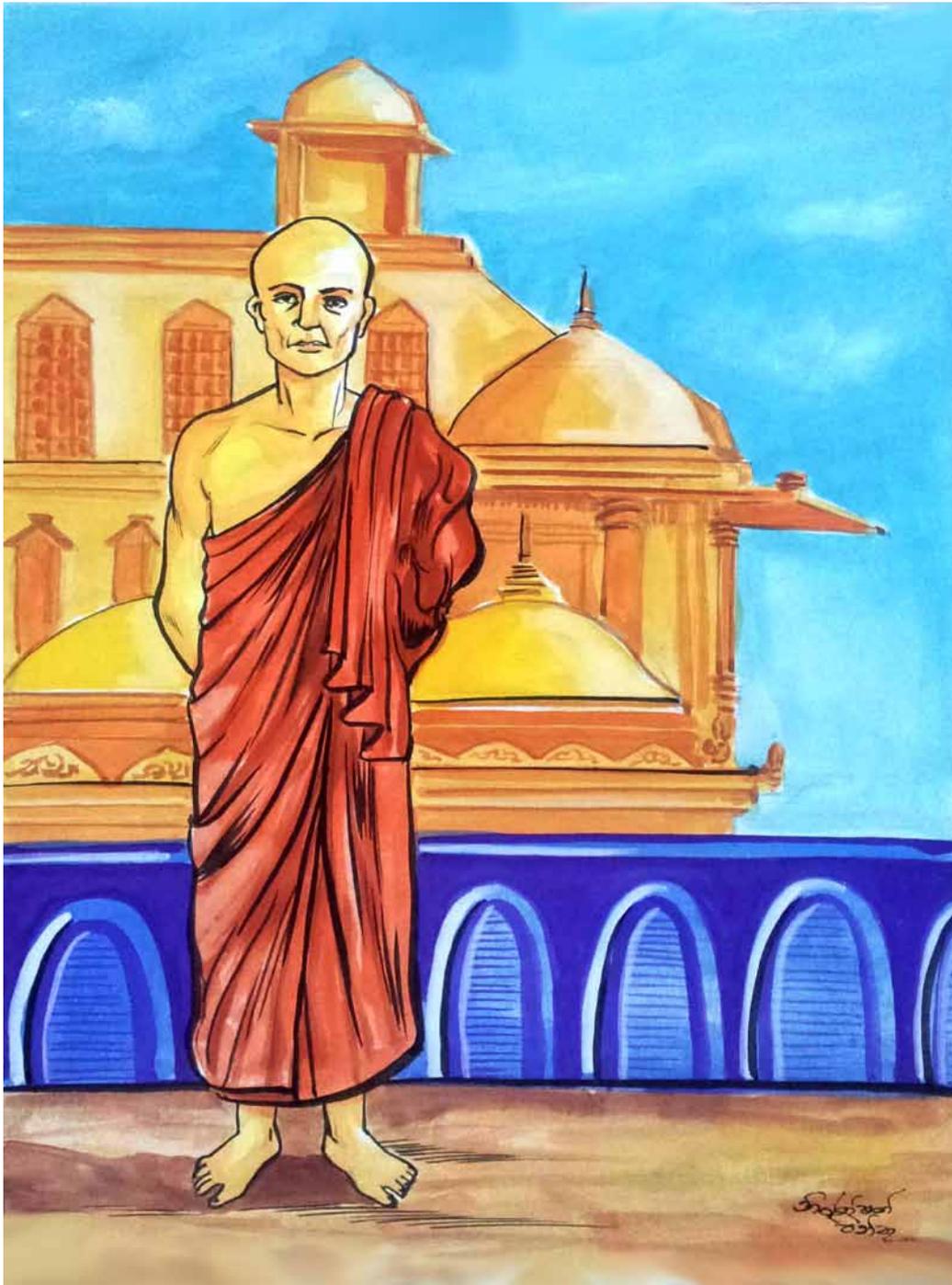
*Venerable Devadatta Beguiles Prince Kunika*

*place as Raja.*

*I only ask of Your Royal Highness to regard me as your trusted friend and ally. I foresee clearly that your Royal Highness is destined to be the greatest king of Magadha. I have every confidence that Your Royal Highness is destined to go down in history as the renowned Emperor of the whole of Majjhima Desa. I will use my powers of iddhi to ensure that you ascend the Magadha throne and soon achieve your glorious destiny of becoming the greatest Raja in all of Magadha's history.*

*Noble Prince, you have waited all these years to succeed your father to the throne. In a few years your youth will pass on and you will not be in a position then to fulfil your destiny. It is terribly humiliating that the King considers you unfit and incapable of ruling Magadha. That is why he has not handed over the kingship to you. How can anyone, especially your own father, think so lowly about Your Royal Highness? Why should you not be the Raja? You are at the prime of your manhood. Do not let your manhood go to waste. In any case, in the larger interest of the kingdom, you have to act immediately and usurp the throne.*

Prince Kunika thought long and hard about Venerable Devadatta's assertions. They began to play on his mind. The destructive flames of craving and suspicion cast by Venerable Devadatta fiercely fuelled the prince's ambition. He felt that there was much truth in Venerable Devadatta's contention regarding his father's thinking and attitude about his succession. He thought to himself, "Why should my father think so lowly of me. I can't bear such a degrading opinion of my capabilities. I must not let my father's infuriatingly low opinion of me pass unchallenged." Reflecting thus, he sought Venerable Devadatta's advice as to what should be done to achieve the glorious destiny he had forecast.



*Venerable Devadatta's Monastery at Gayasisa*

From thence onwards, Venerable Devadatta had free access to Prince Kunika. The scheming ambitious monk succeeded in reinforcing the prince's confidence in him by pandering to his ego. By cajoling and fanning his ambition to become the greatest ruler in the history of Magadha, he beguiled Prince Kunika to trust him wholeheartedly. In great anticipation of his future destiny, the prince favoured him lavishly with numerous worldly gifts. He treated him as a close confidant. As a result Venerable Devadatta began to wield a powerful influence over the prince's thinking and attitude. He spent many hours with him daily and manipulated his vantage position to poison the prince's mind with wicked thoughts and vile schemes upon assuming political power and glory. His painstaking sinister efforts had the desired effect. Through his cunning, Venerable Devadatta succeeded in securing Prince Kunika's support to take over the leadership of the Sangha Order and wield absolute ecclesiastical authority. In return, he promised to help Prince Kunika to enjoy supreme authority as Raja of Magadha. Everything appeared to be falling into place according to his evil scheme. The prince often waited upon him with all kinds of generous favours. He offered him lavish alms food and built him a monastery at Gayasisa.

Having secured a close alliance with Prince Kunika, Venerable Devadatta felt that it was propitious to confront the Buddha to relinquish the leadership of the Sangha in his favour. One day when the Buddha was giving a sermon to a large group of monks in the Veluvannarama Monastery, he appeared before the Enlightened One, bowed respectfully and sheepishly suggested:

*Exalted One, you are enfeebled with age and exhaustion after guiding the Sangha Order all these years. Noble Master, leading the Sangha Order is a great burden that has taken a severe toll on your health. You have already spent the better part of your life in teaching the Dhamma. The time has come for Your Exalted One to*



*Venerable Devadatta Requests the Leadership of the Sangha*

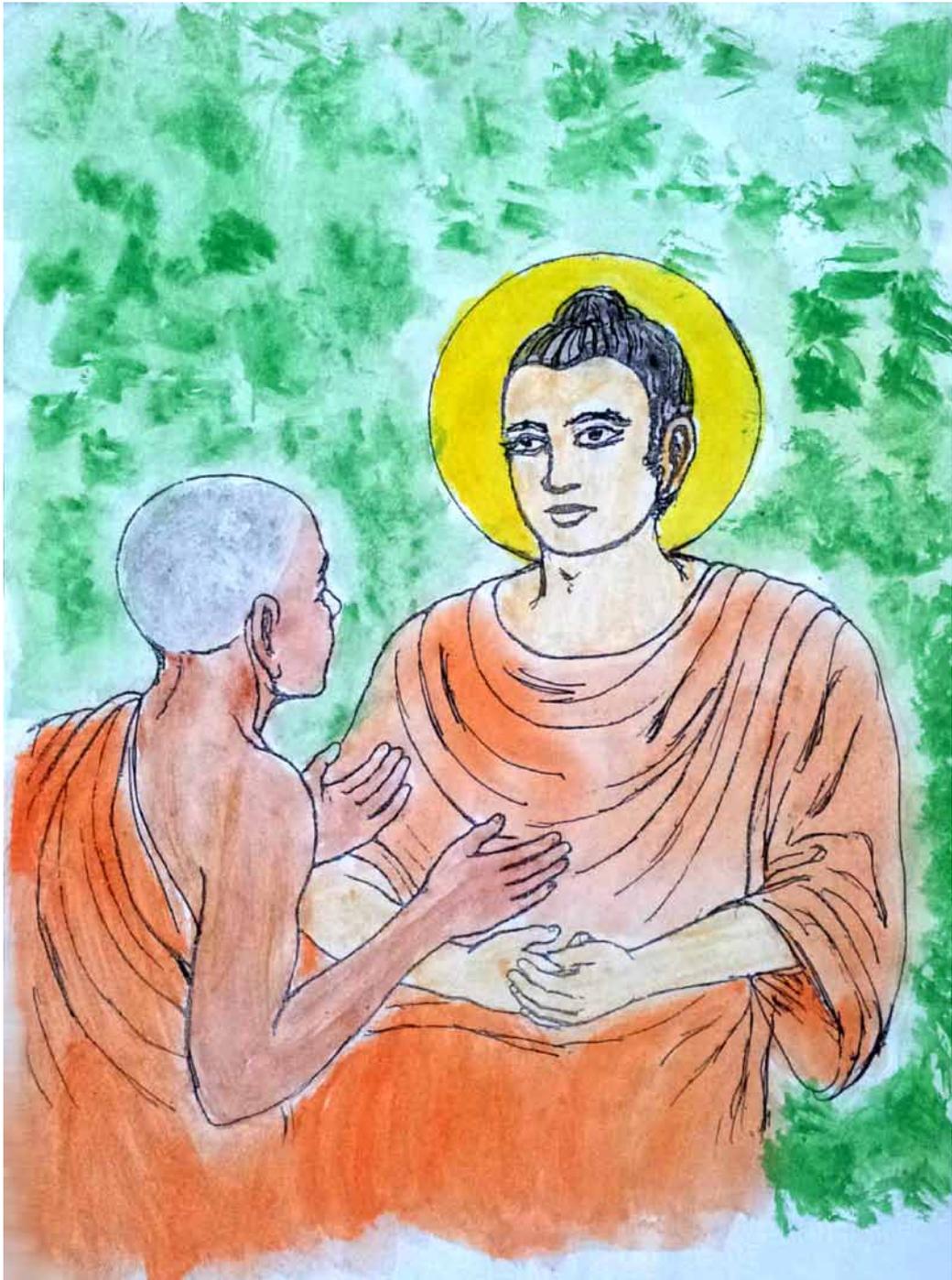
*have a well-earned rest. Noble Master, you richly deserve to live a life free of stress and strain. Allow me to relieve you of this heavy loadstone from your weary head. My powers of iddhi will give me the necessary drive, energy and above all the respect of the community of monks to lead them.*

*Furthermore, being your cousin and brother-in-law would induce all the monks and nuns to readily accept me as your worthy successor. I therefore humbly offer myself to relieve you of the burden of leading the Order of the Sangha. It is time for you to relinquish your leadership of the Sangha Order. Enlightened One, you should spend your remaining years in a more relaxed and comfortable way.*

The Buddha knew only too well the true character of Venerable Devadatta. He readily understood the narrow ulterior motive behind his soothing sweet words which like the proverbial bee that produces honey also carries a vicious sting in its tail. The Enlightened One rejected outright his insincere suggestion. He thought it best to chastise him in a manner that would end his duplicity and dubious ulterior motive:

*Venerable Devadatta, please give up your burning ambition to wield the leadership of the Sangha Order. A vile cunning person like you is hardly qualified to lead the Order of the Sangha. It will do you far more good if you abandoned your sinister plans and instead practise the Dhamma diligently and change your thinking and conduct for your own good.*

*I would not hand over the Order of the Sangha even to my two principal disciples Arahants, Maha Sariputta and Maha Moggallana. The reason for this is that the Sublime Dhamma is to remain the leader of the Sangha*

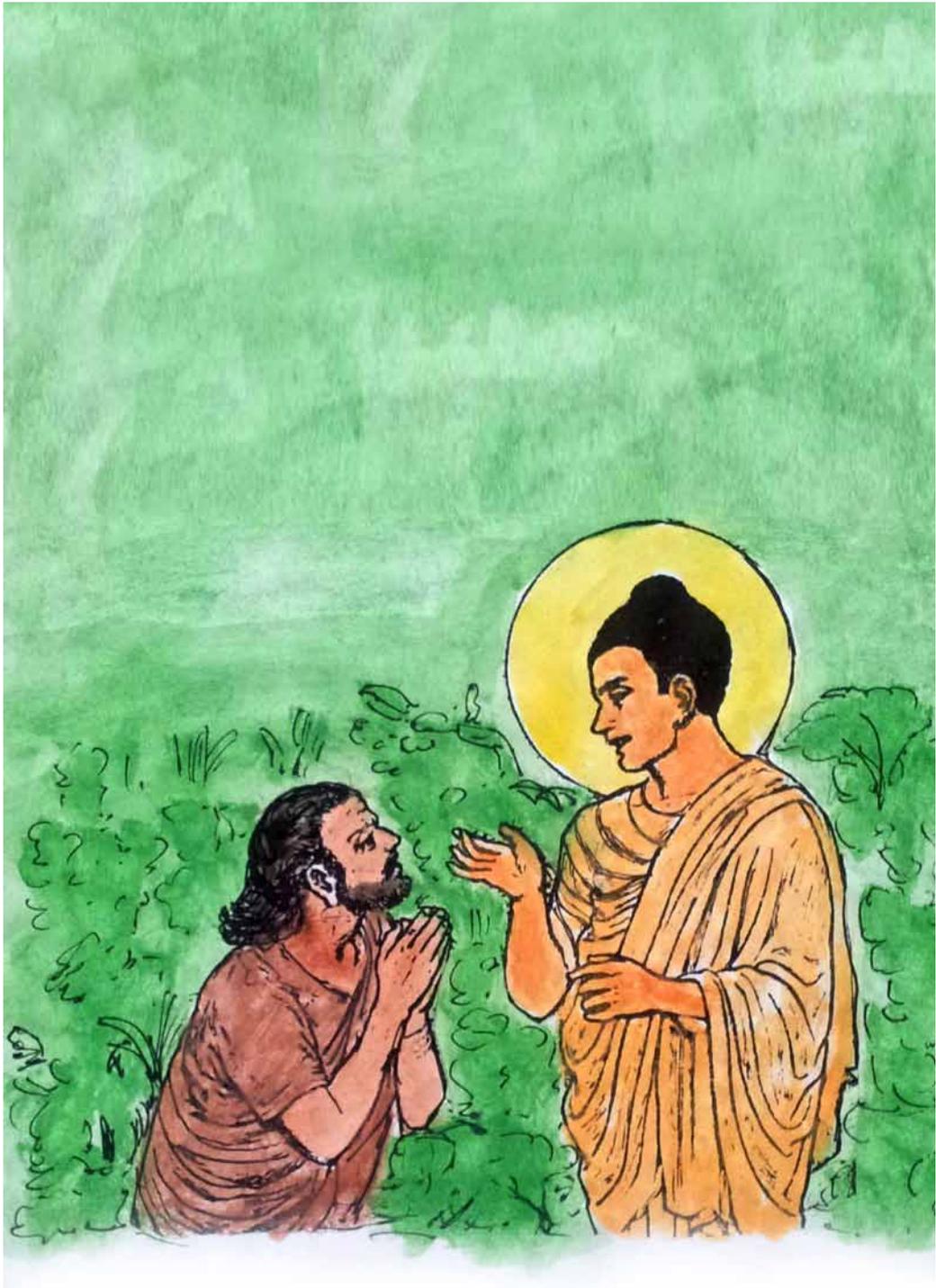


*The Buddha Rebukes Venerable Devadatta*

*Order for posterity. Besides these cogent reasons, how could I ever consider you, of all persons, to lead the Sangha Order, Devadatta? You cannot hold a candle to the host of Arahant disciples amongst the Noble Sangha Order. You ought to be coughed out like spittle for your narrow wicked schemes and devices. You will remain incapable of attaining Arahant hood because of the unwholesome evil thoughts you continue to harbour in your mind. Unless you get rid of your dreadful kilesa you will face great dukkha in life.*

Venerable Devadatta felt terribly humiliated. He could not bear the ignominy of the Buddha's ridicule in the presence of the large gathering of monks. Feeling thoroughly embarrassed, he left the place in a huff. He swore under his breath to avenge the public humiliation he had suffered. Raging with intense hate, he vowed that he would not rest idle until he secured the leadership of the Sangha Order. Since he had utterly failed to secure this through his cunning, Venerable Devadatta decided that the only option left for him was to eliminate the Buddha altogether. He successfully coaxed Prince Kunika to believe that it was now timely to kill the Buddha and achieve their sinister scheme to wrest both the spiritual and temporal leaderships between them. The wicked Venerable Devadatta poisoned the prince's mind about the Buddha. He instigated him to believe that the Buddha had exploited King Bimbisara's patronage and had obtained great tracks of land as outright gifts. He warned that much of the wealth of Magadha would be simply given away to the Buddha. He swore that his father's unreserved patronage of the Buddha would spell disaster for Magadha. It was therefore imperative for him to take matters of state into his own hands and save the kingdom from total ruin.

Venerable Devadatta despatched an assassin to kill the Buddha. At the same time he secretly arranged someone to murder the contracted assassin after the latter had carried out his dastardly act so that no one would come to know about their involvement



*The Would-Be Assassin Pleads for Forgiveness*

in the sinister plot. But, when the would-be killer came face to face with the Buddha to carry out the intended assassination, he was totally inspired by the Enlightened One's serenity and saintly bearing. With his heart overwhelmed with regret, he fell on his knees and broke down in a torrent of tears. In between heavy sobs, he confessed about the plot to murder the Enlightened One and pleaded for forgiveness. The Buddha expressed his understanding and forgave his would-be assassin. The man was so moved by the Enlightened One's compassion that he instantly took refuge in the Buddha Dhamma. He remained in the *vihara* (temple) as a devout disciple of the Buddha. Two more similar plots to murder the Buddha were hatched by Venerable Devadatta. Both attempts were abandoned when the contracted assassins faced the Buddha. Just as in the case of the first assassin, the Buddha's aura of compassion and boundless friendliness completely overwhelmed them. They too became devout disciples of the Enlightened One.

Venerable Devadatta flew into a rage over the failed schemes to assassinate the Buddha. He grew impatient. In utter frustration and burning with anger, he shrieked furiously, "*It appears that I will have to kill the Buddha myself!*" He concluded that he could no longer depend on others to murder the Buddha.

Venerable Devadatta knew that the Buddha's favourite place to practice walking meditation was at Gijjakuta (Vulture's Hill). He positioned himself at its peak to carry out his evil deed. His opportunity to kill the Buddha came sooner than he had expected. He spied the Buddha pacing in measured steps at the foot of the steep hill practising walking meditation. With the help of a few accomplices, he pushed a huge boulder directed towards crushing the Buddha down below. Fortunately, the bolder, got trapped between two huge pinnacles of rock. Upon impact a splinter broke away from the bolder. It struck the Buddha's foot and caused a sharp cut. Blood began to gush from the gaping cut. As good fortune would have it, Jivaka Kombaccha, the Buddha's



*Jivaka Kumbhaccha Nurses the Buddha's Foot*

personal physician was at hand at that time. He quickly applied some herbal medication and arrested the bleeding. He attended to the Buddha's injured foot for about a week until the wound was completely healed.

On another occasion, when the Buddha was on his alms round, Venerable Devadatta had arranged with the mahout of a huge elephant named Nalagiri to intoxicate the animal and direct the drunken beast to attack and kill the Buddha. Everyone ran helter-skelter as the savage Nalagiri came romping down the street. The earth rumbled as the drunken elephant headed straight towards the Buddha like a towering mountain. At that very moment, a mother who was carrying her child on her left hip bolted for safety just like all the other people on the street had done. In her frantic dash for safety, her baby slipped and fell at the middle of the street. The little baby lay crying helplessly about mid-way between the charging Nalagiri and the Buddha. The compassionate Buddha rushed forward to save the baby from being trampled by the drunken Nalagiri. The Enlightened One calmly faced the charging drunken Nalagiri, raised his right hand and said in his characteristic soothing voice,

*“Sukhi hotu (May you be happy and well always), Nalagiri. Halt right there my dear friend. The person who had intoxicated you with pots of arrack (fermented palm) had intended that you kill me and not the little baby. Spare the innocent baby's life. The child means no harm to you or to anyone else for that matter. Attack me instead, Nalagiri. This is what you were instructed to do.*

On hearing the gentle voice of the Most Compassionate One, Nalagiri halted. The Enlightened One's powerful blast of compassion calmed the drunken Nalagiri. Its eyes opened wide with amazement as they beheld the Buddha's brilliant radiance. Its terrifying looks disappeared and it stood still like a lifeless statue as if frozen



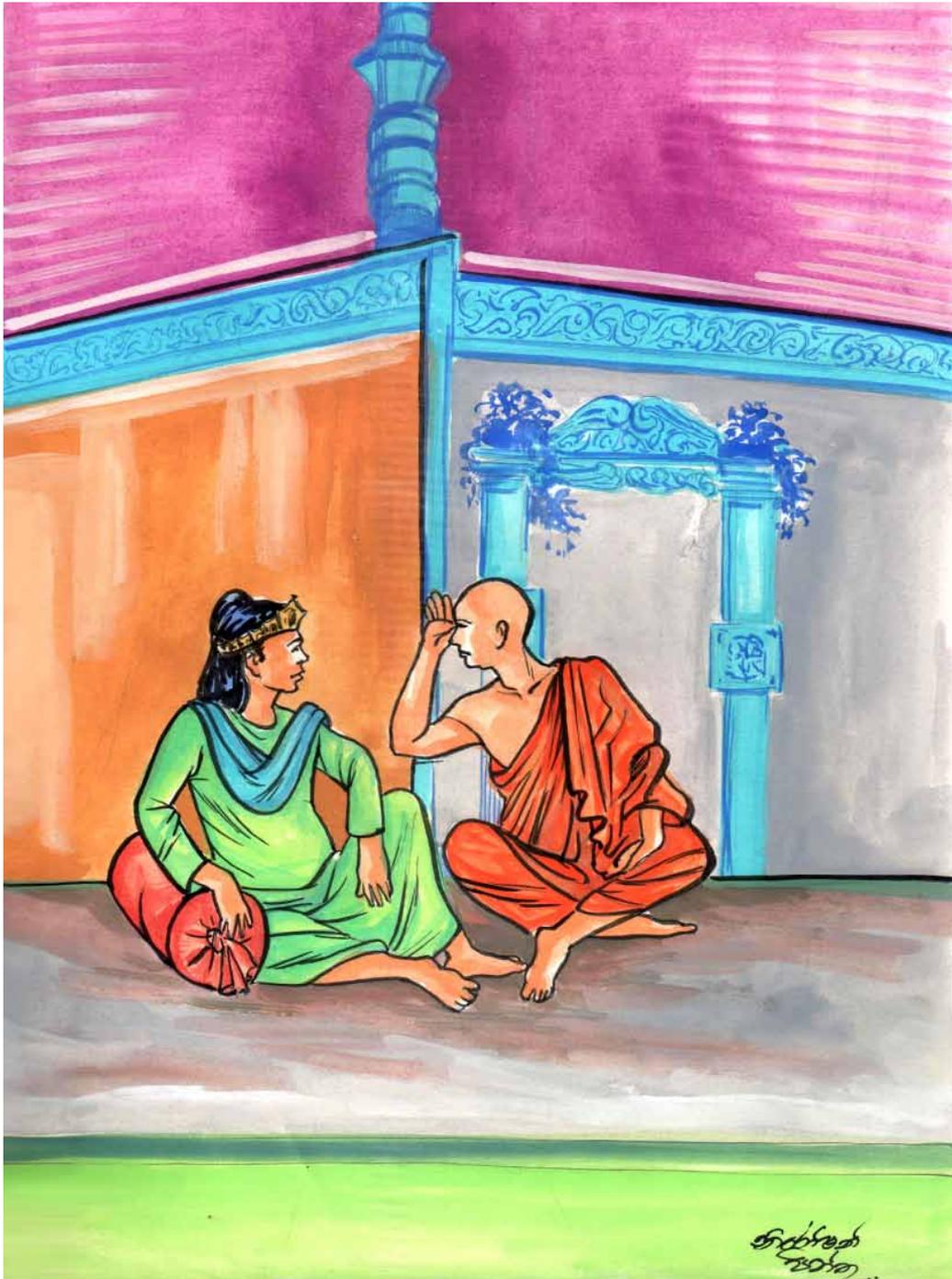
*The Buddha Calms Nalagiri*

in time. The Buddha requested Nalagiri to shake its head from side to side to sober up and revert to its original harmless self. Spellbound by the Buddha's serenity, Nalagiri knelt down at the Enlightened One's feet and paid reverence. The Buddha stretched out his right hand and stroked its forehead affectionately and advised:

*Nalagiri, let this dreadful episode be a lesson in life for everyone. We should live skilfully and be free from intoxicants and of heedless behaviour. By avoiding intoxicants we can remain sober and think and act in a mindful manner. In this way, we can dwell in a happy state of mind and live a peaceful life.*

Having failed to kill the Buddha, Venerable Devadatta shifted his attention to instigate Prince Kunika to usurp the throne and thereby end the royal patronage the Buddha enjoyed from King Bimbisara. He craftily rekindled the deadly flame of ambition in the prince to become King of Magadha without further procrastination. He stressed that he had remained isolated as the Viceroy of Anga for far too long. He cunningly planted the evil thought that if matters were left to their own course it was absolutely clear that King Bimbisara would live for many years to come. He reminded him that his father had no intention whatsoever of abdicating the throne and installing him as his successor in the foreseeable future. This obviously meant that he would have to wait several more years before he becomes king. But by then, he would have passed the prime of his life. For that matter, his father could very well outlive him which meant that he would die without becoming the *Raja*. It was therefore pointless for him to simply wait for his father's death in order to ascend the throne. He promised the prince that he would use his powers of *iddhi* to alter such a fate and help him become the ruler soon.

Venerable Devadatta calculated that he had to move fast and that the time was ripe for him to urge Prince Kunika to murder



*Devadatta Poisons Prince Kunika's Mind about the Buddha*

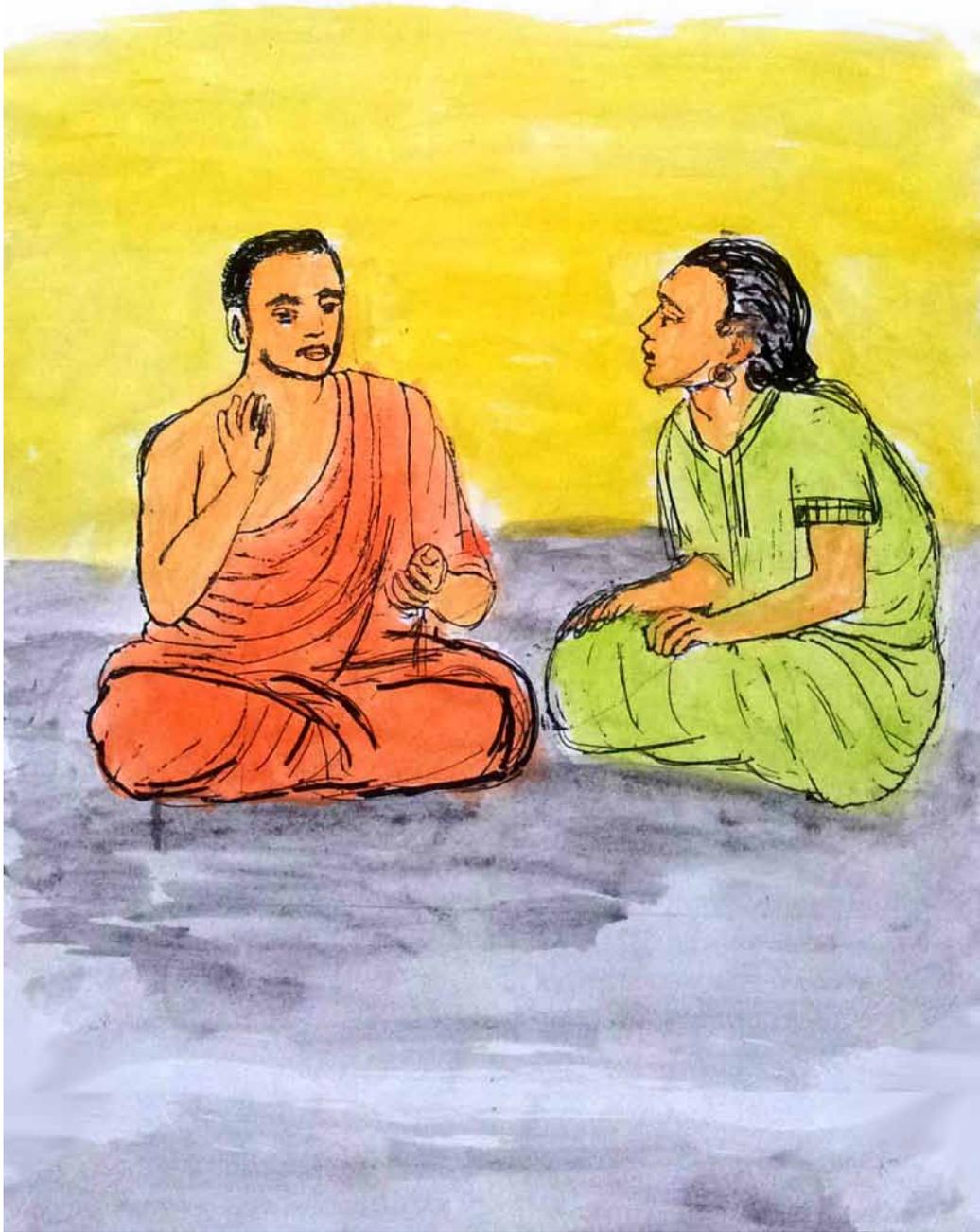
his father in order to ascend the throne. He warned him tersely:

*Noble Prince, do not look elsewhere for changing your present absurd situation. What you need to do is to get rid of your father immediately. He is the very obstacle preventing you from your birth right to be the King of Magadha and to realise your glorious destiny as the greatest Emperor of the region. As long as he is alive you will never be the Raja, much less become the enviable glorious Chakravati Raja of Majjhima Desa.*

Initially, Prince Kunika was taken aback by Venerable Devadatta's advice to kill his father. He did not envisage that he would have to resort to such a drastic measure to achieve his burning ambition to be the *Raja*. He asked Venerable Devadatta nervously, "Wise Venerable, is there no other way for me to succeed my father?"

Venerable Devadatta moved close up to Prince Kunika and spoke into his ear in a low measured voice:

*Your Royal Highness, the King has fallen completely under the spell of the Buddha. He has already given away lands and made numerous other offerings for the Buddha's personal pleasure. You will no doubt recall that when King Bimbisara first met the Buddha when the latter was only an ordinary shramana, he had offered him half the kingdom of Magadha to govern. This goes to show that you do not matter in the King's scheme of things. If you allow your father to continue with such lavish handouts, very soon much of Magadha would be given away to the Buddha. You will then not only inherit a much reduced kingdom, but also find it difficult, if not indeed impossible, to retain your kingship. By then Magadha would have been reduced to a weak and highly vulnerable kingdom ready for the picking by its powerful ambitious neighbours.*



*Venerable Devadatta Cajoules Prince Kunika to Usurp the Throne*

*The only way to prevent such a catastrophe from befalling Magadha is for you to take matters into your own hands. Destiny compels you to usurp the throne and become the ruler immediately. On my part, I assure You Royal Highness that I will get rid of the Buddha and assume the leadership of the Sangha Order. Once this is achieved you can rest assured of absolute commitment of the Sangha to galvanise the support of the people for whatever you wish to embark on. You must therefore put an end to your father's misrule at once. We can together forge an invincible alliance which will take Magadha to the greatest heights of fame and glory ever achieved in its entire history.*

Just as the wicked Venerable Devadatta had anticipated, Prince Kunika was excited with the prospect of ascending the throne immediately instead of having to wait aimlessly for his father's death. He was completely taken up by Venerable Devadatta's assurances to use his powers of *iddhi* to make him a powerful and famous Emperor.

Prince Kunika's head spun in jubilation at becoming the Raja. He became intoxicated with visions of great power and glory. He was carried away by the heady thought of becoming the greatest king of Magadha with the help of Venerable Devadatta's mystical powers. He agreed to collude with Venerable Devadatta to carry out the evil scheme. He looked him in the eyes and asserted, "*You are absolutely right about my future destiny, Most Venerable Devadatta. I will heed your advice and usurp the throne by eliminating the foolish King who has more love and admiration for the Buddha than his own son.*" Thus, Prince Kunika succumbed to Venerable Devadatta's sinister instigations to murder his father and usurp the throne.



*Prince Kunika Agrees to Murder his Father.*

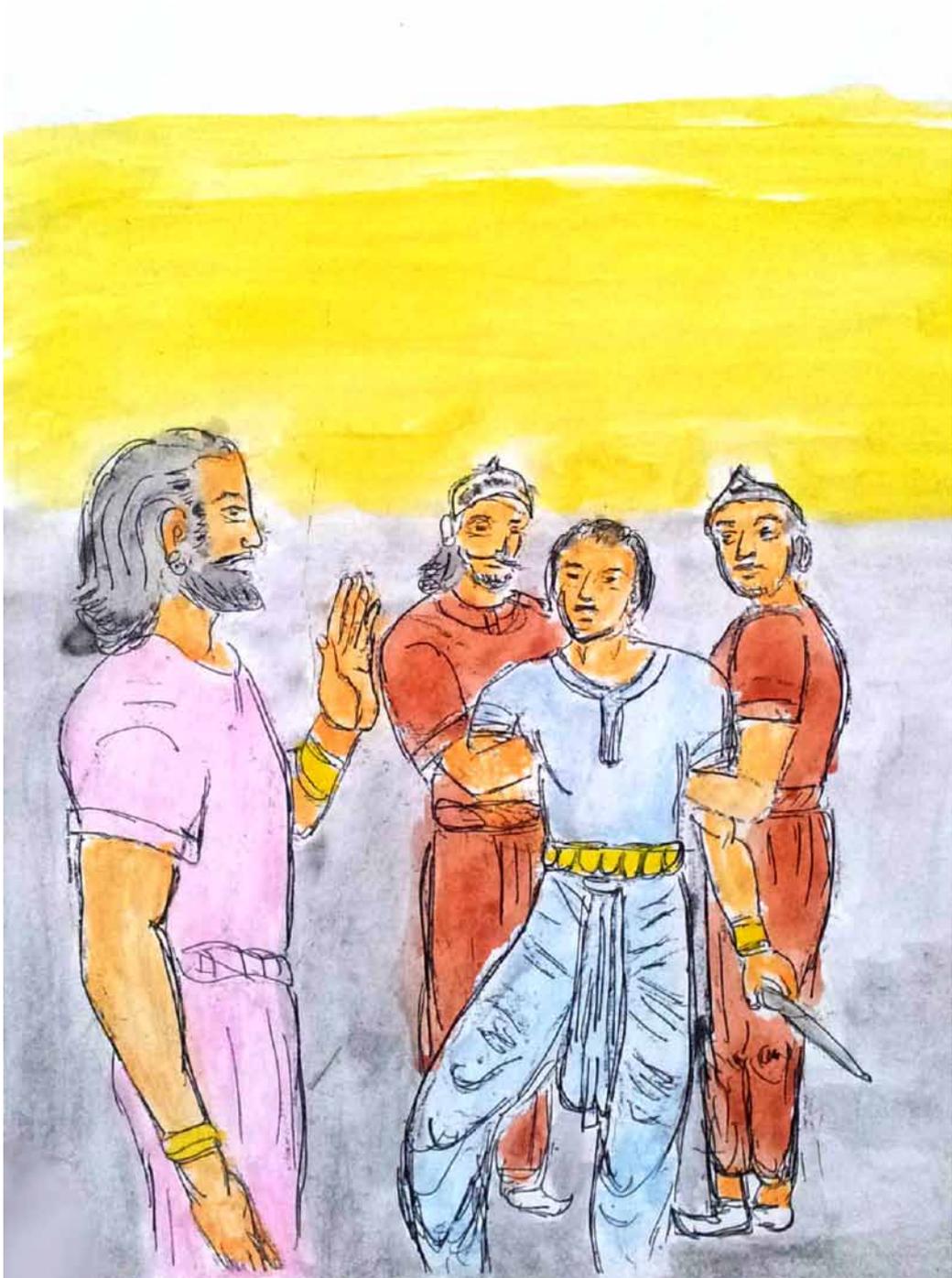
## CHAPTER VI

### Unremitting Paternal Love

One dark night when all was quiet in the palace, Prince Kunika crept into King Bimbisara's bed chamber with a dagger concealed around his left thigh. He intended to use the weapon to kill his father in his sleep and usurp the throne. But just as he was about to reach the King's bed chamber, the palace guards pounced on him and foiled his sinister plan. As a result of the commotion that broke out, the King was awakened. The guards dutifully reported to him the treacherous act of the Crown Prince.

King Bimbisara was completely devastated. Not even in his wildest dream did he think that his son whom he loved so dearly would want to cause him the slightest harm, much less to kill him. The royal guards requested King Bimbisara to permit them to put Prince Kunika to the sword for committing high treason as in accordance to the law. The King, however, would have no such punishment inflicted on his son whom he loved so dearly. He remained calm despite the shattering discovery of the attempt to kill him in his sleep. He ordered the guards to release his son and to resume their respective duties as he intended to deal with the matter the next morning. Before retiring, the King asked his son in his characteristic fatherly manner as to the reason for wanting to kill him.

Prince Kunika responded curtly that he had waited for far too long as Viceroy of Anga and desired to be the King of Magadha. He strongly felt that it was high time he assumed rulership of the



*Prince Kunika's Treacherous Attempt to Kill the King Aborted*

kingdom. King Binbisara was at first shocked at the resoluteness of his son to usurp the throne. Even so, his deep love for him was steadfast as ever just like the unshakable Himalayan Mountains. He paused for a moment and reflected deeply as to how he ought to respond to the heart-breaking revelation. Despite the heart shattering discovery, he was mindful that he should not say anything about what had transpired that would cause him to regret afterwards.

King Bimbisara concluded that it was entirely his fault for his son to be driven to usurp the throne. The King acknowledged in his own mind that it was wrong for him to have clung on to the throne for so long. He felt that it was time for him to abdicate and install his son as the *Raja*. Rationalising thus, he counselled his son that there was no need for him to resort to any drastic measure to become the *Raja* for he would only be too glad to hand over to him the rulership of the kingdom.

By the next morning, all the ministers had come to learn about the aborted attempt of Prince Kunika to kill the King. The Mukhya Mantri, Sri Abeshek, advised the King about the law of the land and the agitated mood of the ministers over the treacherous episode. As anticipated, at the Assembly of the Royal Court which was convened, the Mukhya Mentri, Shri Abeshek and the Council of Ministers strongly advised King Bimbisara to impose the death penalty on Prince Kunika for high treason. They reminded the King about the prophesy made at the time of the Crown Prince's birth, that he would prove to be *ajatasattu*, even to the point of killing his father. They counselled that if the King were to pardon his son there was every possibility that he would again try to assassinate their beloved monarch. They maintained that the Crown Prince should not be left off without the severest sentence.

King Bimbisara tactfully set aside the insistence of his Council



*The Mukhya Mantri Advises King Bimbisara*

of Ministers to impose the conventional death penalty on Prince Kunika by declaring that he was handing the kingdom to his son and heir. The ministers were all completely dumfounded when the King declared that he wished to abdicate and proclaim Prince Kunika as the *Raja*.

A chorus of objections broke out spontaneously from the Council of Ministers. They pleaded that the King should dismiss any notion of abdicating the throne. They cautioned that such a course of action would spell ruin for the future of Magadha. When their clamour of pleas reached a high pitch, the King rose from his *Singhasana* (royal throne). He raised his hand to signal the Royal Court to stop their protestation. There was pin drop silence in the hall. He took a deep breath and paced a few steps forward to be close to his Council of Ministers. In a voice filled with deep fatherly love, he urged members of the Royal Court not to be hasty in their judgement. He sought the understanding of his advisers of his boundless love for his son and to forgive him for being misled by the scheming Venerable Devadatta:

*Council of Ministers, I know you have all been absolutely loyal to me and have the best interest of the kingdom at heart. As regards Prince Kunika's attempt to usurp the throne, I have given the unfortunate episode a great deal of thought. I am the one at fault and not the Crown Prince, because I have over-stayed my kingship. I have ruled Magadha for five decades. I am no longer young. It is time for me to abdicate and hand over the throne to Prince Kunika. This course of action is all the more imperative because the Crown Prince is already of age to take over the reins of the kingdom. Based on these pertinent reasons, I have decided to install him as Raja. I am sure he would rule Magadha well and ensure peace throughout the land.*



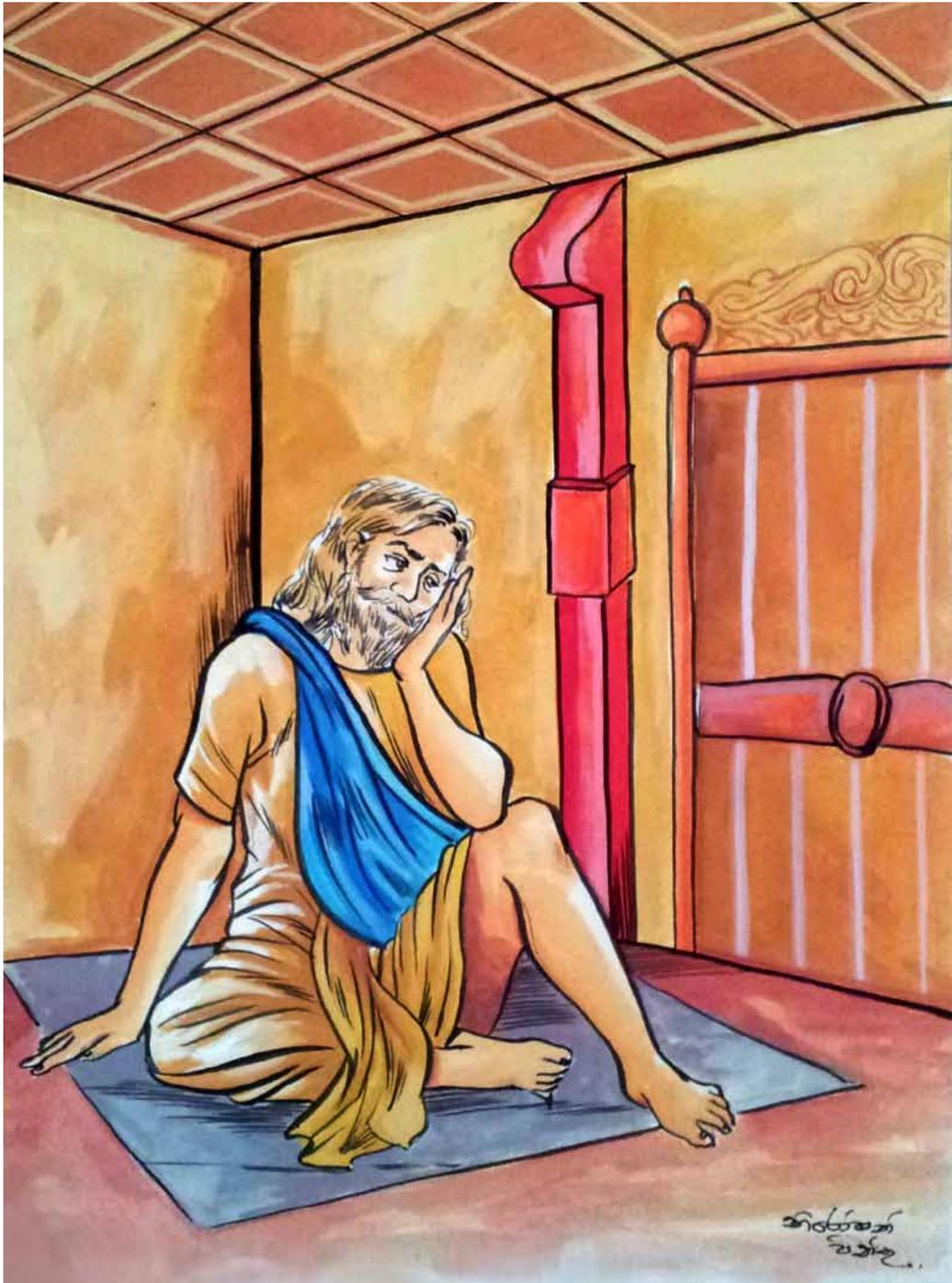
*Bimbisara Being Led to Prison*

*I love my son too dearly to hurt his feelings in anyway. What had happened last night is good for the future of Magadha. I am already old. The kingdom needs a young and energetic ruler like the Crown Prince. Viewing the whole episode from my personal perspective, I feel that what happened is a blessing in disguise. Once I relinquish the kingship, I will have more time to devote myself fully to practising the Noble Teachings of the Buddha.*

So instead of punishing Prince Kunika with the death penalty, King Bimbisara abdicated and proclaimed him as the *Raja*. Little, however, did the King anticipate that he would be in for a great shock upon Prince Kunika's accession to the throne. To everyone's horror, instead of reciprocating his father's unconditional love and affection King Kunika ordered him to be imprisoned in the royal dungeon. The Council of Ministers were dumfounded. They could not believe that the newly proclaimed monarch would show such ingratitude, of all persons, towards his ever loving father.

The Mukhya Mantri, Sri Abeshek, was aghast when he received the royal command. He spontaneously protested, forgetting for a moment that he was actually objecting a royal command. King Kunika paid no attention whatsoever to the Prime Minister's stout objection. He strongly rebuked Sri Abeshek and threatened him with charges of high treason should he choose to disobey his orders to see that the guards carry out his royal command at once.

Matters came to ahead when Venerable Devadatta insisted that the former King Bimbisara be totally eliminated and not just kept incarcerated in prison indefinitely. He implored King Kunika to sentence his father to death for failing to do this would result in serious repercussions on his kingship. He warned that he ran a real danger of a change of heart by his father that would result in



*Bimbisara Imprisoned in the Royal Dungeon*

him resuming the rulership of Magadha. This was all the more so likely in view of the great respect, admiration and affection the ministers, officials and the people in general had for him. He urged that since no weapon could kill his father because he was a Sothapana (One who enjoys high spiritual attainment), his life has to be ended through starvation. King Kunika accordingly decreed that no one except the Queen mother, Queen Videhi, was to have access to the imprisoned Bimbisara. Further, he ordered that no food was to be served to him.

When Shri Abeshek approached Bimbisara to carry out the royal command, the first remark that came from the former kings lips was, *“Why are you looking so depressed and sad, Mukhya Mantri? Pray tell me, is my son unwell or is there some crisis my beloved son is facing?”*

After a moment’s hesitation, Sri Abeshek bust out angrily:

*Yes, Your Majesty, I regret to inform that His Majesty King Kunika has lost his head as he is bereft of any human decency. Instead of showing gratitude to Your Majesty for sparing his life and installing him as Raja, he has decreed a most heinous royal command. The wicked Venerable Devadatta has convinced King Kunika that since he had failed to kill Your Majesty with his dagger, no weapon would be able to harm Your Majesty. Based on this belief, he has implored King Kunika to decree that Your Majesty be starved to death in the dungeon.*

Tears began to well around the corners of Bimbisara’s eyes. With great resolve he held them back and managed to suppress his sadness. He did not want anyone to know of the pain he bore over his son’s heart-breaking sentence to starve him to death. He moved closer to Sri Abeshek and comforted him:



*Queen Videhi Smuggles Food for Bimbisara*

*Do not be disturbed my loyal Mukhya Mantri. You have served me well all these years. Now, you have to serve King Kunika. I am already advanced in age. There are not many more years for me to live. Now that I have relinquished the throne, I am freed of mundane matters of governance. I am free of anger or hatred and have no regrets whatsoever for installing him as the Raja. All is not lost, my loyal Mukhya Mentri. In the solicitude of my prison cell, I have lots of time to meditate and practise the Buddha's Teaching.*

*I am no longer King. I am divested of political power, but I have the Noble Dhamma which I treasure far more greatly than kingship. Please forgive my son for all his foolishness. He is young and confused. He has been misguided by the wicked Venerable Devadatta. Let's be patient with his impetuosity and immaturity. You and the rest of the Council of Ministers must remain loyal to him at all times, just as you have been to me.*

King Kunika's attempt to starve the imprisoned Bimbisara to death did not come to pass. This was because the former king was able to sustain himself on the little bits of food his ever loving and devoted consort, Queen Videhi, managed to smuggle into his cell. However, each time she visited Bimbisara in the gloomy dungeon, she was stricken with deep sorrow and would break down and lament over his suffering. When this happened, her beloved Bimbisara would console her tenderly:

*My Dearest, do not feel sad about my fate. This will only make you unwell. According to the Teaching of the Buddha, this condition too will pass. Furthermore, the hardship that I presently experience is the result of the ripening of some unskillful acts I had committed in my past lives. There is no need for you to be angry against*



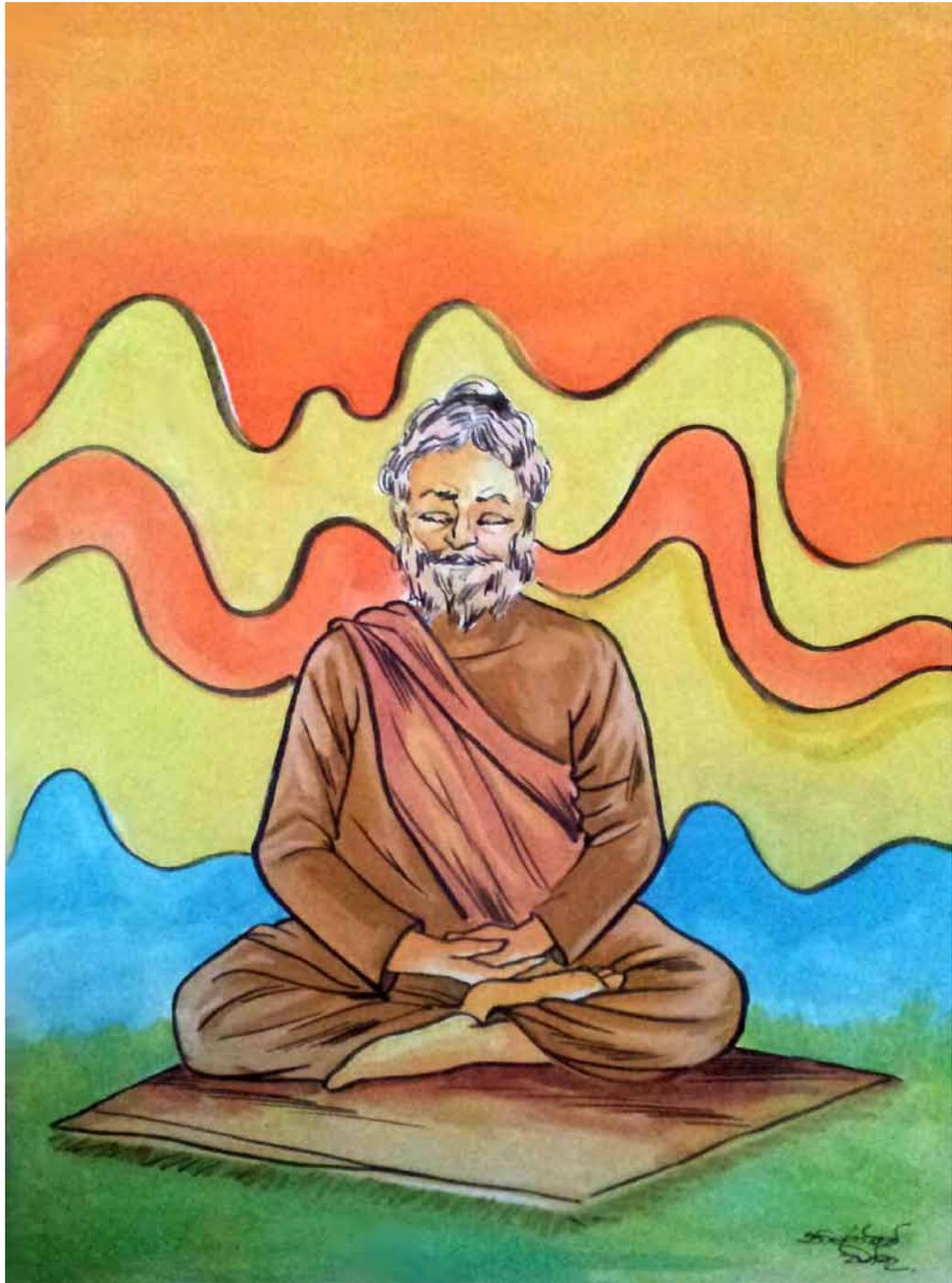
*Queen Videhi Bemoans Bimbisara's Imprisonment*

*King Kunika or feel apprehensive over the treatment he has meted out to me. My Dearest, we must not forget that he is our son. He is being misguided by the evil monk, Devadatta, who has poisoned his mind with unwholesome thoughts. Please do not fret my dearest. In time, all will turn out well. Keep up your spirits and your usual good cheer. This means a lot to me. I do not wish to see you sad and unhappy.*

Despite being confined in the dungeon, the former king, Bimbisara, remained cheerful. One of the principal reasons was because he could view the Jetavana Monastery from the window of his dungeon. He experienced spiritual uplift by the very thought of the Buddha residing in the nearby Jetavana Monastery and by contemplating on the Dhamma the Enlightened One had unravelled. He spent much of his time meditating on the serenity and extra-ordinary qualities of the Buddha. Upon entering into an exalted meditative state, he experienced profound spiritual uplift. The delight that sprang forth from his mental liberation was supremely blissful. His body shone brightly as compassion curled around his loving heart. He remained relaxed in body and calmed in mind as he rejoiced inner peace. He maintained his physical strength by doing yoga exercises and walking briskly within the confines of his dungeon daily.

King Kunika was perplexed as to how his father could survive for several days without food. A thorough investigation revealed that the Queen Mother, Queen Videhi, had been smuggling food into the royal dungeon, concealed in her waist pouch. He was furious and dashed into her bed chamber and burst out angrily, “*Mother you have broken my trust by smuggling food into the dungeon! Henceforth, you must stop committing this crime of yours!*”

Queen Videhi furiously retorted:



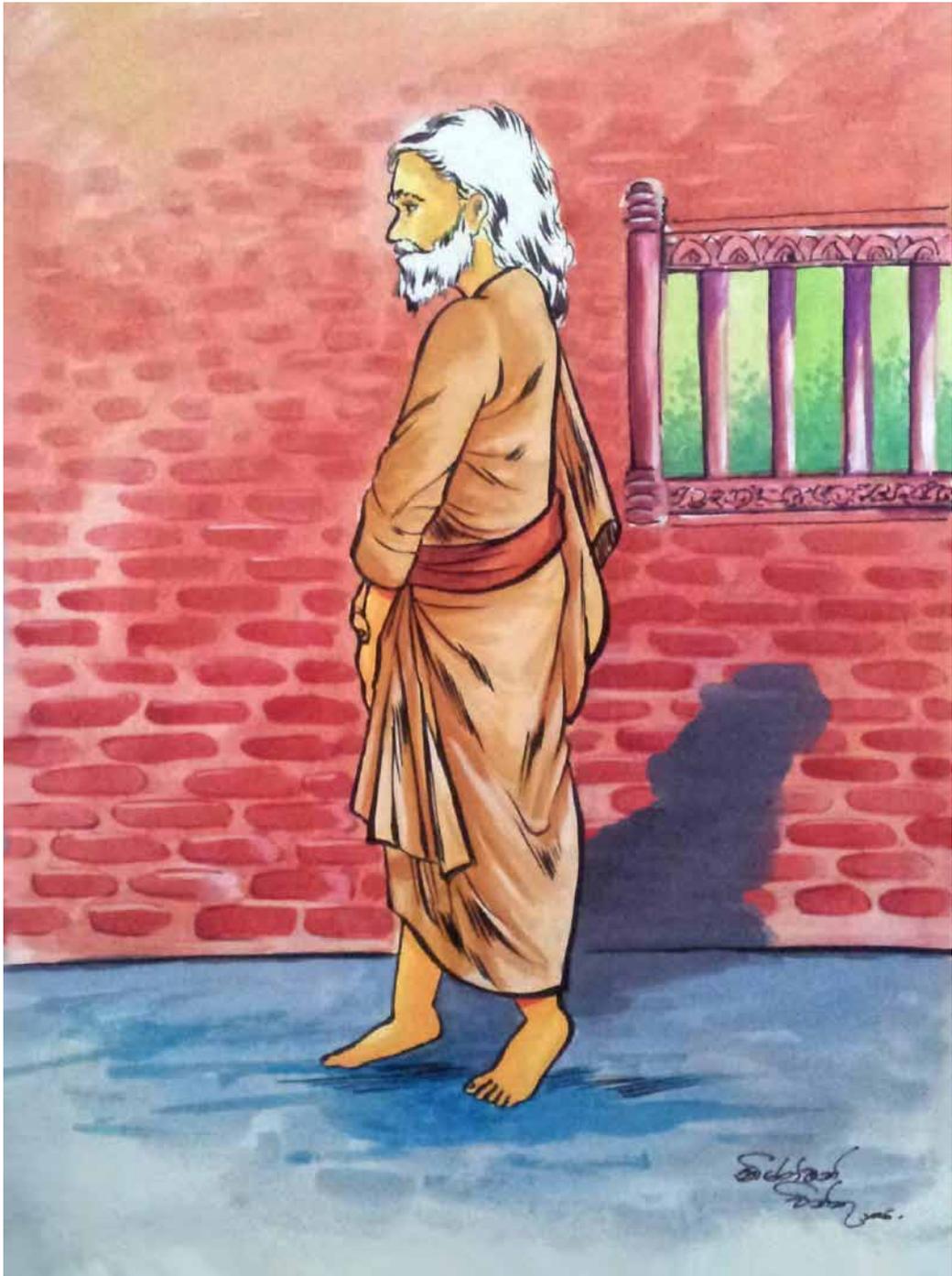
*Bimbisara Meditates in the Dungeon Daily*

*There is no wrong that I have committed in feeding my imprisoned husband Kunika! As a wife, I am duty bound to look after his every need in good times as well as in times of trouble, unhappiness and suffering. How can you ever consider my love and devotion to serve my husband and master a crime?*

King Kunika held his head down in shame and left the bed chamber hurriedly without saying a word. The next day, he ordered strict security measures to be imposed on the Queen Mother's future visits to the dungeon.

This time around, to avoid being apprehended by the guards, Queen Videhi smuggled food concealed in her hair knot. All too soon King Kunika discovered this and instructed the guards to check her thoroughly before she entered the dungeon. From then onwards, she bathed herself with scented water and smeared her body with a layer of thick ghee and honey before visiting the dungeon. This was to enable her beloved Bimbisara to sustain himself by licking her body. This method of providing nourishment to her imprisoned Bimbisara too was eventually discovered by King Kunika. As a result, the King decreed that the Queen Mother be forbidden to enter the royal dungeon.

Notwithstanding the harsh restrictions imposed by King Kunika to prevent the imprisoned Bimbisara from receiving food, he was still able to survive because of his devout practice of Aanapanasati Meditation (concentration of the mind on the in and out-breaths). Seated in the lotus meditation posture, he would meditate for several hours each day. In addition, he paced across the dungeon mindfully as part of his mindfulness meditation. He continued to draw profound *shraddha*, delight, and courage from gazing at the Jetavana Monastery through the little window of his dungeon. He concentrated his mind on the Buddha's presence in the Jetavana



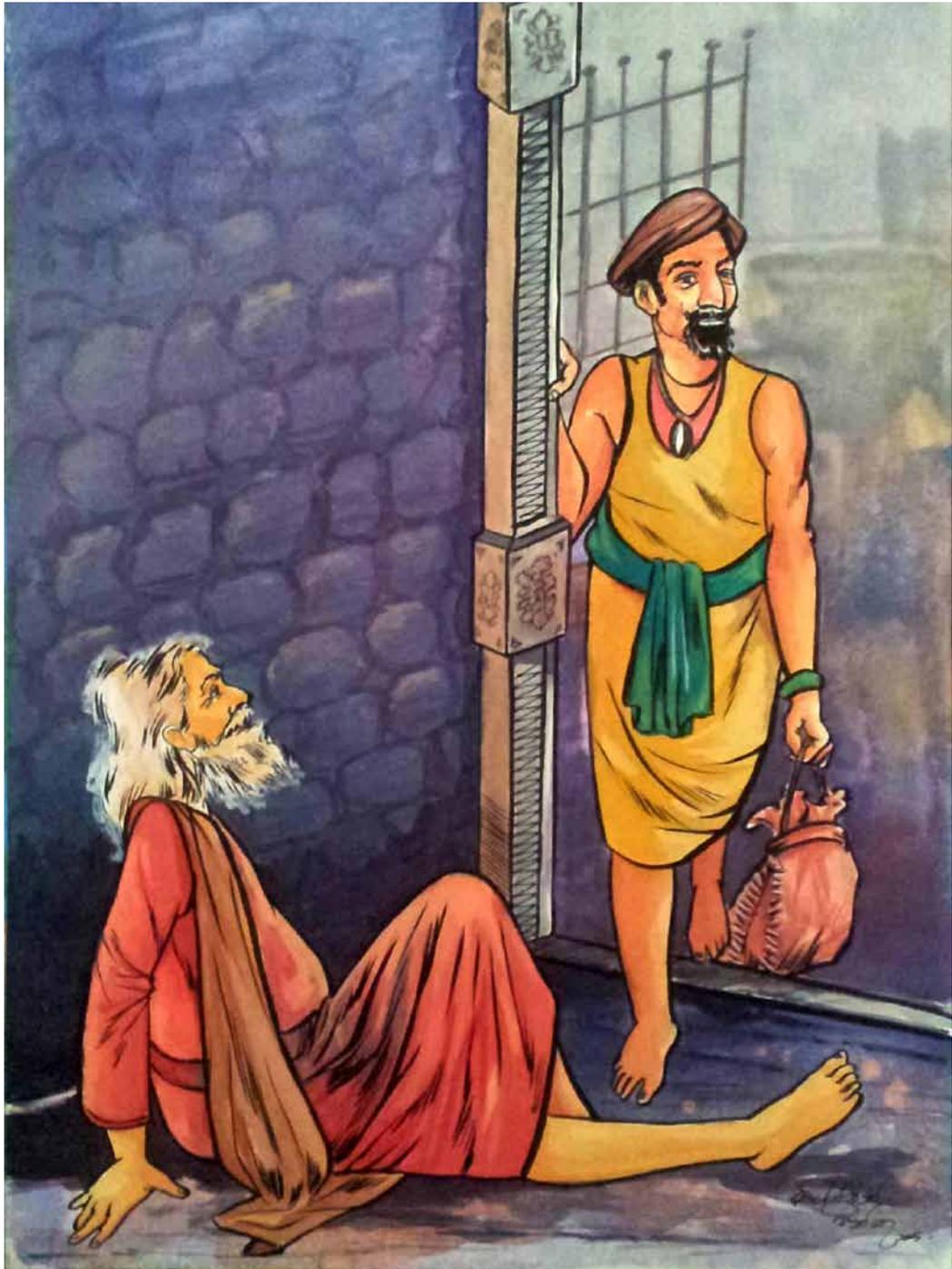
*Bimbisara Practises Walking Meditation*

Grove and meditated on the inspiring radiance of the Enlightened One and of his Maha Karuna for all living beings. As a result of his spiritual exertion, his equanimity reached a high point of perfection. He felt no anger or hatred towards anyone. The palace guards who had to carry out the harsh restrictions against him too were free of any blame or anger.

Days passed and yet Bimbisara did not die of starvation as intended by Venerable Devadatta. This caused him to become impatient with the indefinite incarceration of Bimbisara. He warned King Kunika that so long as his father was alive, his position as *Raja* remained insecure for he could very easily reassert his authority and re-occupy the throne. This was all the more so predictable given the high esteem Bimbisara enjoyed among the nobility as well as the masses. A palace revolt could well break out. He pointed out that the common people too would soon clamour for their former king's freedom and mount a popular uprising.

Venerable Devadatta tersely warned King Kunika that in view of his precarious position, he must immediately put an end to his father's life. He maintained that Bimbisara was able to remain alive because of his practice of walking meditation in the confines of the dungeon. The only way, therefore, to get rid of him was by cutting open the soles of his feet, filling the raw flesh with salt and forcing him to walk on simmering charcoal. This he asserted would surely prevent him from meditating and destroy his will to live. Following the counsel proffered by Venerable Devadatta, King Kunika ordered the royal barber to carry out the gory execution.

On seeing the royal barber approach the dungeon, Bimbisara's heart sored with extreme joy. His fatherly instinct led him to believe that his misguided son had finally realised his mistakes and turned into a new leaf. He assumed that King Kunika had sent the royal barber to stave off his unkempt beard and spruce-up his



*Bimbisara Shocked that the Royal Baber was to Execute him.*

now scruffy hair before freeing him. But he was in for the shock of his life. When he was told that the royal barber was ordered to carry out his gruesome execution, Bimbisara was devastated. Yet, his unremitting love for his son remained steadfast. He felt a deep sense of sorrow for his misguided ways. Though thoroughly let down, he did not show any resentment against him. He allowed the royal barber to carry out his son's orders without the slightest resistance or protest. The great King Bimbisara faced his tragic death with complete equanimity. The flame of his unremitting love for his son remained undiminished till his very last breath. According to scriptural records, it is believed that he was reborn in the Catummaharajika celestial world.

On the very day Bimbisara was put to death, a son was born to King Kunika. Great was his joy on becoming a father. A spontaneous surge of ecstasy filled his heart. A natural outpouring of love flowed freely from deep within him for his new born son. The thrill and excitement he experienced at being blessed with a son made him recall his own birth. In the midst of the onrush of fatherly pride and the spontaneous surge of joy on becoming a father, the thought arose in King Kunika's mind as to whether his father experienced the same wonderful paternal feeling at the time of his own birth. He pondered, *"What a sense of joy, my father must have felt when I was born?"* At once he hurried to his mother's bed chamber to find out whether his father felt the same explosion of love he was experiencing presently, on the day he was born. He asked her anxiously, *"Pray tell me mother, did father love me with the same passion of paternal love which I feel for my new born son?"*

The Queen Mother responded with a cold hard stare. Her eyes were filled with red hot tears. She could only murmur in disbelief, *"How could you, Kunika, ask such a question? Of all things, you ask me whether your father loved you!"* Tears streamed down her



*Queen Videhi Recounts Bimbisara's Paternal Love*

forlorn face. Ignoring Court Protocol, she said in a voice reeked with pain:

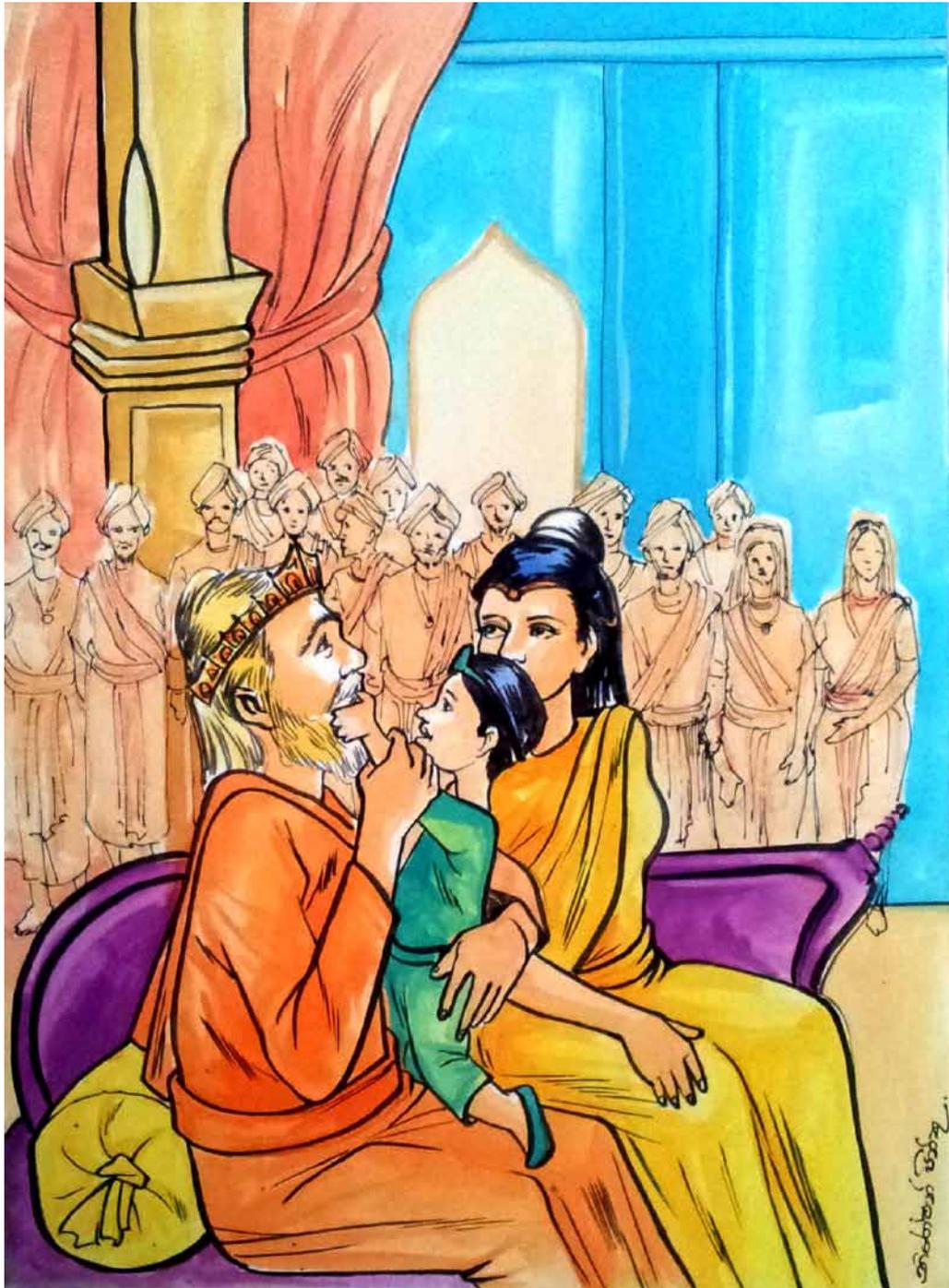
*Kunika, your dear father never felt happier in his entire life than on the day you were born. There was nothing which he treasured more than to know that you were happy and well cared after all throughout your life. Words simply cannot express the boundless love he had for you.*

With profound sorrow and great pain in her heart, she recounted the numerous moving accounts that spoke so eloquently of the great King Bimbisara's, unremitting fatherly love :

*Kunika, even while you were still forming in my womb, your father had shown such intense love for you. When I was expecting you, Kunika, I developed an irresistible dola duka to drink blood from your father's left shoulder. I tried so very hard to hide this from him. In fact, I even contemplated ending my pregnancy to get rid of my strange craving. When your father came to learn about my yearning, he gladly cut a piece of his shoulder and gave me a tumbler of his blood to drink.*

*The royal soothsayer predicted that your birth was inauspicious and warned that you would grow up to be your father's enemy. Fearing the prophesy, I tried very hard to have a miscarriage, but your father forestalled every one of my desperate attempts to abort your birth. That was the depth of your father's love for you, Kunika. I do not know of any father whose love for his son was so pure, indeed so very absolute, Kunika!*

Queen Videhi, paused for a moment and broke down in a torrent of tears. She cried her heart out until there were no more tears to



*King Bimbisara Sucks Baby Kunika's Sore Thumb*

shed. She then turned to King Kunika and continued her account of Bimbisara's unconditional paternal love.

*Kunika, do you see the scar on your thumb ? It was the result of an abuses you had when you were a little baby. Your sore thumb had caused great pain that made you cry bitterly. Nobody was able to lull you to sleep. When your beloved father who was holding court heard your painful cries, he stopped his royal duties and rushed to attend to you. He was deeply saddened to see you suffering in pain. Gently, he took you into his warm embrace, caressed you lovingly and showered you with tender loving kisses. He then tucked your sore thumb into his mouth and sucked the boil to stop your crying.*

*No sooner your ever loving father did this, the pain disappeared. It was only then that you stopped whaling and dozed off to sleep. While you slept peacefully, the abscess in your thumb burst open in your father's mouth. Out of his boundless love for you, he swallowed all the unclean puss and rotten blood. He was concerned that if he was to remove your thumb from his mouth you would wake up and once again feel the pain. Such was the unfathomable love your father had for you, Kunika!*

*Despite the prophesy that you would prove to be ajatasattu, his boundless love and caring for you never ever diminished one bit. Now that you have lived up to the dreadful prophesy of becoming the "unborn enemy of your father", you will be remembered for posterity as Ajatasattu and not as Kunika. The pain in my heart of your father's sufferings are too much for me to bear. I feel like departing from this world for I have no more interest nor purpose to live.*



*King Kunika Orders the Guards to Free his Father*

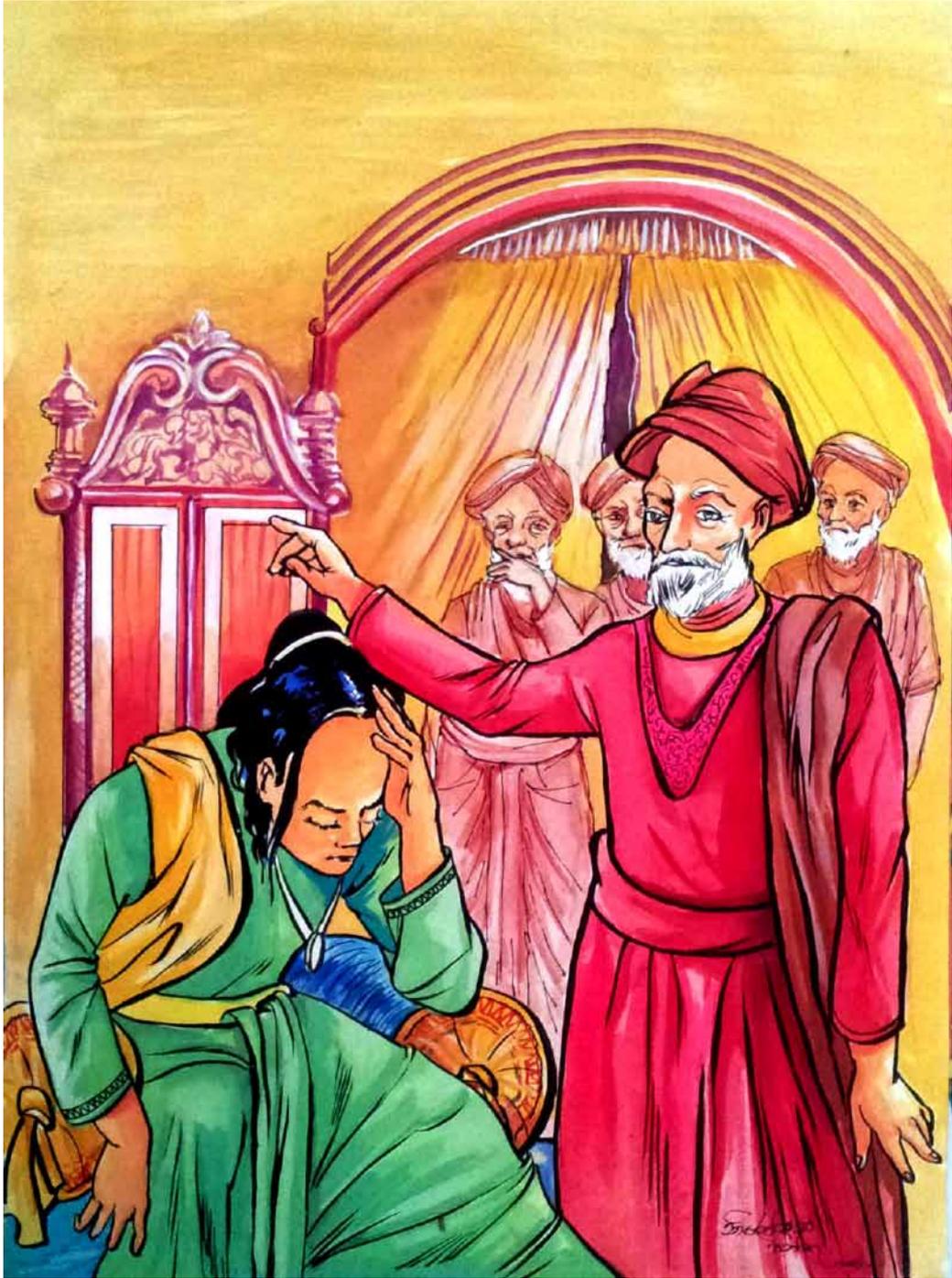
The account of his father's unconditional love for him, touched the core of King Kunika's being. He was reduced to tears. In desperation, he rushed out from the Queen Mother's bed chamber and yelled out, "*Guards, ride away, ride away as fast as you can and release my dear father from prison!*" But none of the guards moved even a step. The King was fired with anxiety. Once again, he screamed in desperation at the palace guards, "*Guards, I command you to go in lightning speed to the royal dungeon and release my father! Ride away! Guards, I command you to ride to the dungeon at once!*" Yet, none of the guards moved.

At that point, the Mukhya Mantri, Sri Abeshek, stepped forward. In a voice filled with deep sorrow, he broke the sad news:

*Your Majesty, in accordance with your command, your beloved father, His Majesty, the former King Bimbisara, suffered a horrifying death this morning. That is why the palace guards did not heed Your Majesty's command to go and free your father. Even in his tortuous dying moments his love for you remained fathomless as ever. In spite of all the suffering he had to endure at your hands, he wished you well. Even as his last breath left him he wished you every happiness.*

*We believe that for the beautiful human being he was and who diligently practised the Buddha's Teaching, he has attained Nibbana. For all the great meritorious deeds he had done as the foremost Patron of the Buddha and the Order of the Sangha, he is freed from future births in this endless samsaric life-cycle of births-deaths and rebirths.*

King Kunika fell to his knees and cried. His whole body shook with repentance. He was drowned in deep remorse for his cruel misdeeds. He just kept muttering like an insane person:



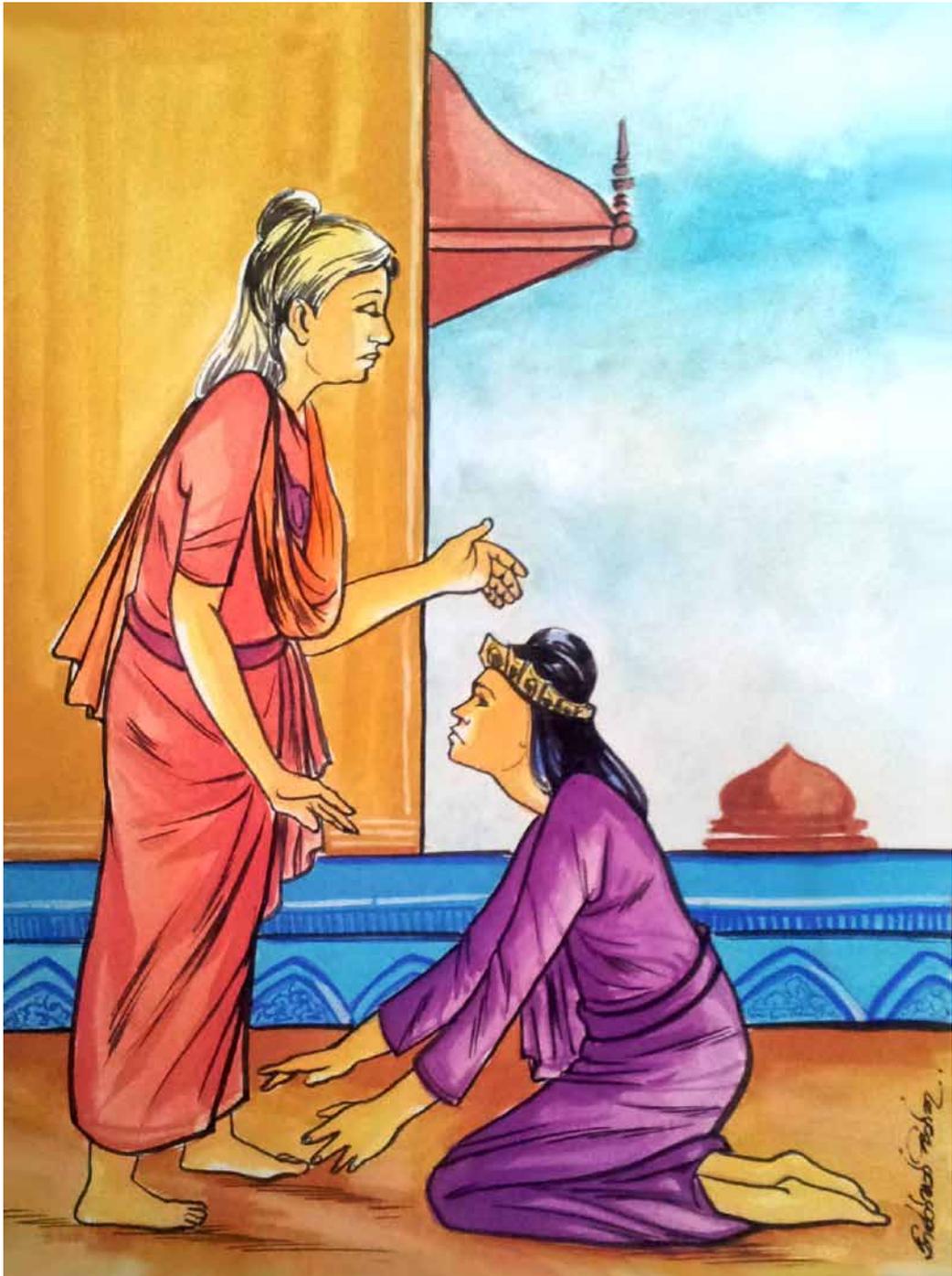
*Mukhya Mantri Breaks the Sad News to King Kunika.*

*Forgive me, dear father. Please forgive me for all the wrongs I had committed against you. I was blinded by ambition for power and glory. I was terribly misled and acted foolishly. Please forgive me, dearest father. Please forgive me. Please forgive me ....*

Exhausted from his deep lamentation, King Kunika retired to his bed chamber and kept all to himself. The first thing he did the next morning was to seek his mother's forgiveness for all the wrongs he had committed against his ever loving father and for causing his cruel death. Out of motherly love, Queen Videhi embraced King Kunika. With tears in her eyes she expressed her forgiveness for all the heart-burning anguish and intense pain he had caused. She advised him to redeem himself from his evil deeds by following the Noble Teaching of the Buddha.

A few days after the death of her beloved Bimbisara, the heart-broken Queen Videhi died of profound grief. Her brother, King Pasenadi of Kosala, was incensed over King Kunika's cruel murder of his brother-in-law and former king, Bimbisara. He was equally angered by the deep sorrow his sister had suffered as the result of the unpardonable killing of her dearly loved Bimbisara. He terminated the revenue grant of Kasi to Magadha which was given as part of the dowry arrangement of his sister's marriage to King Bimbisara. Thereupon King Kunika declared war against his uncle, King Pasenadi. In the war which ensued, he was defeated and taken captive. He was released upon undertaking a commitment that he would never ever wage war against Kosala. Under the seal of renewed friendship that was forged, he married King Pasenadi's daughter, Vajira.

As history would bear witness and just as his mother had predicted, the ignominious nickname, Ajatasattu, stuck with King Kunika forever from the day he killed his father.



*King Kunika Pleas to Queen Videhi for Forgiveness*

## CHAPTER VII

### Repentance

**E**ver since his father's death, King Kunika experienced great difficulty to sleep. The King had terrifying dreams and tossed in bed with all sorts of disturbing thoughts and hellish nightmares. His insomnia grew more chronic when he realised the irreversible unwholesome karmic consequences that he would face as a result of his unpardonable act of committing patricide. The evil deeds he had committed against the Buddha, albeit at the behest of the wicked Venerable Devadatta, also began to haunt him constantly. However, he could not pluck up enough courage to visit the Buddha and seek His forgiveness. He felt ashamed to reveal to anyone the real cause of his inability to have sound sleep.

King Kunika realised that all his woes arose from the sinister advice of Venerable Devadatta. He thoroughly regretted having heedlessly followed him. As the King reflected on his predicament, he pondered:

*“How could monks ever justify committing wrongdoings when they should be exemplars of virtue and morality? Such monks surely are not worthy of reverence!” People must be made aware of this issue of the violation of the vinaya (monastic discipline) by monks and thereby prevent this from becoming widespread and destroying the Buddha Sasana.*

The issue of the *vinaya* for thus monks pre-occupied his mind. Having realised his past wrongs, he was keen to protect his subjects from being cajoled or duped by dubious monks to commit



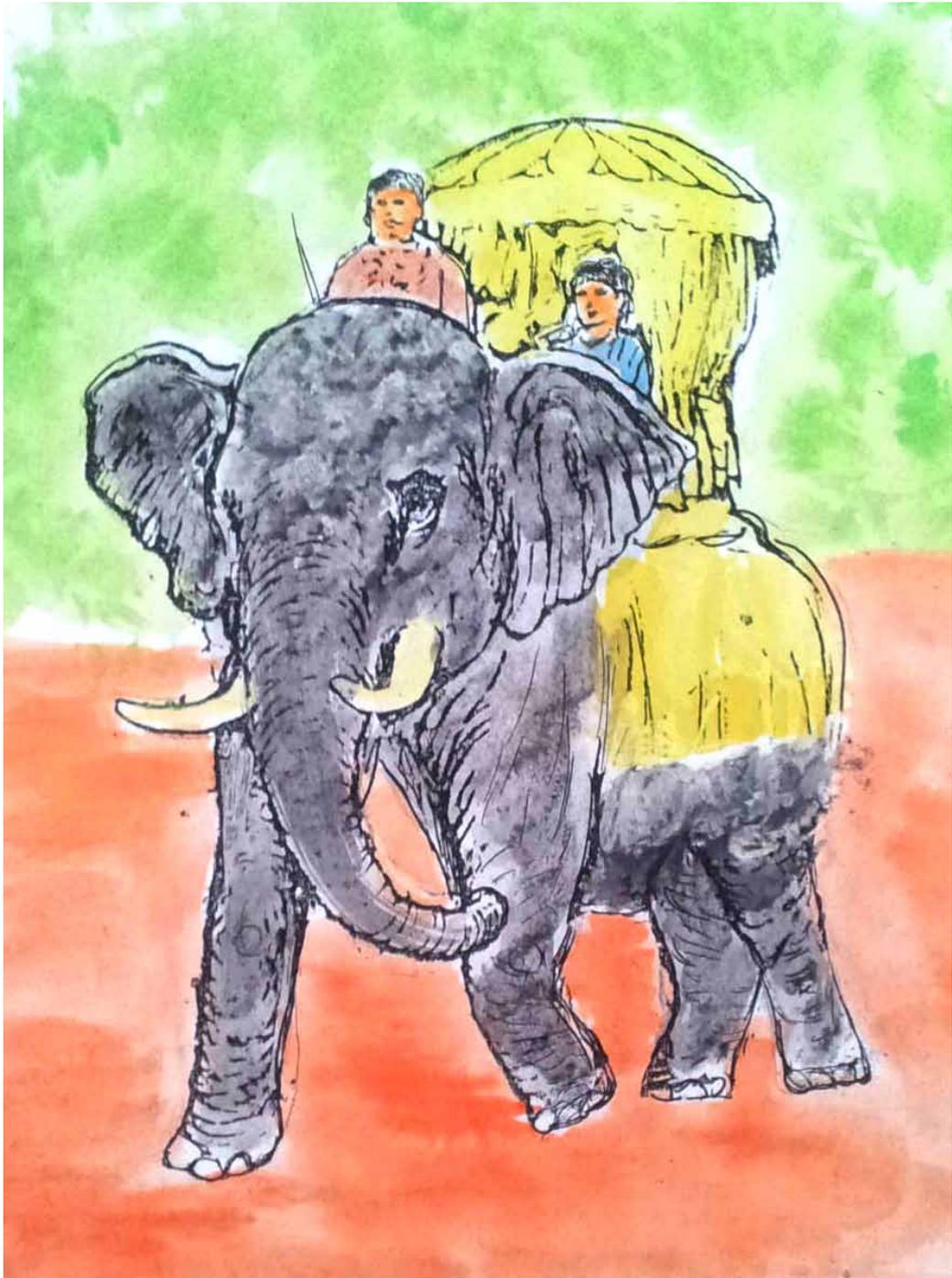
*King Kunika in Deep Contemplation About his Past Misdeeds*

unwholesome deeds. He hoped to obtain an appropriate response to such transgressions among monks.

In the midst of the King's deep reflection, serious doubts rose in his mind about the virtue of respecting monks who conducted themselves inappropriately and who violated the Viniya Rules. He felt perturbed by the prospect that there could be scores of such unworthy monks in the kingdom itself. But then again, he was reminded by his Council of Ministers that in any spiritual community there were both virtuous and saintly disciples as well as cunning, self-serving monks like Devadatta.

One night, while participating in the kingdom's annual Senakeli religious festival, King Kunika was enveloped in deep contemplation. It was a full moon day. Traditionally this was a day for meditation, philosophical discourse, self-reflection and for the people to fulfil their religious duties. At the height of the religious ceremony, the King felt a sense of exaltation as he sat on the flat roof of his courtyard retreat, seated with his ministers, under the glorious light of the brightly lit large silvery moon. He felt that perhaps a learned religious speaker could help to crown the religious occasion with an instructive sermon. He inquired from his ministers and the noblemen seated near him as who they would recommend to do the onus. Each of them proposed their respective religious teacher as the most qualified and appropriate person to deliver a sermon to the royal congregation. His personal physician, Jivaka Komabacca, who was a devout follower and supporter of the Buddha, however, remained silent throughout the discussion. Jivaka understood that if he were to recommend the Buddha, it would be misconstrued that he too was responding in a bias fashion just like the ministers and noblemen had done.

Jivaka Komabacca's conspicuous silence intrigued King Kunika. The King insisted that his royal physician speak his mind. Jivaka saw this as a golden opportunity to advise the King to come to



*King Kunika Visits Ambalavana Monastery*

terms with his past evil deeds and to make amends by transforming himself. Further, Jivika was absolutely convinced that the best way for his monareh to redeem himself was by becoming a devout follower and generous benefactor of the Buddha, in the footsteps of his devout father. Raising his palms together towards the Ambalavana Monastery (Mango Grove Monastery which was gifted by Jivaka to the Buddha and the Sangha Order) where the Buddha was residing then, he recounted the Enlightened One's virtues. He then turned to the King and pronounce his *shraddha* in the Buddha:

*The Bagavat (the World Honoured One) can soothe the spirit of a hundred, or a thousand, or a lakh (one hundred thousand) of persons were they afflicted with illness. Your Majesty, you are at liberty to visit the Buddha and put forward to the Enlightened One any question or problem that is troubling you. Your Majesty can rest assured that the Enlightened One would proffer an appropriate solution that would bring you a great deal of benefits and above all peace of mind.*

King Kunika was straight away won over by Jivaka Kombaccha's persuasion. The renowned physician's expression of compassion acted like a soothing balm to the King's troubled mind. He consented to Jivaka Kombaccha's advice to visit the Buddha at the Ambalavana Monastery. Jivaka advised that it would be imprudent for the King to undertake such a mission without regard to his royal status. Accordingly, a grand procession befitting the King's regal status was organised for the royal pilgrimage to the Ambalavana Monastery.

King Kunika set out in state riding on the magnificent royal elephant. As the royal procession approached the Ambalavana Monastery, the King felt uneasy. His mind was filled with guilt of the terrible wrongdoings he had committed against the Buddha. The stillness of the atmosphere heightened his fear that some



*King Kunika Seeks the Buddha's Forgiveness*

danger was lurking around. Although several hundred monks resided in the Ambalavana Monastery, the atmosphere all around was absolutely still and quiet. Only a few dim lights shone from the dwellings in the monastery. Not even a cough or word could be heard. This struck fear in the heart of the King. He felt he was entering a dangerous trap. He was so nervous that he imagined conspirators hiding among the bamboo grove waiting silently to assassinate him. His whole body trembled like a leaf fluttering in the wind. He looked around tensely and stammered some incomprehensible mono syllables. He wanted to turn around and abandon the pilgrimage. It was only because of Jivaka Komabacca's repeated reassurances that nothing untoward would happen that the King proceeded to enter the precincts of the Ambalavana Monastery.

The moment King Kunika dismounted from his royal elephant and his feet touched the ground, rays of the Buddha's light shone on him. The King became alarmed once again. He began to perspire profusely as past evil deeds he had committed against the Buddha flashed in his mind's eye. Jivaka Komabacca pacified the King that the glorious rays of light was a manifestation of the Buddha's *Maha Karuna* (Great Compassion) towards him and there was nothing for him to fear of the Enlightened One. Even so the King entered the monastery and walked towards the *Dhamma Sala* (Hall for Sermons) with Jivaka Kombaccha with much trepidation.

When they approached the Perfumed Pavilion where the Buddha was delivering a sermon to His disciple monks, Jivaka Kombaccha ushered the King to the Buddha. The Enlightened One was seated in the centre of the *Dhamma Sala* facing East with the community of monks seated in the lotus meditation position listening in rapt attention to His sermon. Their minds were just like a perfectly calm and clear lake. King Kunika was struck by the serenity of the Buddha's presence. This encouraged him to proceed towards the Buddha with some confidence.



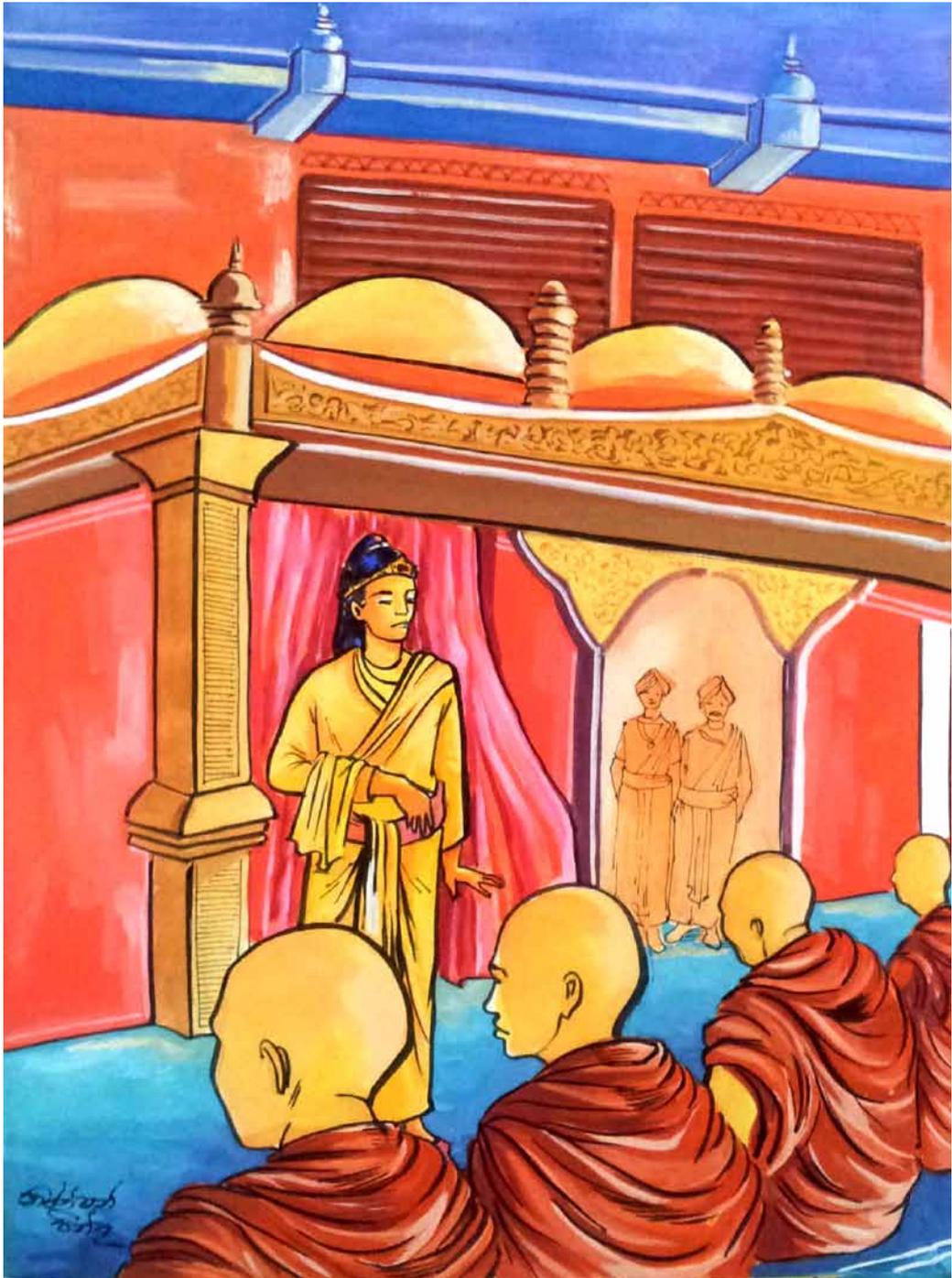
*The Buddha Foretells the Ambition of King Kunika's Son*

King Kunika stood on the right side of the Buddha and contemplated on the perfect calmness among the Sangha. At once, the King's heart was filled with great delight. He felt so inspired that the thought was born in his mind that it would be truly wonderful if his son too were to experience the same exuberance that had enveloped his heart. While the King was overjoyed with such a wonderful spiritual uplift, he wished ardently that his son would acquire the same calmness as the community of monks. The very next moment, the King could not help wondering whether his son and heir to the Magadha throne might have inherited the same strong desire and impatience he had in his youth to become the *Raja*.

The Buddha perceived the inner stirring of King Kunika's spiritual impulse and also his troubling thoughts about the probability of his son possessing a similar ambition as he had in his youth to be the *Raja*. The Enlightened One ended His sermon and beckoned the King to be seated to his right. When the King was comfortably seated the Buddha advised:

*Just as the stream descends from an elevated mountain slope to the lower grassy plains, so too do your thoughts wonder from me towards your dear son, King Kunika. I regret to state that your son possesses the same affliction for power and eager ambition to be the Raja of Magadha as you did in your youth. This is a clear case of the ripening of unwholesome karma in this very life itself. The lesson to draw from this natural law of causality is that if your mind is cultivated and your heart filled with positive emotions of metta (boundless friendliness or goodwill) and karuna (compassion) there is nothing to fear, regardless of whether one is the Raja or an insignificant pauper.*

The Buddha's profound understanding of his innermost thoughts



*King Kunika Pledges Patronage of the Sangha Order*

and feelings at once convinced King Kunika of the Enlightened One's Power of Insight. He reflected with great remorse on the past evil deeds he had committed. He thought to himself, "*No one has sinned against the Buddha as I have done, and yet, the Enlightened One speaks to me with such compassion and kindness. This is truly amazing.*" Contemplating thus, he prostrated before the Buddha and expressed his profound reverence to the Enlightened One.

The Buddha took note of King Kunika's troubled state of mind and ministered the Samannaphala Sutta which underlined the incomparable gains to be accrued by '*going forth*', that is, to renounce the householders life in preference for a homeless penniless monastic discipline. The King was thoroughly inspired by the Buddha's discourse. With his palms brought together in reverential salutation, he expressed great appreciation of the Buddha's Teaching. He further disclosed that he had been to various religious teachers before, but failed to find satisfaction in their Teaching. He requested the Buddha's forgiveness for his past wrong deeds. He expressed his profound regrets in having befriended Venerable Devadatta and for being tricked by him into committing the grave wrongs against his father and the Buddha and declared once again his sincere repentance. Before taking leave, the King announced that he would follow the footsteps of his illustrious father and be a devout follower and worthy Patron of the Buddha and the Order of the Sangha.

As soon as King Kunika and his retinue entered the city, he proclaimed with great exuberance the excellence of the Enlightened One. From that day onwards, the King was able to enjoy sound sleep. Having realized his terrible folly, he completely disassociated himself from Venerable Devadatta. Further, the King withdrew all the grants he had gifted him. Increasing numbers of people too began to openly criticise Venerable Devadatta. Public support for him dwindled drastically. At the same time, he lost his mystical powers because of the evil deeds he had committed, especially



*King Kunika Grieves over the Passing Away of the Buddha*

against the Buddha.

King Kunika was totally transformed after seeking the Buddha's forgiveness. He was full of love and respect for the Enlightened One. He developed his piety with great earnestness. His *sraddha* in the Buddha Dhamma soared to new heights by the day. It was said of the King, that among the *putujjanas* (lay followers of the Buddha), he was one most possessed of piety. For example, when Upaka Mandikaputta spoke impolitely of the Buddha, the King flew into a rage. Another instance of his deep devotion of the Buddha was the sadness that overcame him on learning the Mahaparinibbana (Passing Away) of the Enlightened One in the eighth year of his reign. His ministers decided to gently break to their monarch the sad news. Even so, the King was struck with deep grief and fainted. It took the ministers some time to revive and restore him to his normal sense. Nonetheless, his sadness lingered on for days.

King Kunika despatched one of his ministers as his special emissary to claim a share of the sacred relics of the Buddha. He saw to it that the Buddha's relics were consecrated in a stone *thupa* (stupa\_an inverted bell\_shaped mould) in Rajagaha. Two months after the Passing Away of the Buddha, King Kunika extended his royal patronage to the historic convening of *the First Sangeeta* (the First Buddhist Council) comprising Arahant monks to consolidate the Teaching of the Buddha and to put the Doctrine into memory among the Maha Sangha. He ensured that every assistance was accorded to the monks who took part in the deliberations of the First Buddhist Council. The King's support of the Buddha Dhamma remained steadfast as ever. He often called to mind the Buddha's many inspiring qualities and visited sacred places associated with the Enlightened One.

Reverting to Venerable Devadatta's ambition to wrest the leadership of the Sangha Order; when all his attempts to kill the Buddha failed, he endeavoured to cause a schism in the Maha Sangha. He schemed to lead a sizeable group of monks to



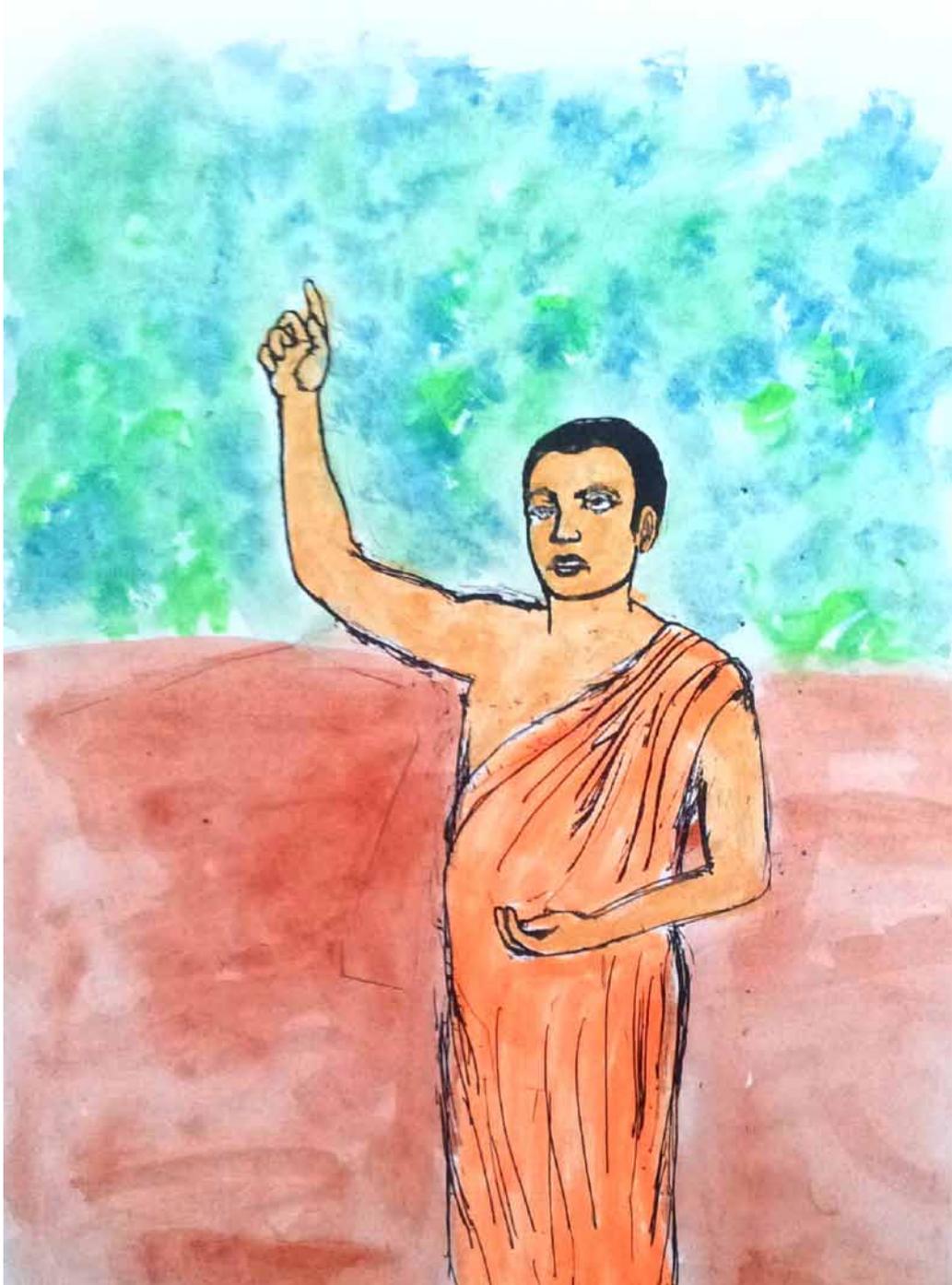
*King Kunika's Patronage of the First Buddhist Council*

break away from the Buddha's leadership and to instigate the renegade monks to secure his leadership of the Maha Sangha. So he rounded up a few monks to support his insistence on the Buddha to impose a regime of austere disciplinary rules for monks to follow scrupulously. He accosted the Buddha and adamantly insisted that it was absolutely necessary for monks and nuns to follow a Spartan monastic life as spiritual role models:

*Enlightened One, I firmly maintain that purification comes through the discipline of self-restraint, deprivation and the practice of austere monastic vows. This rule must form the bedrock of the monastic discipline. By the same token, liberation can only be achieved by renouncing all worldly comforts. It will do monks and nuns far more good to follow a stricter viniya (monastic discipline) and practise it scrupulously if they are to realise complete liberation from samsaric existence (endless cycle of births, deaths and rebirths) and be true role models for the lay Sangha.*

*I therefore insist that henceforth, monks should dwell only in the forest and avoid villages and cities; they should exist by nothing other than alms food and they are not to accept invitations for meals at homes; they should dwell at the foot of trees and not live under roofs of dwellings. Further, they must be strictly vegetarian.*

The Buddha rejected Venerable Devadatta's insistence on making it mandatory for monks and nuns to follow his proposed austere regime of monastic rules. The Enlightened One first pointed out that he had practised extreme ascetic practices of self-mortification to a point where he was reduced to mere skin and bones. On realising the futility of such extreme practices to gain spiritual uplift, he had abandoned them in favour of *Majjhima Patipada* (The Middle Path or the Middle Way) as a more appropriate monastic discipline. The Buddha ruled that members of the Maha Sangha were free to adopt or reject the Spartan rules proposed by



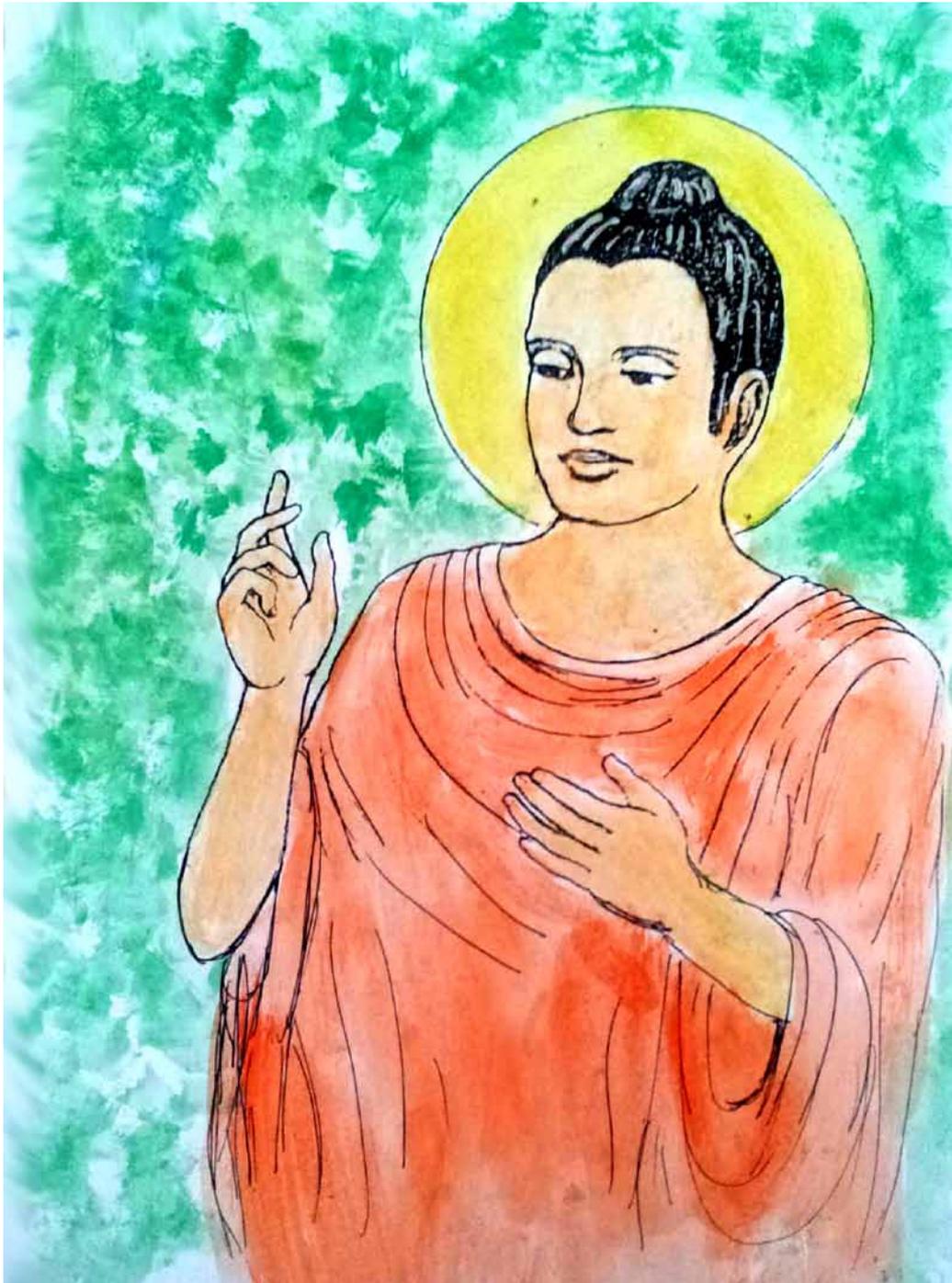
*Venerable Devadatta Insists on Spartan Monastic Rulers*

Venerable Devadatta.

On recognising the danger that Venerable Devadatta's narrow self-serving interest could bear on the Order of the Maha Sangha, the Buddha chastised him:

*Devadatta, I am the least bit surprised by your insistence on extreme monastic rules. Your reputation for harboring ulterior selfish motives precedes you. Neither am I perturbed over such matters as it is only to be expected that the culture of freedom of thought and free investigation and inquiry that the Dhamma consistently encourages naturally provides an avenue especially for persons possessing narrow self-serving interest or ego to peddle their own brand or perspective of the Dhamma. Devadatta, always remember that a half-filled pot makes a sound when struck or moved. One that is full is stilled within. Changing outward trappings will not change your inner being. Where you live or what you eat do not constitute the most important rules in the vinaya. More important still is the need for you to develop the sublime qualities of metta, karuna, muditha (altruistic joy) and upekkha (equanimity) and to cultivate your mind to free it from lobah (greed) dosa (anger or hatred) and moha (disillusion or ignorance).*

The scheming Venerable Devadatta took the Buddha's rejection of his proposed austere monastic rules as a legitimate justification to create a schism in the Sangha Order. He calculated that the best way now for him to succeed in his ambition to lead the Sangha Order was by appealing to the monks directly to support his cause for imposing a stricter monastic discipline. Some five hundred monks who had little experience and possessed a superficial understanding of the Dhamma supported his stance. These monks abandoned the Buddha as their spiritual leader in preference of Venerable Devadatta and resided in his monastery in Gayasisa. From his monestry, Venerable Devadatta and his renegade monks spread vicious rumours against the Buddha to



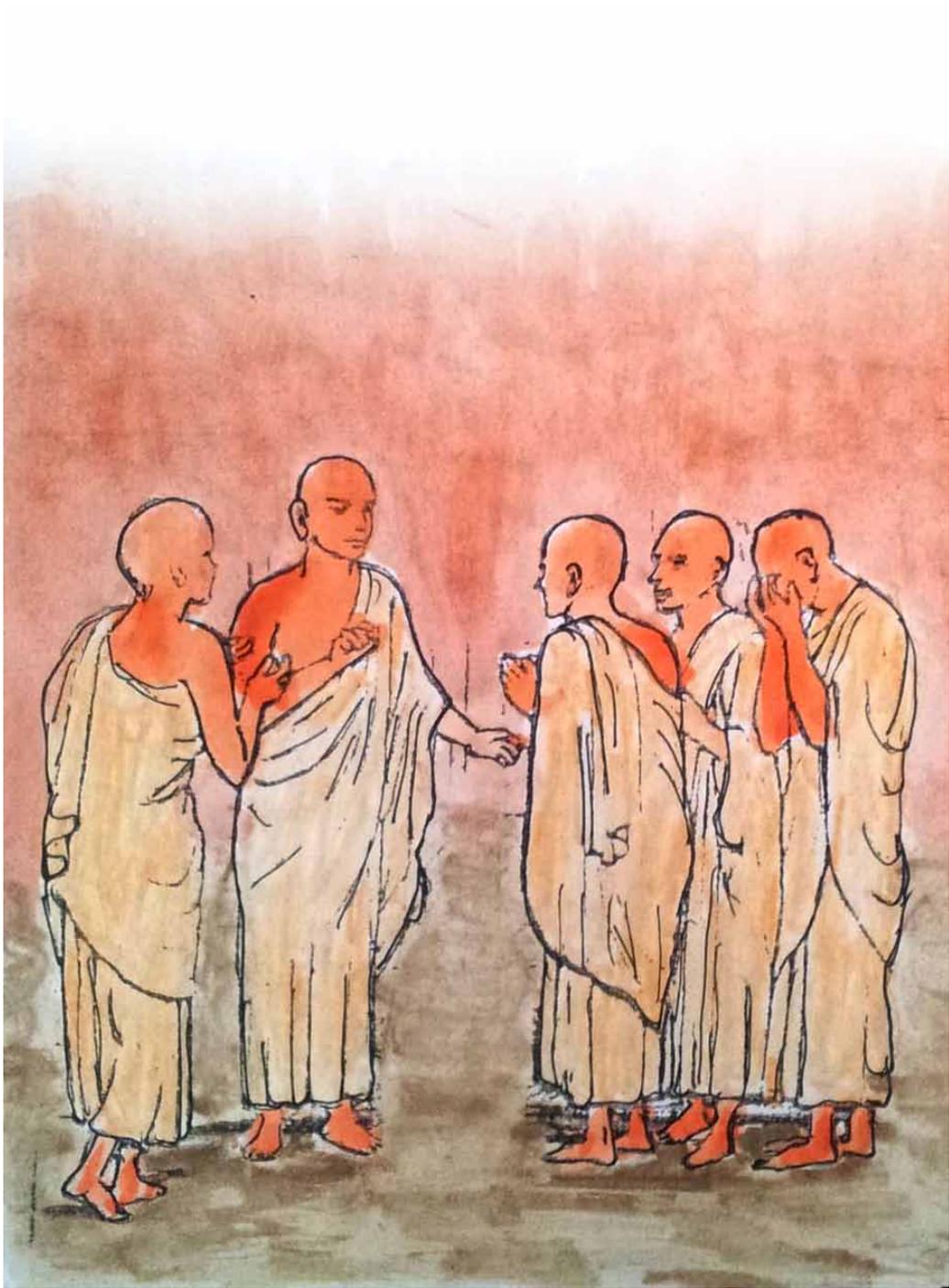
*The Buddha Chastises Venerable Devadatta*

garner more support from among the fraternity of monks and lay followers of the Buddha.

Venerable Ananda, the Chief Attendant of the Buddha, felt agitated over Venerable Devadatta's unpardonable erosion of the Sangha Order. He urged the Buddha to take punitive action against Venerable Devadatta in order to prevent greater schism. The Enlightened One pacified him with His insightful wisdom which holds universal relevance to this day : *"Easy it is to commit deeds that are evil and bring harm and ill-will, but deeds that bring welfare and good are truly hard to accomplish."* After much persuasion by Venerable Ananda, the Buddha finally requested his two Chief Disciples, Sariputta and Maha Moggallana, to advise the monks who were misled by the ambitious and scheming Venerable Devadatta to return to the fold.

When Venerable Devadatta saw Arahants Sariputta and Moggallana approaching his monastery, he felt elated. He assumed that the two chief disciples of the Buddha too had abandoned their Master and were joining his rival group of monks. He was thoroughly taken aback when he discovered that they had in fact come to disabuse the misguided monks about the *vinaya* and the Buddha's Sublime Teaching. To Venerable Devadatta's utter disgust, the Arahants Sariputta and Maha Mogallana succeeded in transforming the thinking and attitude of most of the renegade monks. On realizing the self-serving sinister intentions of Venerable Devadatta, the misguided monks returned to the fold and accepted the Buddha as their spiritual Master. As a result, only a handful of them remained with Venerable Devadatta in Gayasisa Monastery. The general public too soon criticised Venerable Devadatta's evil ways and distanced themselves from him.

Venerable Devadatta flew into a rage at the reversal of support for his leadership. He was so consumed with anger against the Buddha that he was stricken by a serious mental illness and became bed ridden. As days passed, his health and mental state progressively deteriorated. He realised that he was nearing death. He repented over his wicked deeds. He wished to seek forgiveness



*Arahants Sariputta and Moggallana Disabuse the Renegade Monks.*

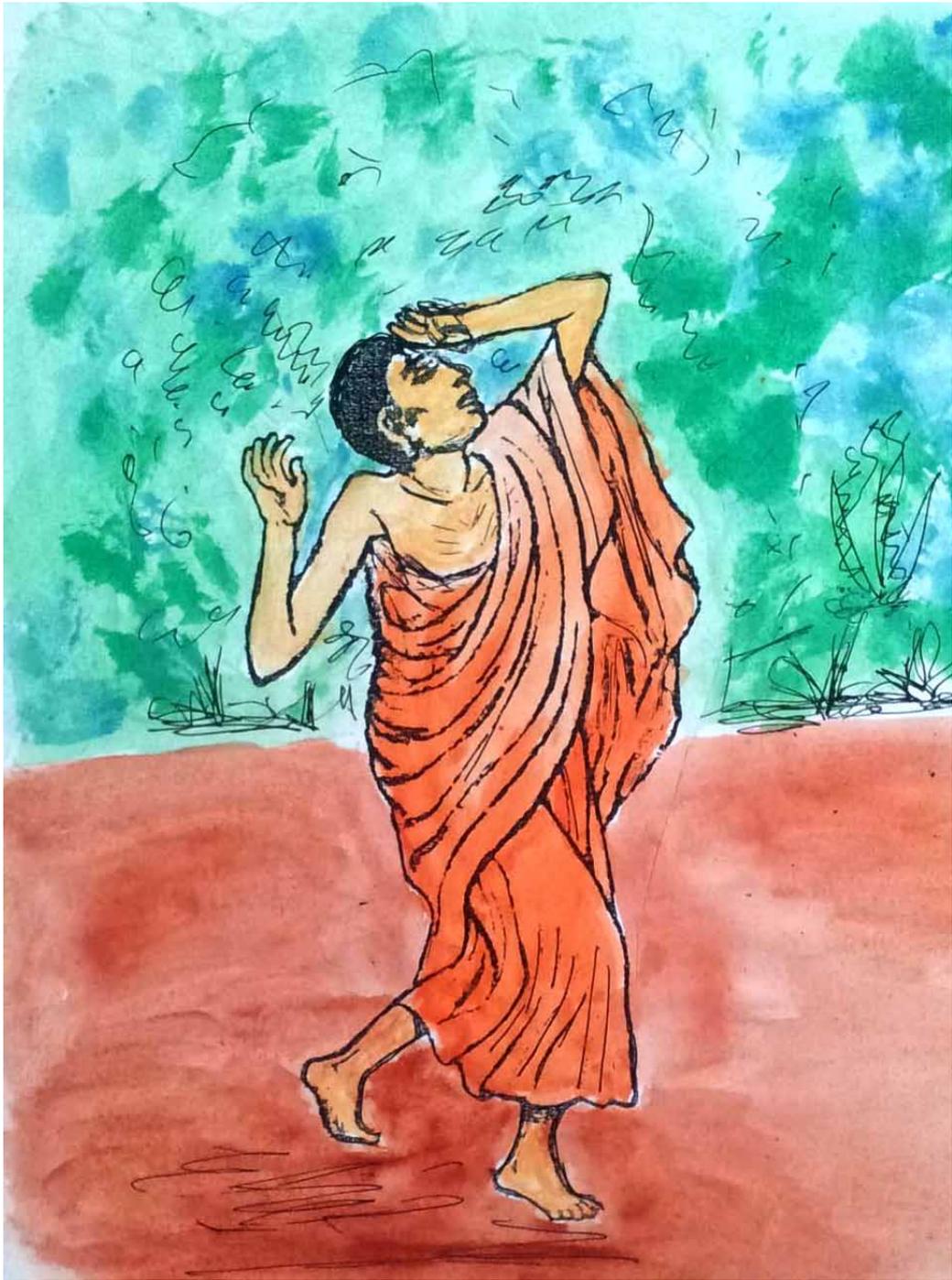
from the Buddha for the intense hatred and the numerous harm he had caused the Enlightened One. But his handful of remaining disciples declined to take him to the Buddha. Instead, they chided him, “*Master, when you enjoyed good health you caused enmity against the Buddha. How can we now lead you to the Enlightened One?*”

In desperation, Venerable Devadatta pleaded to them:

*Please Brother Monks, have pity on me. Please, do not destroy me completely. I admit that I have been consumed with hatred towards the Buddha. I do acknowledge unreservedly that despite my hostility and attempts to harm and even kill the Enlightened One, He had not cherished as much as the tip of a hair’s hatred towards me. Please, I beg you, lead me to the Blessed One. I must go and declare my repentance to the Buddha and seek His forgiveness before I depart from this world. Only then can my mind be at peace.*

It was only after desperate pleas that his disciple monks agreed to take Venerable Devadatta to the Buddha. But he was not able to accomplish his dying wish. Just as he was about to reach the outer gate of the Jetavana Monastery where the Buddha was residing, he suffered a massive heart attack and breathed his last. As his breath left him, Venerable Devadatta managed to recite his refuge in the Buddha and the Sublime Dhamma: “*Buddham Saranam Gachami, Dhammam Saranam Gachami.*” (I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Dhamma).

A key significance in the Teaching of the Buddha that underlines the historic episode of King Senyia Bimbisara, the Great Patron of the Buddha Dhamma, is the working of the Eternal Law of Kamma in the very life-time of three successive generations. Just as King Kunika had committed patricide, his son Udayibhadda was impatient to become the *Raja* and killed him to usurp the throne. In the same manner, Udayibhadda was killed by his own son to ascend the throne.



*Venerable Devadatta Seeks the Buddha's Forgiveness in Vain*

## **Comprehension Exercise**

1. Why and how did King Bhattiya choose his youngest son, Bimbisara to succeed him to the throne?
2. Describe King Bimbisara's able statesmanship?
3. Explain King Bimbisara's diplomatic skill in forging political marriages?
4. Describe King Bimbisara's encounter with Sharamana Siddhartha.
5. Discuss the episode of the Fire Worshippers' Annual Sacrifice.
6. Why was Queen Videhi so worried over the birth of her baby?
7. Describe King Bimbisara's devout practice of the Buddha Dhamma.
8. How did Venerable Devadatta poison Prince Kunika to kill his father?
9. Why is King Bimbisara regarded as a great patron of the Buddha ?
10. How did Bimbisara survive in the royal dungeon?
11. How did Venerable Devadatta try to kill the Buddha?
12. Describe King Bimbisara's unremitting love for Prince Kunika?
13. How did King Kunika redeem himself from his past wrongs?
14. Explain the Law of Kamma in relation to the story.
15. What lessons can you learn from this true-life story?