

Disciples of the Buddha



Introduction



The Language of the Buddha

Most likely spoke

Old Magadhi Prakrit

Not likely he spoke

Pali

He avoided

Sanskrit



Origin of the Stories

- Some of these stories come from the Apadana (the collection of biographical stories found in the Khuddaka Nikaya of the Pali Canon).
- Others are legendary or apocryphal.



What's an Arhant (Arahant)

- is a "perfected person" in Buddhism who has attained the highest level of spiritual enlightenment, achieved Nirvana, and is liberated from the cycle of rebirth and death (samsara).
- They are considered "worthy ones" who have destroyed all mental defilements—specifically greed, hatred, and delusion—and have eliminated the ten fetters that bind beings to existence



What's an Arhant (Arahant)

- Mahayana Buddhism often distinguishes between the arhat and the Bodhisattva (one who seeks Buddhahood to help all beings).
- In this view, the arhat's goal is sometimes seen as personal liberation, whereas the bodhisattva path is considered higher due to its altruistic, universal focus. However, Mahayana also recognizes arhats as advanced, highly respected practitioners.



The Inner Circle

The 10 Principle Disciples



The 10 Principle Disciples

Śāriputra (Shariputra)

Mahāmaudgalyāyana (Moggallana)

Mahākāśyapa (Mahakasyapa)

Subhūti

Pūrṇa Maitrāyanīputra (Purna)

Mahākātyāyana (Katyayana)

Aniruddha (Anuruddha)

Upāli

Rāhula

Ānanda



Shariputra

- Śāripūtra (Sanskrit), or Sāriputta (Pāli), The Buddha's chief disciple renowned for supreme wisdom (paññā).
- In the Heart Sutra, the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara preaches to him.



Shariputra

- Formerly a follower of Sañjaya until he encountered the Buddha's teaching through Assaji.
- Known for his calm intellect, deep insight into dependent origination, and gentle guidance to others.
- Regarded as the right-hand disciple of the Buddha and a master of doctrinal exposition.



Maudgalyayana

- Maudgalyāyana (Sk.) or Moggallāna(Pl.), also known as Mahāmaudgalyāyana or Mahāmoggallāna.
- He was a top master of supernatural powers. Maudgalyayana and Śāriputra were once disciples of Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta, the skeptic, but they became disciples of the Buddha.
- In Chinese Buddhism, the Mass that Maudgalyayana held to save his mother who had gone to the Hungry Ghost realm (one of the Six realms) is the foundation of ullambana (Ghost Festival).



Maudgalyayana

- The Buddha's chief disciple renowned for supreme psychic powers (iddhi).
- A close friend of Śāriputra; both attained arahantship soon after ordination.
- Used his supernatural abilities compassionately to help beings in difficult realms.
- Regarded as the left-hand disciple of the Buddha, embodying spiritual energy and compassion.



Two Friends

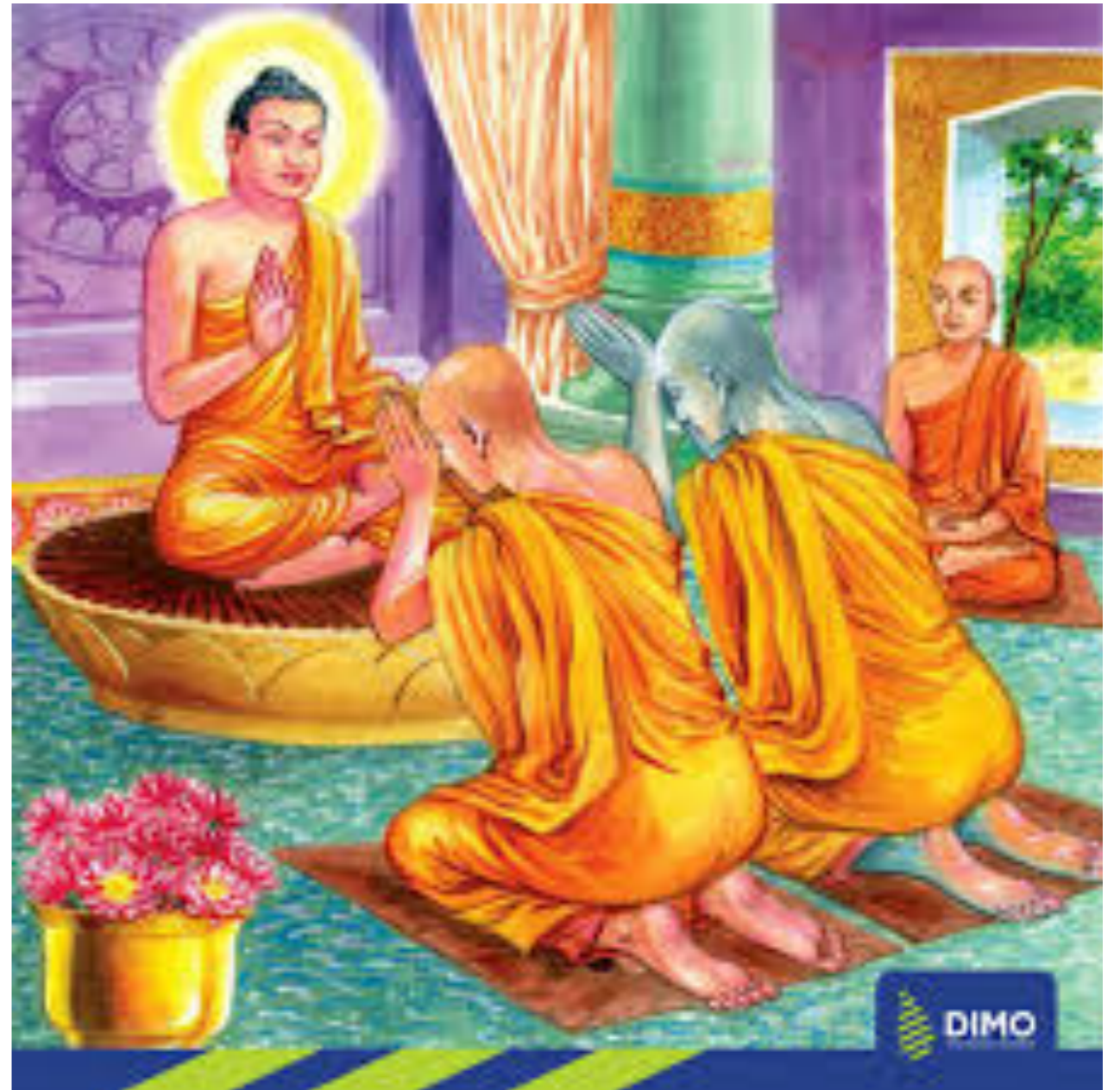
- Śāriputra and Moggallāna were childhood friends who grew up searching for a deeper truth.
- Though brilliant and respected among spiritual seekers, both felt that no teaching they encountered fully resolved their questions about suffering and liberation.



Two Friends

- One day, Śāriputra saw a serene monk walking through the village—Assaji, one of the Buddha’s first disciples. Struck by his composure, Śāriputra approached him and asked for the essence of his teacher’s doctrine. Assaji replied with a brief verse:

• *“Of all things that arise from a cause,
The Tathāgata has explained the cause,
And also what their cessation is—
This is the teaching of the Great Sage.”*

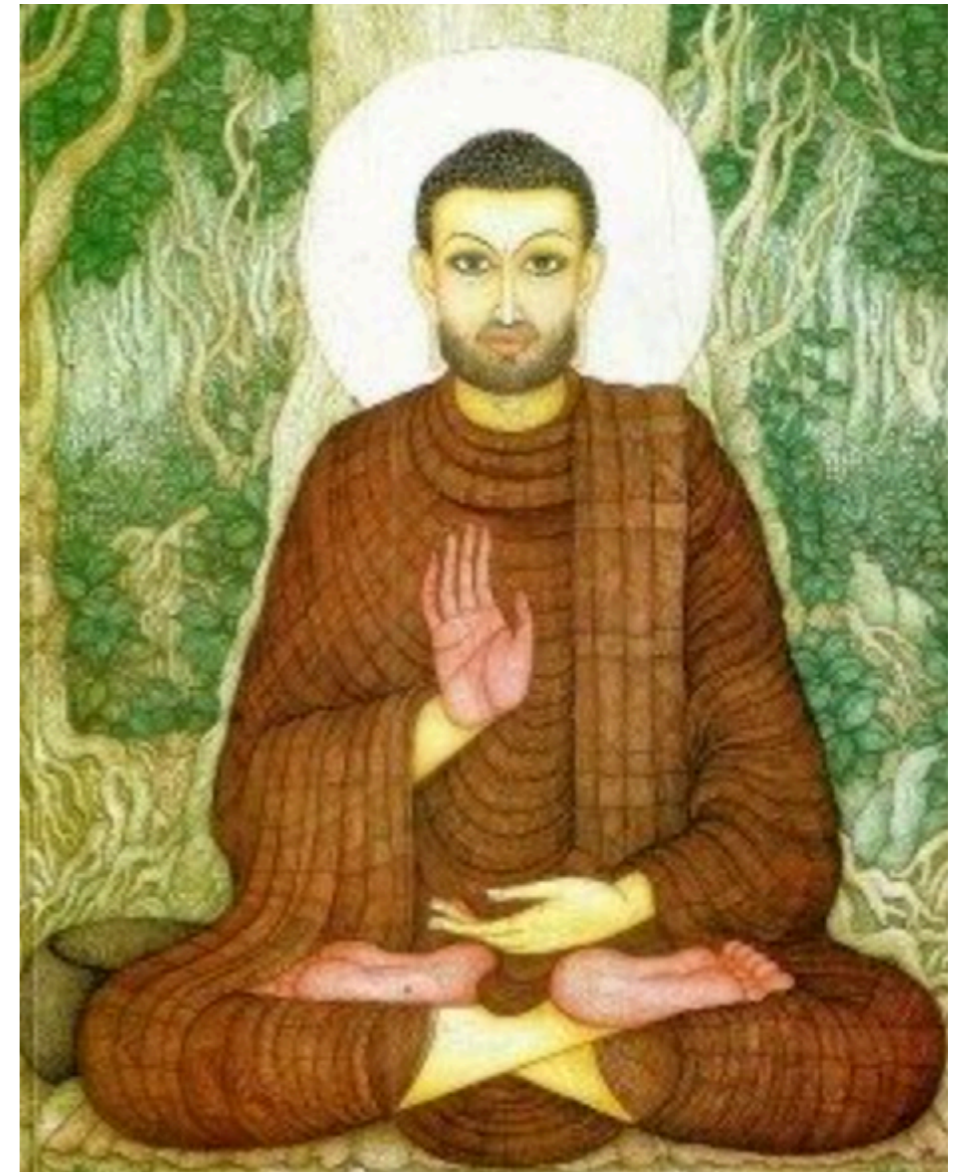


Two Friends

- Just hearing these few lines, Śāriputra experienced a profound insight. He immediately sought out Moggallāna and repeated the verse. Moggallāna, too, instantly understood its depth. The two friends went directly to the Buddha and became his disciples.
- Śāriputra soon became known as the Buddha's foremost in wisdom, analyzing the Dharma with unmatched clarity.
- Moggallāna became the foremost in supernatural abilities, able to enter deep meditative states and help the community in miraculous ways.
- Yet despite their different strengths, they always remained loyal friends—supporting each other, guiding monks, and serving as the Buddha's two chief disciples.

Mahākāśyapa

- Mahākāśyapa (Sk.) or Mahākassapa (Pl.)
- Master of ascetic training. After the death of Shakyamuni Buddha, he assumes the leadership of the sangha, compiled the Buddha's sayings (suttas) with 500 other disciples (First Buddhist council), and became the first man who preached the Buddha's teachings directly.
- Foremost among the monks in ascetic practices (dhutaṅga) and simplicity of life.



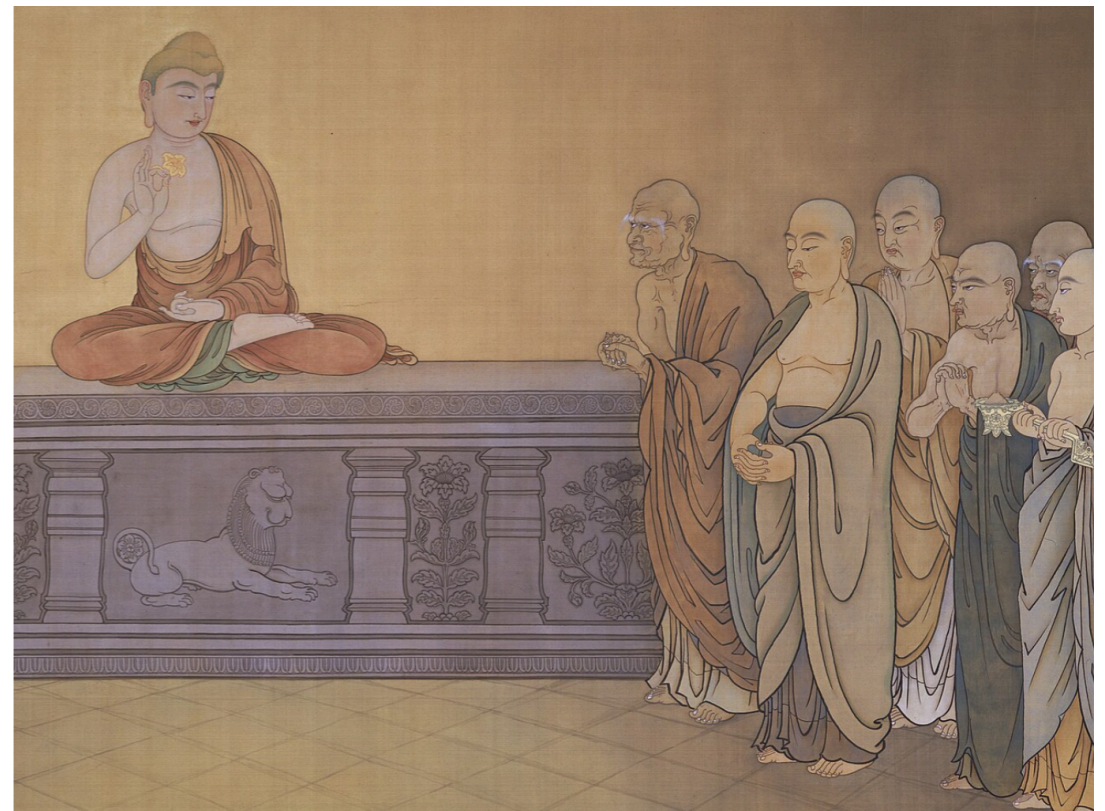
Mahākāśyapa

- A leading elder who convened and presided over the First Buddhist Council after the Buddha's passing.
- Deeply revered for his austerity, wisdom, and spiritual authority.
- Regarded in later tradition as the guardian of the Buddha's robe and Dharma transmission.



The Flower Sermon — Summary

- In a famous Zen (Chan) tradition, the Buddha once gave a sermon in complete silence.
- Instead of speaking, he simply held up a single flower.
- The assembly was puzzled, but Mahākāśyapa smiled in sudden understanding.



The Flower Sermon — Summary

- Seeing this, the Buddha declared that Mahākāśyapa had grasped the wordless essence of the Dharma—the direct, intuitive insight beyond scriptures and concepts.
- He then entrusted Mahākāśyapa with the “special transmission outside the teachings,” making him the first patriarch in the Zen lineage.
- The story symbolizes how awakening can arise through direct experience rather than verbal instruction.



The 13 Dhutanga Practices

- **I. Robe Austerities (3 practices)**
- Wearing only rag-robles (paṃsukūlika)
 - Wearing robes made from discarded cloth found in trash heaps, cremation grounds, etc.
- Wearing only triple robe set (tecīvarika)
 - Possessing only the three basic robes of a monk, nothing extra.
- Wearing only patched robes (paṃsukūla-saññin)
 - Robes repaired repeatedly with visible patches.



Venerable Phiyathammoo

The 13 Dhutanga Practices

- **II. Almsfood Austerities (5 practices)**

- Alms-round only (piṇḍapātika)
 - Eating only food collected by going house to house, not accepting invitations.
- Going in order without skipping houses (sapadānacārika)
 - Taking alms from each house in sequence without preference for rich or generous donors.
- Eating only once per day (ekāsanika)
 - Eating only one meal, in one sitting.
- Eating from the bowl (pattapiṇḍika)
 - Taking all food mixed together in the alms bowl, without choosing or arranging dishes.
- Refusing later offerings (khalupacchā-bhattika)
 - Not accepting food once one has finished a meal.



The 13 Dhutanga Practices

• **III. Lodging Austerities (5 practices)**

- Living in the forest (āraññika)
 - Dwelling away from villages and towns.
- Living under a tree (rukhamūlika)
 - Staying at the base of a tree instead of a hut or monastery.
- Living in the open air (abbhokāsika)
 - No dwelling at all; sleeping under the sky.
- Living in a cemetery or charnel ground (sosānika)
 - Meditating where corpses were placed, confronting impermanence directly.
- Using any available lodging (yathā-santhatika)
 - Taking the simplest space available without preference.



The 13 Dhutanga Practices

- **Important Notes**

- The Buddha did not demand these practices of all monks.
- They were recommended for those seeking stricter renunciation.
- Several great disciples, such as Mahākāśyapa, were especially associated with the dhutaṅgas.



Rahula

- Rāhula (Sk. & Pl.)
- was the only son of the Buddha (when he was still Prince Siddhartha) and his wife Princess.
- He was a scrupulous, strict and shrewd person.
- When the Buddha went to his hometown, he became the first Sāmanera (novice monk).
- Exemplifies humility and eagerness to learn.



Rahula

- Entered the monastic order as a child and was carefully guided by the Buddha.
- Foremost in training and desire for instruction.
- His story represents renunciation of worldly ties and sincere spiritual growth.



Ananda

- He was a cousin of the Buddha.
- Ananda means great delight.
- After he became a monk, he took care of the Buddha for 25 years, until the Buddha died.
- In the First Buddhist council, the suttas/sutras were compiled based on his memory.
- He lived to 120 years old.



Ananda

- The Buddha's personal attendant and cousin, known for his devoted service.
- Foremost in hearing and remembering the teachings (sutras).
- His remarkable memory preserved most of the Buddha's discourses.
- Advocated for women's ordination, helping establish the bhikkhuni order.



Ānanda and the “Half the Holy Life”

- One day the Buddha told Ānanda that spiritual friendship (kalyāṇa-mitta) is not just half of the holy life, but the whole of it.
- Ānanda had remarked that good friends seemed to be “half the path,” but the Buddha corrected him—underscoring how essential community, support, and companionship are for awakening.
- This teaching is often cited as the heart of the Buddhist understanding of human connection.



Ānanda's Perfect Memory and First Council Role

- After the Buddha's passing, the community was anxious about preserving the teachings accurately.
- Ānanda—because he had attended nearly every teaching and remembered every word—recited all the Buddha's discourses at the First Council. He began each with the now-famous phrase:
 - "Thus have I heard..."
- This story highlights his role as the guardian of the oral tradition, ensuring that the Dharma survived.



Radical Transformations

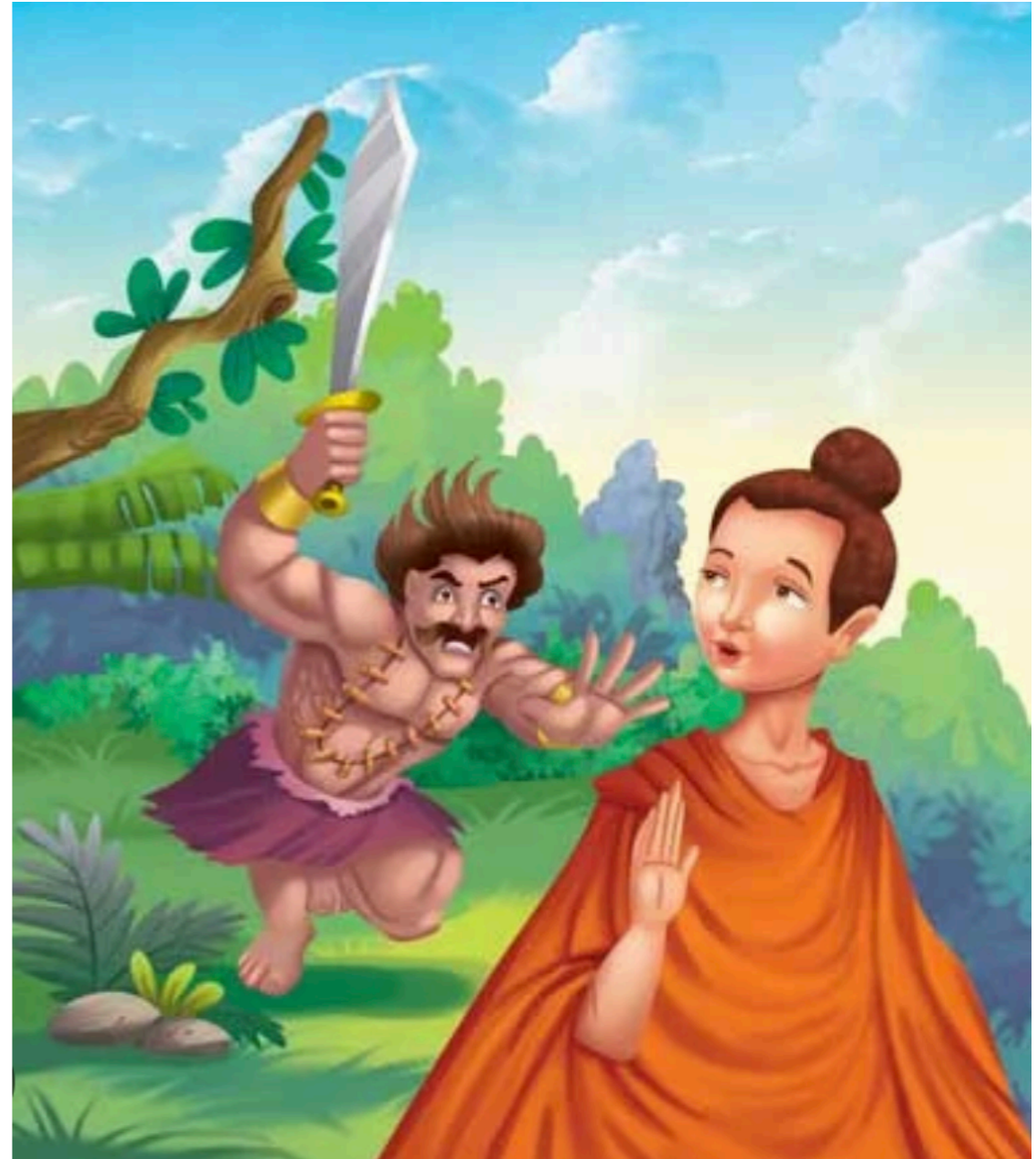
The Story of Angulimala



The Encounter with the Buddha

- **The Chase:** Angulimala, with 999 fingers, sought his final victim and chased the Buddha, but could never catch him.
- **The Lesson:** The Buddha, walking calmly, told Angulimala, "I have stopped all killing; it is you who have not".

The Realization: This profound statement, contrasting the Buddha's inner peace with Angulimala's frenzied quest, made the killer realize his own madness.



Transformation & Redemption

- **Becoming a Monk:** Angulimala dropped his weapons, fell at the Buddha's feet, and asked to be taught.
- **New Name:** He took refuge in the Buddha, changed his name back to Ahimsaka (harmless), and became a monk, symbolizing his new, non-violent path.
- **Overcoming Karma:** Despite facing fear and hatred from villagers, he meditated, served others, and transformed his past regrets into compassion, eventually attaining enlightenment (arhathood).



Significance

- Angulimala's story is a powerful example in Buddhism, demonstrating that profound spiritual change and redemption are possible for anyone, regardless of past deeds, through sincere effort and following the path of Dharma.





The Bhikkhuni Sangha

Female Disciples

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī

- The first female renunciant and the Buddha's aunt and foster mother, acknowledged as foremost in seniority.
- First woman to request and receive ordination, founding the bhikkhunī order.
- Foremost among nuns in seniority and experience.
- Represents maternal compassion, leadership, and persistence.



Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī

- Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was the sister of Queen Māyā who died shortly after the Buddha's birth.
- She lovingly raised the young Siddhartha as her own son.
- Years later, after he attained enlightenment. Mahāpajāpatī became one of his most devoted followers.
- When the Buddha returned to Kapilavastu, she approached him and asked to join the Sangha—to live the life of a renunciant and follow the path to awakening.



Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī

- At first, the Buddha declined, believing that the time was not yet right for the ordination of women.
- But Mahāpajāpatī's determination was extraordinary. She cut her hair, put on simple robes, and—together with a large group of women from the royal household—walked hundreds of miles barefoot to the place where the Buddha was teaching.
- Her feet were bleeding and her body was covered in dust, yet her resolve was unshaken.



Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī

- When the Buddha's attendant Ānanda saw her, he pleaded with the Buddha to reconsider.
- Ānanda asked, "Are women capable of realizing enlightenment if they follow your teaching?" The Buddha replied, "Yes, they are."
- Then Ānanda said, "If that is so, then it is only fitting that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī be allowed to enter the Sangha."
- Moved by her courage and devotion, the Buddha agreed—and thus the order of nuns (the Bhikkhunī Sangha) was established.



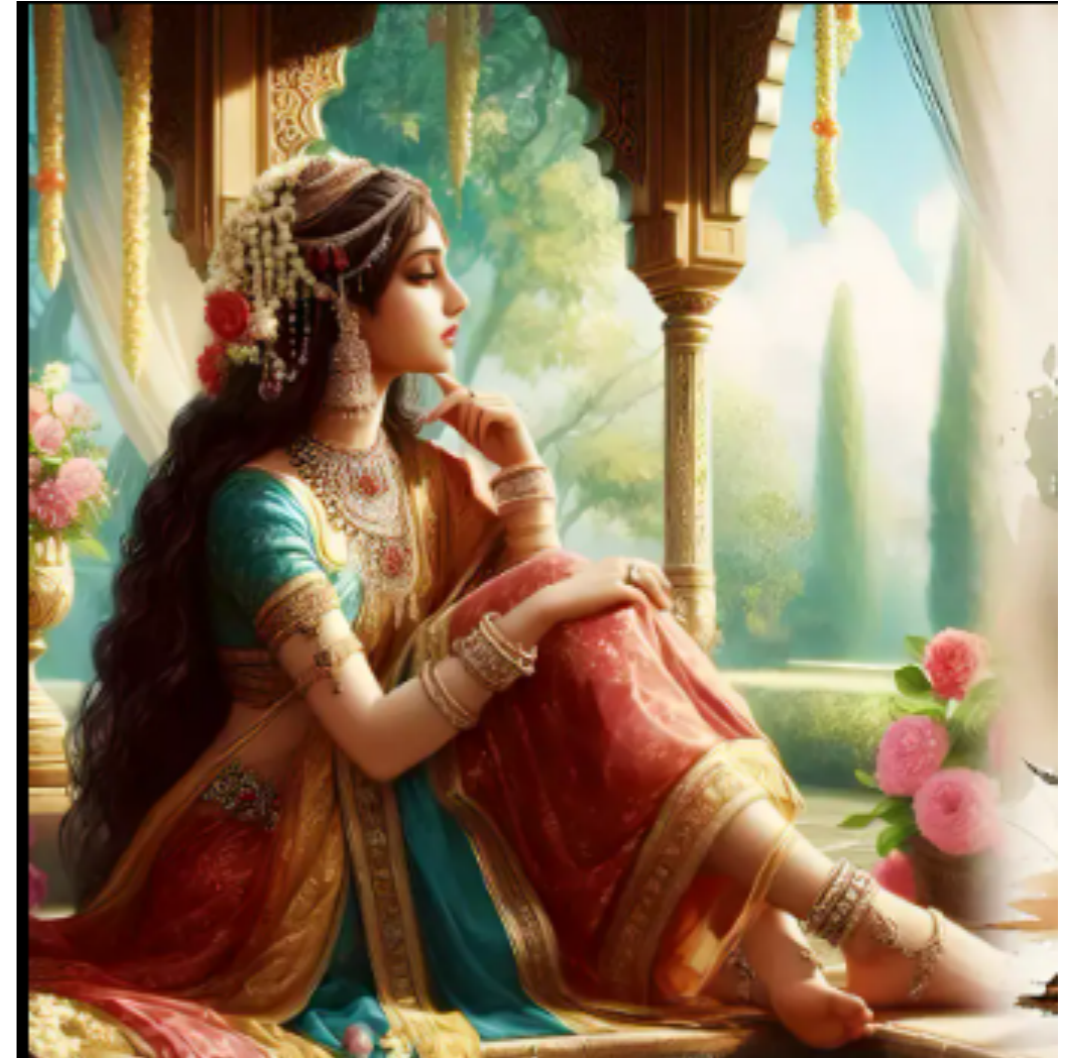
Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī

- Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī became the first ordained woman in Buddhist history, a symbol of spiritual equality and compassion in action.
- Her story teaches the power of perseverance, dignity, and faith, showing that enlightenment transcends all boundaries of gender or status.



Yasodharā

- Foremost in great insight.
- The Buddha's wife before his renunciation.
- Understood his spiritual destiny and later became a nun and arahant.
- Foremost in miraculous powers among nuns, according to some sources.
- Represents devotion, patience, and eventual enlightenment.



Yasodharā

- When Prince Siddhartha Gautama lived in the palace, his wife Yasodharā shared his sense that worldly pleasure could not bring lasting peace.
- She was devoted, wise, and deeply perceptive.
- When he left the palace in the night to seek enlightenment, she intuitively understood why he had gone.
- Though overcome with sorrow, she did not condemn him—she simply said, “If this is his path, I will walk mine in spirit.”

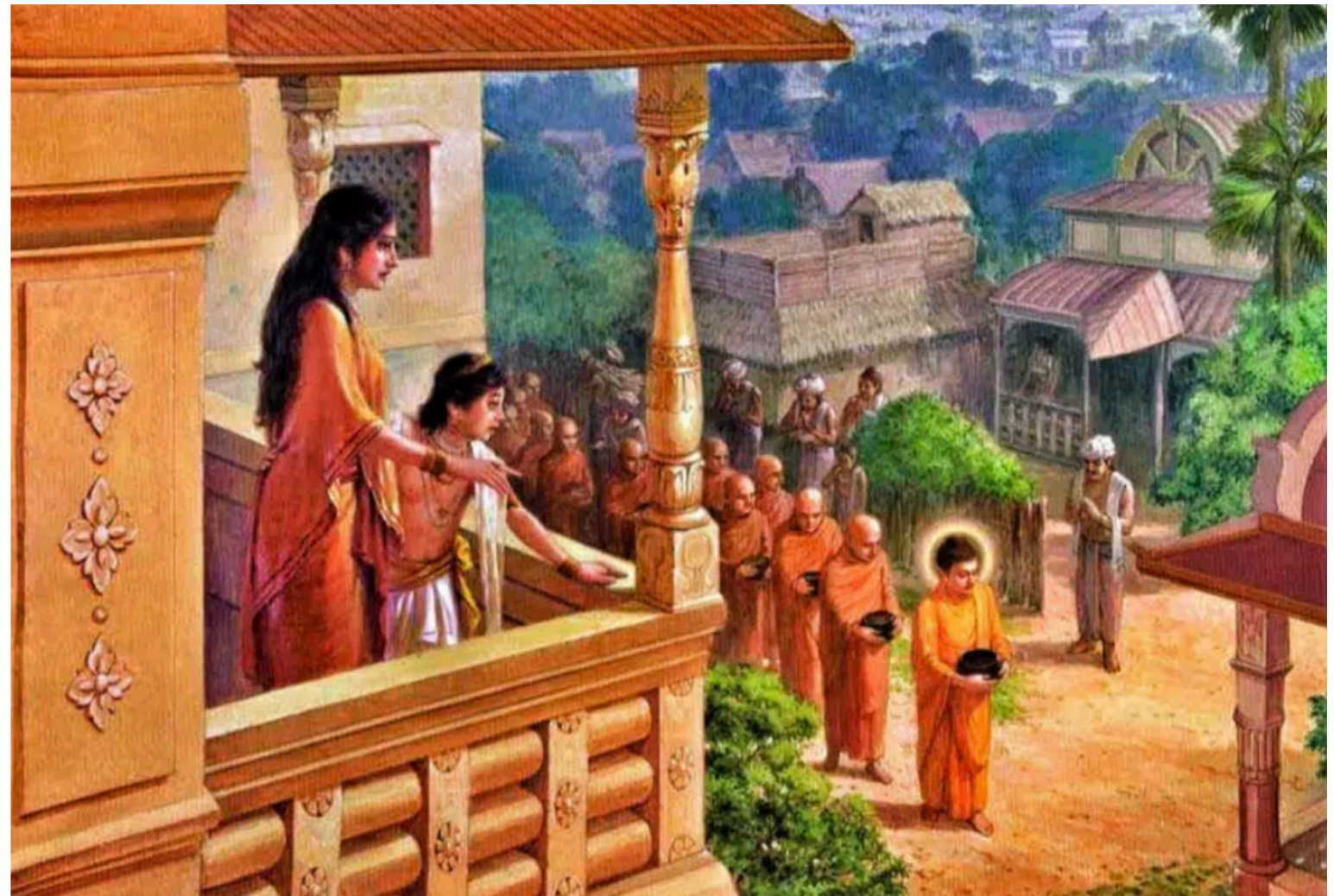
Yasodharā

- When the Buddha finally visited her, she bowed respectfully but without tears or complaint.
- She showed him their son, Rāhula, who later became a monk under the Buddha's guidance.
- The Buddha praised Yasodharā's unwavering faith and spiritual maturity, telling his followers that in many past lives she had walked beside him, supporting his journey toward awakening.



Yasodharā

- In Buddhist tradition, Yasodharā's story is seen as a parable of patience, equality, and inner strength.
- She embodies the understanding that love need not cling, that devotion can be expressed through stillness, and that enlightenment is open to all—women and men alike—through compassion and wisdom.



Kisā Gotamī

- Foremost in wearing coarse robes, representing a life of simplicity and detachment.
- Lost her only child and sought the Buddha's help in her grief.
- Realized the universality of death through the mustard seed parable.
- Attained arahantship through deep insight into impermanence.



Parable of the Mustard Seed

- The Parable of the Mustard Seed tells of a grieving mother named Kisa Gotami, who begged the Buddha to bring her dead child back to life.
- The Buddha asked her to find a mustard seed from any household that had never known death.



Parable of the Mustard Seed

- As she went from house to house, she realized that every family had lost someone they loved.
- Through this, she understood that death is a universal part of life, and she found peace in letting go of her grief.
- She then became a disciple of the Buddha and achieved enlightenment.



Countries / Traditions with Full Ordination For Women

Country / Region	Tradition	Ordination Status	Key Years
Sri Lanka	Theravāda	Yes (revived)	1996, 1998 ongoing (Wikipedia)
Australia	Theravāda	Yes	2009 (Wikipedia)
USA	Theravāda	Yes	2010 (Wikipedia)
Germany	Theravāda	Yes	2015 (Wikipedia)
Indonesia	Theravāda	Yes	2015 (Wikipedia)
Taiwan / China / Korea / Vietnam / Japan	Dharmaguptaka Mahāyāna	Continuous unbroken	Historical & ongoing (present.bhikkhuni.net)
Bhutan	Vajrayāna/Mūlasarvāstivāda	Yes (recent)	2022, 2025 (Wikipedia)
Thailand	Theravāda	Unofficial / contested	2003 (Thai woman ordained abroad) (Wikipedia)
Myanmar	Theravāda	No official	— (Wikipedia)
Cambodia	Theravāda	No	— (Thubten Chodron)
Laos	Theravāda	No	— (Thubten Chodron)
Tibet / Nepal / Mongolia	Vajrayāna (traditionally)	No until Bhutan revival	2022 onward (Wikipedia)
Japan (Zen, Tendai etc)	Mahāyāna (different ordination)	No bhikkhunī upasampadā	— (Wikipedia)

Countries / Traditions with Full Ordination For Women

- **Theravāda revival:** Sri Lanka's 1996 ordination is a major modern milestone after a ~1000-year gap.
- **Western ordinations:** Australia (2009), USA (2010), and Europe (2015) show global spread beyond Asia.
- **Mahāyāna lineage:** East Asian traditions (China, Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam, Japan) have maintained continuous bhikkhunī ordination historically.
- **Tibetan tradition:** Historically lacked bhikkhuni lineage; recent 2022 and 2025 bhikkhuni ordinations in Bhutan represent breakthrough steps.
- **Resistance / lack:** Southeast Asian Theravāda countries like Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos — and historically Thailand's hierarchy — do not officially recognize full ordination.

Theravāda revival

- Korea played a pivotal, facilitating role in the late 20th-century revival of the Theravada Bhikkhuni (nun) order in Sri Lanka by providing an unbroken lineage of ordination, specifically through the Jogye Order.
- Because the Theravada bhikkhuni lineage had been extinct in Sri Lanka for centuries, Korean Mahayana nuns—who possess a lineage directly descended from Sri Lankan nuns who traveled to China in the 5th century—were instrumental in re-establishing the order in 1996 and 1998.
- While some conservative elements within the Sri Lankan Sangha initially refused to recognize this lineage because it came through a Mahayana tradition, the involvement of the Korean order is credited with enabling the modern revival of the Bhikkhuni order in Sri Lanka.

The Lineage



Kwan Um Linage (India)

The Buddha
Shakyamuni

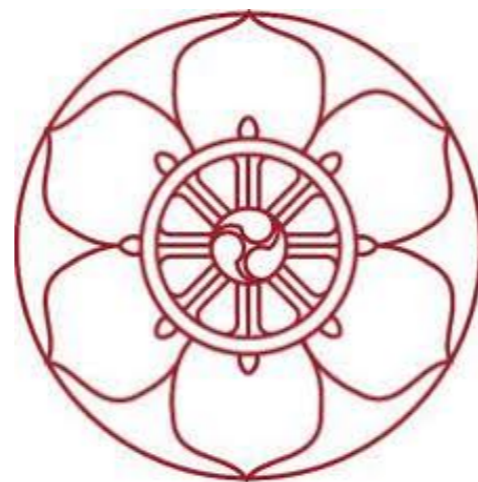
1. Mahakasyapa
2. Ananda
3. Sanakavasa
4. Upagupta
5. Dhrtaka
6. Miccaka
7. Vasumitra
8. Buddhanandi

9. Buddhamitra
10. Parsva
11. Punyayasas
12. Asvaghosa
13. Kapimala
14. Nagarjuna
15. Kanadeva
16. Rahulata
17. Sanghanandi

18. Gayasata
19. Kumarata
20. Jayata
21. Vasubandhu
22. Manorhita
23. Haklena
24. Aryasimha
25. Basiasita
26. Punyamitra
27. Prajnatarā
28. Bodhidharma

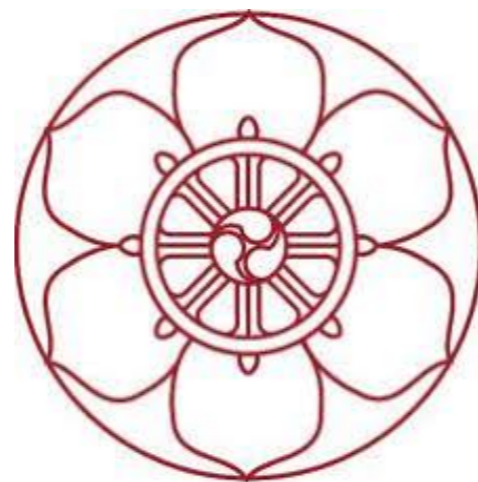
Closing Statement

- I hope these stories of the Buddha's great disciples remind us how many different ways the Dharma can be lived. Sariputta's clear wisdom, Moggallana's deep meditative power, Mahāpajāpati Gotami's courage in opening the path for women, Kisa Gotami's heartbreaking journey to compassion, Rahula's humility as a young monk, Yasodhara's quiet strength and insight, Ananda's devotion and memory, Mahākāśyapa's fierce commitment to the essence of Zen, and even Angulimala's radical transformation — each one shows a different doorway into awakening.



Closing Statement

- In the Kwan Um School of Zen, we often return to “don’t know mind,” the mind that is open, flexible, and ready to see clearly. These disciples lived that spirit in their own ways. Their lives show us that awakening isn’t limited to one personality, one background, or one style of practice. It’s something that unfolds uniquely for each person, yet points to the same truth.



Closing Statement

- These stories matter not just for Zen practitioners, but for anyone walking the Buddhist path. They remind us that wisdom and compassion grow through struggle, through sincerity, and through returning to practice moment after moment.
- May their examples encourage us to keep going, keep questioning, and keep opening our hearts. Thank you for listening, and may your practice benefit all beings.

