

## C. The Charity of Sudatta

‘Sudatta was an extremely wealthy merchant. He lived in the capital city, Savatthi, in the kingdom of Kosala that was ruled by King Pasenadi. Sudatta was known to his countrypeople as a philanthropist who always set aside a generous portion of his income to share with orphans and the destitute. His charitable efforts gave him much satisfaction and happiness. His people called him "Anathapindika," which means "the one who cares for the poor and abandoned." ...

When Sudatta heard more of the Buddha's teaching the next day, his heart opened like a flower. He knelt down and said, "Lord Buddha, the people of Kosala have not yet had an opportunity to welcome you and your sangha and to learn the way of Awakening. Please consider my invitation for you to come to Kosala and spend a period of time. Please show compassion to the people of Kosala."

The Buddha agreed to discuss the idea with his senior disciples. He promised to give Sudatta a response within a few days.

A few days later Sudatta visited Bamboo Forest Monastery and received the happy news that the Buddha had decided to accept his invitation. The Buddha asked him if there would be some suitable place near Savatthi where a large community of bhikkhus could dwell. Sudatta assured him that he would find a place and would provide for all the sangha's needs while they were there. Sudatta also suggested that the Buddha allow Venerable Sariputta to come to Kosala with him first in order to assist in preparations for the Buddha's arrival. The Buddha asked Sariputta whether or not he would like that, and Sariputta replied he would be happy to go.

Of all the places Sudatta visited, none was more beautiful and peaceful than the park which belonged to Prince Jeta. Sudatta felt sure that if he could acquire this park it would serve as a perfect place from which the Buddha's Way of Awakening could be spread to all corners of the kingdom. Sudatta went to see Prince Jeta and found him entertaining a palace official. Sudatta respectfully greeted them both and then expressed directly his hope that the prince would sell him the park to provide a practice center for the Buddha. Prince Jeta was only twenty years old. The park had been a gift the previous year from his father, King Pasenadi. The prince looked at the palace official and then at Sudatta, and replied, "My royal father gave me the park. I am very attached to it. I would only part with it if you agreed to cover every square inch of it in gold coins."

Prince Jeta was speaking in jest. He certainly wasn't prepared for the young merchant to take him seriously. But Sudatta responded, "Agreed, I will meet your price. Tomorrow I will have the gold brought to the park."

Prince Jeta was startled. "But I was only joking. I do not want to sell my park. Don't bother bringing the gold."

Sudatta answered with resolve, "Honorable Prince, you are a member of the royal family. You must carry out the words you have spoken."

Sudatta looked at the palace official drinking tea for support. "Is that not so, Your Excellency?"

The official nodded. He turned to the prince and said, "The merchant Anathapindika speaks the truth. If you hadn't actually quoted a price, it would be different. But you cannot withdraw your offer now."

Prince Jeta submitted, but he secretly hoped Sudatta would not be able to meet his price. Sudatta bowed and departed. Early the next morning, Sudatta sent great carts of gold coins and had his servants spread it over the entire park.

Prince Jeta was astounded that this had been no ordinary business agreement. He asked himself why anyone would give so much gold for one park? This Buddha and his sangha must be truly extraordinary for the young merchant to go to such lengths. The prince asked Sudatta to tell him about the Buddha. Sudatta's eyes shone as he spoke about his Teacher, the Dharma, and the Sangha. He promised that he would bring Venerable Sariputta to meet the prince the following day. Prince Jeta found himself moved by the things Sudatta told him about the Buddha. He looked up to see that Sudatta's men had already spread gold coins over two thirds of the forest. Just as a fourth cart was arriving, he held out his hand and stopped them.

He said to Sudatta, "That is enough gold. Let the remaining land be my gift. I want to contribute to this beautiful project of yours."

Sudatta was pleased to hear this. When he brought Sariputta to meet the prince, the prince was impressed by the bhikkhu's peaceful bearing. Together they went to visit the park, which Sudatta had decided to call "Jetavana," or "Jeta Grove," in honor of the prince.'

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