

The Legend Of The Miraculous Lamp

Buddhist scripture chronicles the legend of "The Miraculous Lamp." As the story goes, one day an old beggar woman saw soldiers pushing many carts full of barrels of oil and garish lamps. When she asked the soldiers about them, she learned that King Ajatashatru wanted to offer the oil lamps to the Buddha and the Sangha because the light they would create symbolized wisdom and enlightenment. Where there is light, darkness would vanish. Likewise, wherever the Buddha and the Sangha is, hatred and sin will disappear.

Upon hearing this, the old beggar woman thought, "It took thousands of years for the Buddha to manifest in this world. In this life I have the great fortune to meet the Buddha. Why, then, shouldn't I make a light offering to the Buddha and the Sangha?"

She immediately reached her hand into her bag but only found two coins. She rushed to a shop to purchase a lamp and oil. Unfortunately, the two coins would only buy her two tablespoons of oil. However, when the old woman told the story about the Buddha to the shopkeeper, he was delighted and gave her another three tablespoons of oil, and loaned her a lamp. Joyfully, the old beggar woman immediately went to the Jetavana Monastery in order to make a lamp offering to the Buddha before darkness fell.

When she arrived at the Jetavana Monastery, she saw an assortment of exquisite oil lamps burning brightly and lighting up the entire Monastery. She heard gentle, rhythmic music playing as courtiers, soldiers, and devotees paid their respects and praised the merits of the Buddha and the Sangha.

As the crowds continued to mindfully and respectfully offer their lamps to the Buddha, the old woman stepped aside and, with mindful respect, polished her oil lamp. As she was pouring the oil into the lamp and, while lighting the lamp she quietly prayed, "I humbly offer this light to the Buddha and the Sangha. My only wish is that I too will attain the full wisdom just like the Buddha in the ten directions." She acknowledged her modest offering as she thought, "With only this small amount of oil, this lamp will probably burn out by midnight." Despite this, she made her offering with sincere faith as she thought, "If I truly attain my heart's desire of Full Enlightenment, may this lamp forever burn and never go dark."

After the old beggar woman made the vow, she hung the lamp on a tree, and immediately entered the monastery where she paid homage to the Buddha and left the Monastery.

All of the oil lamps that were offered by the king required that the soldiers take turns in order to fill the oil and change the wicks. This was necessary in order to make sure that the lamps wouldn't burn out. Even with this effort, very few of the oil lamps were able to stay lit throughout the night. Some were blown out by the wind, and others simply burned out.

But the lamp that the old beggar woman had lit, even though it was hung outside on a tree, it still was burning brightly into the next morning.

As the sun rose that next morning the Buddha asked Maudgalyayana to blow out the oil lamps, and one by one, Maudgalyayana blew out the lamps, but when he came to the old woman's oil lamp, no matter what he did, he could not blow it out.

Just as Maudgalyayana was trying, once again, to blow out the old beggar woman's lamp, the Buddha passed by and gently said, "My dear disciple, even you, with your psychic power, will never be able to extinguish this lamp, because it burns with the merit of the future Buddha."