

# The Traditional Studies of Jīvaka Komārabhacca: The Buddha's Doctor in Theravada and Bhaiṣajyaguru, The Medicine Buddha in Vajrayāna



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## ABSTRACT

Among many traditions and beliefs, Buddhism is considered as one of the largest religion in the world which now ranks the fourth. Though its scriptures and traditions inform countless subsequent sects and ideologies, Buddhism is largely divided into 2 branches: Theravāda and Mahāyāna. Vajrayāna, a body of teachings attributed to Indian adepts, may be viewed as a separate branch or as an aspect of Mahāyāna Buddhism. This article presents with the conceptual idea that life is a combination of *Nāmarūpa*, mind: *Nāma* and matter: *Rūpa*, used in Buddhism in referring to the constituents of a living being which is mutually dependent, and not separable.

In order to train the mind, a practitioner can use mindfulness meditation to practice by oneself. Unlike the body that needs special care and treatment from the medical professional like doctors or physicians. Even all the Buddhas still need the personal doctor who is aspired to become one, as well as the Buddha himself who performs immeasurable power in healing the suffering of all beings. With the great compassion of Bodhicitta to the world, their names – *Jīvaka Komārabhacca* and *Bhaiṣajyaguru* – remain as a legend until now. The textual traditions, stories, and some useful guidance for practices with daily mantras for the Buddha's Doctor in Theravādin tradition and the Medicine Buddha in Vajrayāna tradition are studied and discussed in this article.

**Keywords:** Jīvaka Komārabhacca, Buddha's Doctor, Bhaiṣajyaguru, Medicine Buddha, Buddhist Medicine, Physician

## Introduction

“Buddhism” is one of the largest religions in the world<sup>1</sup>, which is ranked the world’s fourth largest religion<sup>2</sup>. Buddhism is both a religion and philosophy. The traditions and beliefs surrounding Buddhism can be traced to the original teachings of Siddhārtha Gautama Buddha. This religion originated in India, and it is based around the teachings of Buddha. There are traditions, practices, and beliefs of this religion that are unique to this religion. Though its scriptures and traditions inform countless subsequent sects and ideologies, Buddhism is largely divided into 2 branches: *Theravada* – the goal of which is to achieve freedom from ignorance, material attachment, and anger by practicing the Middle Path (the Noble Eightfold Path), all in pursuit of a sublime state called ‘Nirvana’; and *Mahāyāna* – the goal of which is aspire to Buddhahood by practicing the principles of self-control, compassion, meditation, and expression of the insight of Buddha in our daily life, especially for the benefit of others, all to the end of achieving bodhisattva, or an ongoing cycle of rebirth by which we can continue to enlighten others.

Most Buddhist traditions share the goal of overcoming suffering and the cycle of death and rebirth, either by the attainment of Nirvana or through the path of Buddhahood<sup>3</sup>. *Vajrayāna*, a body of teachings attributed to Indian adepts<sup>4</sup>, may be viewed as a separate branch or as an aspect of Mahāyāna Buddhism<sup>5</sup>. Tibetan Buddhism, which preserves the

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<sup>1</sup> David A. Tomar. 2019. “18 Major World Religions – Study Starters.” Last Updated on February 25, 2019. <https://thebestschools.org/magazine/world-religions-study-starters/> (accessed September 27, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> C.L., Illsley. 2018. “Largest Religions In The World.” World Atlas. Last Updated on September 10, 2018 <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/largest-religions-in-the-world.html/> (accessed September 27, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Powers, John. Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism (Revised Edition). Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2007. pp. 392–393, 415. ISBN 978-1-55939-282-2.

<sup>4</sup> Mahāsiddha is a term for someone who embodies and cultivates the “siddhi of perfection” (Sanskrit), (Tibetan: ལྷ་མོ་འཇུག་པོ།): great (Mahā) accomplished one (siddha), or great [spiritually] accomplished one, also known as Indian adepts. They are the principal Indian teachers of Hindu and Buddhist Tantra, or any great religious teacher that is credited with having special attainments and powers. A siddha is an individual who, through the practice of sādhanā, attains the realization of siddhis, psychic and spiritual abilities and powers.

<sup>5</sup> White, David Gordon, ed. Tantra in Practice. New Jersey, US: Princeton University Press, 2000. p. 21. ISBN 978-0-691-05779-8.

Vajrayāna teachings of eighth-century India, is practiced in the countries of the Himalayan region, Mongolia<sup>6</sup> and Kalmykia<sup>7</sup>.

According to Buddhism, life is a combination of mind (Nāma) and matter (Rūpa). The term *Nāmarūpa* is used in Buddhism to refer to the constituents of a living being which is mutually dependent, and not separable as in the Buddhist Pāli term *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (Sanskrit: Pratītyasamutpāda) – Dependent Origination. Traditionally, the links of dependent origination consisting of twelve elements is interpreted as describing the conditional arising of rebirth in saṃsāra, and the resultant dukkhā (suffering, pain, unsatisfactoriness)<sup>8</sup>. As person, we have the full right in taking care of our mind with the practice of mindfulness meditation when we are in suffering. However, when our physical body is in pain – minor or major injuries – or suffered with illnesses, some seek help from modern medical doctors but some look for indigenous remedies or traditional medicine doctors.

### ***Jīvaka Komārabhacca, The Buddha's Doctor in Theravada***

**1. The Story of *Jīvaka Komārabhacca* (The Buddha's Doctor):** Around 2,600 years ago back in the Sakyamuni Buddha's time, there was one prominent physician who always cured people with a traditional remedy whether poor or rich, ugly or beautiful, noble or lowly, king or beggar, etc. His name was *Jīvaka* (Pāli: Jīvaka Komārabhacca; Sanskrit: Jīvaka Kumārabhṛta). In the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, he was the personal physician to the Buddha and the King Bimbisāra. Sometimes he was narrated as “Medicine King<sup>9</sup>” because he figures notably in several countries throughout Asia as the traditional model healer and worshipped by many Āyurvedic physicians and traditional medicine healers. The life of Jīvaka can be found in the Early Buddhist Texts (EBTs) as well as the corresponding

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<sup>6</sup>Powers, John. Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism (Revised Edition.). Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2007. pp. 26–27. ISBN 978-1-55939-282-2.

<sup>7</sup>Baudot, Barbara Sundberg. Candles in the Dark: A New Spirit for a Plural World. University of Washington Press: Softcover Ed. Edition, 2002. p. 305. ISBN-13: 978-029598292.

<sup>8</sup>Harvey, Peter. (2015). “The Conditioned Co-arising of Mental and Bodily Processes within Life and Between Lives”, in Emmanuel, Steven M. (ed.). A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy. Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, ISBN 978-1-119-14466-3.

<sup>9</sup>Salguero, C. Pierce. “The Buddhist Medicine King in Literary Context: Reconsidering an Early Medieval Example of Indian Influence on Chinese Medicine and Surgery.” History of Religions, (2009) 48 (3): 183–210, doi:10.1086/598230, JSTOR 10.1086/598230.

Chinese Āgamas<sup>10</sup> from the Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka and Sarvāstivāda traditions, all translated from Indic texts in 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, and in many textual traditions such as the Pāli in Vinaya Piṭaka (Samantapāsādikā) tradition, Tibetan (Mūlasarvāstivāda) tradition, and Sanskrit texts (Mahāsaṃghika tradition, however fragmented) as well as from later Buddhist discourses and devotional Apadāna<sup>11</sup> texts (Sanskrit: Avadāna). In the Chinese canon of Buddhist scriptures<sup>12</sup>, two separate discourses (Pāli: Sutta; Sanskrit: Sūtra) can be found that are not part of the Vinaya, titled the Āmrapāli and Jīvaka Sūtra (known as T. 554) and the similarly titled Āmrapāli and Jīvaka Avadāna Sūtra (T. 553). His life story was scattered in various places, however, the main important details similar of which are compiled here.

Jīvaka was born in Rājagṛha, Magadha in India. His father was unidentified (Pāli tradition); Prince Abhaya (Dharmaguptaka tradition; also Manorathapūranī, Commentary on the Aṅguttara Nikāya mentioned that he was the secret guest of Salāvati<sup>13</sup>) or King Bimbisāra (other textual traditions). His mother was known as a courtesan (Sanskrit: gaṇikā; in the Pāli and Dharmaguptaka canons this was not Āmrapāli (other textual traditions), but Salāvati<sup>14</sup>) who had him discarded on a trash heap by a slave. Later on Prince Abhaya, a son of King Bimbisāra was riding through the city as usual when he saw a flock of crows circling and cawing loudly around. With curiosity, stopping his carriage, he investigated the sound and found a newborn baby boy who had been left to die amongst the trash on the roadside. He asked his servants whether the child was still alive. Upon inquiry, he learned that a courtesan had discarded her illegitimate son whom she felt was a burden, and had left him to die. When his servants responded that it was, he named the baby Jīvaka

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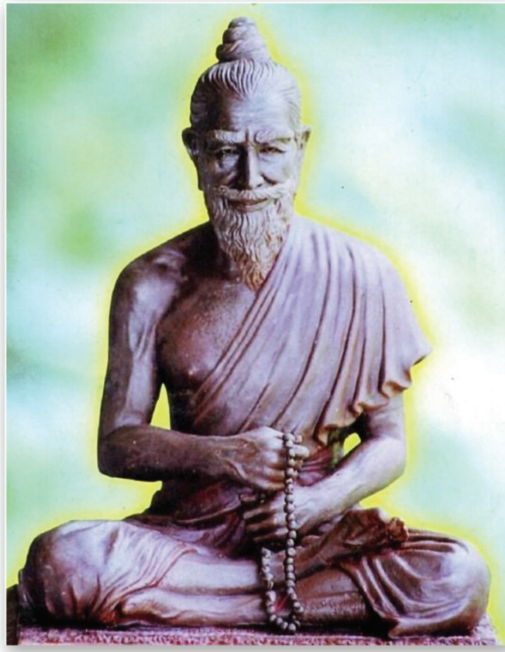
<sup>10</sup> Hartmann, Jens-Uwe. "Agamas", in Buswell, Robert E. ed.; *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, New York: Macmillan Reference Lib, 2003. ISBN 0028657187. Vol. 1, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Salomon, Richard. *The Buddhist Literature of Ancient Gandhara*. Indiana, US: Wisdom Publications, 2018. p. 229. ISBN 978-1-61429-168-8.

<sup>12</sup> The Chinese Buddhist Canon is one of the three major Buddhist Canons, the other two being the Tibetan Buddhist Canon and the Pali Canon.

<sup>13</sup> Sathianpong Wannapok. *Example Life: Medical Doctor Jīvaka Komārabhacca*. Bangkok, Thailand: Thammasapa Banluetham Institute, 2005. p. 38. ISBN 974-87221-4-7.

<sup>14</sup> Salguero, C. Pierce. *History of Religions*. 195.



**Source:** <https://alchetron.com/Jivaka-Kumar-Bhaccha>

“he who is alive” (Sanskrit and Pāli: Jivaka)<sup>15,16</sup> and Komārabhacca, which meant “adopted by a prince”<sup>17</sup>.

Jivaka led a privileged life in the palace. His friends, however, often teased him as he had no mother. Jivaka, who was embarrassed by the teasing, questioned his father about his origin. When he heard about his origins and his will to live he decided that he would one day grow up to be a preserver of life. He felt that he had no real heritage or family as he was only the adopted son of the prince. Physicians, however, were treated with great

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 195.

<sup>16</sup> Silk, Jonathan A. Child Abandonment and Homes for Unwed Mothers in Ancient India: Buddhist Sources. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 2007. 127 (3): 297–314, JSTOR 20297277.

<sup>17</sup> Sathianpong Wannapok. *Example Life: Medical Doctor Jivaka Komārabhacca*. 7.

respect and could save many lives. In all versions of the story, Jīvaka gave up his claim to the throne to study in Takṣaśilā<sup>18</sup>. He was probably sixteen when he went there<sup>19</sup>.

**2. Aspiration:** Determined to earn the respect Jīvaka felt he lacked due to his orphanage birth, he decided to become a physician. Without telling his father, Prince Abhaya, Jīvaka went to study Āyurvedic medical treatises at Takṣaśilā and there he met *Ātreya*<sup>20</sup> *Punarvasu*<sup>21</sup>; in some Buddhist texts is given as *Streya*, or *Ātreya*<sup>22</sup>; but given *Disapamok* in Theravādin tradition<sup>23</sup> and Chinese Buddhist Encyclopedia<sup>24</sup>. Jīvaka approached Ātreya for his physician training and he succeeded in seven years which others usually took eleven years. Realizing that his education was complete, Ātreya asked him to go forth and bring back any plants, herbs or roots that could not be used for medicinal and curative purposes of life. After travelling far and wide Jīvaka returned to his teacher to inform him that no such plant, herb, or root existed. All of nature's treasures were beneficial for the preservation of life. The teacher then praised him with joy that his education was complete with surpass in knowledge. In the Sanskrit and Tibetan recensions (revidierter Text), however, the test of the forest is done before accepting Jīvaka in Takṣaśilā, as opposed to the exam at the

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<sup>18</sup> Salguero, C. Pierce. "The Buddhist Medicine King in Literary Context: Reconsidering an Early Medieval Example of Indian Influence on Chinese Medicine and Surgery." *History of Religions*, 2009. p.196. 48 (3): 183–210, doi:10.1086/598230, JSTOR 10.1086/598230.

<sup>19</sup> Muley, Gunakar. "The Great Doctor of Northern India: Jivaka Kaumara-Bhrtya". Edited by Bob Haddad. Vigyan Prasar, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. Archived from the original on 28 September 2019. [http://thaihealingalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/The\\_Great\\_Doctor\\_of\\_Northern\\_India\\_Jivaka\\_Kaumara\\_-\\_Bhrtya.pdf](http://thaihealingalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/The_Great_Doctor_of_Northern_India_Jivaka_Kaumara_-_Bhrtya.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Ātreya (आत्रेय) Rishi, or Ātreya Punarvasu, was a descendant of Atri, one of the great Hindu sages (rishis) whose accomplishments are detailed in the Puranas. He was native of Taxila, Gandhara. Sage Ātreya was a renowned scholar of Ayurveda and six schools of early Ayurveda was founded based on his teachings.

<sup>21</sup> Jog, Deepti & Mekoth, Nandakumar. "Educational Tourism As an Avenue of Responsible Tourism." *Proceedings of the Two Day National Conference, on Vision India: The Road Ahead*, January 27-28, 2015. p. 283. ISBN 978-81-930826-0-7.

<sup>22</sup> Muley, Gunakar. Vigyan Prasar. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Sathianpong Wannapok. *Example Life: Medical Doctor Jivaka Komārabhacca*. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Chinese Buddhist Encyclopedia. Jivaka. Last Updated on February 9, 2016 <http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php/Jivaka> (accessed September 28, 2019).

end of his medical studies<sup>25</sup>. After Jīvaka passed the test, he then was admitted and learnt at the center for several years; there he started to demonstrate his medical superiority and was recognized as such by Ātreya<sup>26</sup>.

**3. Unwavering Faith:** In many Buddhist texts, the Buddha declared Jīvaka foremost among laypeople in being beloved by people<sup>27,28</sup> and the Pāli texts name him as example of someone with unwavering faith in Buddhism<sup>29</sup>. From the early Buddhist texts which were translated in Chinese, Jīvaka was deified and described in similar terminology as used for Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. He came to be called the “Medicine King”, a term used for several legendary Chinese physicians<sup>30</sup>. His whole life was spent for helping all sentient beings as he aspired to be the Buddha’s medical doctor; in Pāli texts, by his last breath he attained the state of the Stream Enterer (Pāli: Sotāpanna; Sanskrit: Śrotāpanna); in the Sanskrit textual traditions, Jīvaka is the ninth of the Sixteen Arhats, disciples that are entrusted to protect the Buddha’s teaching until the arising of the next Buddha. He is therefore described in Buddhist texts as still being alive up until now as same as his legend<sup>31</sup>.

**4. Mantra Recitation:** Many of the Buddhist traditions worldwide have their own stanzas of healing, offerings, and rites, also many of these become very popularly practiced in not only in the suburban but the city as well. In Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhist contexts, which represent the majority of temples in many countries, healing rituals typically involve some prayers and offerings to call upon deities to intercede in preserving supplicant’s health

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<sup>25</sup> Zysk, Kenneth G. *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery*, First Published 1991 (Corrected Ed.: Delhi, 1998). Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1998. p. 54. ISBN 978-81-208-1528-9.

<sup>26</sup> Thakur, Amarnath. *Buddha and Buddhist Synods in India and Abroad*. New Delhi, India: Shakti Malik Abhinav Publications, 1996. p. 80. ISBN 978-81-7017-317-5.

<sup>27</sup> Perera, H. R. “Jīvaka”, in Malalasekera, G. P.; Weeraratne, W. G. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, 6, 1996. p. 55. Government of Sri Lanka, OCLC 2863845613.

<sup>28</sup> Buswell, Robert E. Jr.; Lopez, Donald S. Jr. “Jīvaka”, in *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, New Jersey, US: Princeton University Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-691-15786-3.

<sup>29</sup> Perera, H. R. “Jīvaka”. p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> Salguero, C. Pierce. “The Buddhist Medicine King in Literary Context: Reconsidering an Early Medieval Example of Indian Influence on Chinese Medicine and Surgery”, *History of Religions*, 2009. pp. 183 n.2, p. 191. 48 (3): 183–210, doi:10.1086/598230, JSTOR 10.1086/598230.

<sup>31</sup> Buswell, Robert E. Jr.; Lopez, Donald S. Jr. “Jīvaka”. 2013.



and overcoming the illnesses. Similarly, in the Theravādin tradition, before beginning the practice or any healing sessions, the therapists or practitioners perform a ritual and prayer to Jīvaka, father of traditional medicine, for healing and blessings.

### **This is the Mantra in Pāli**

*Om Namō Shivago Silasa Ahang Karuniko Sapasatanang Osatha Tipa-Mantang Papaso Suriya-Jantang. Gomalapato Paka-Sesi Wantami Bantito Sumethasso Arokha Sumana-Homi. (3 times)*

*Piyo-Tewa Manussanang Piyo-Proma Namuttamo Piyo Nakha Supananang Pininsiang Nama-Mihang Namō Puttay Navon-Navien Nasatit-Nasatien Ehi-Mama Navien-Nawe Napai-Tang-Vien Navien-Mahaku Ehi-Mama Piyong-Mama Namō-Puttaya. (1 time)*

*Na-A Na-Wa Lokha Payati Vina-Shanti. (3 times)*

### **Translation of this Pāli Prayer**

*“We invite the spirit of our Founder, the Father Doctor Jīvaka, who comes to us through his holy life. Please bring to us the knowledge of all the elements of nature, that this prayer will show us the true medicine of the universe. In the name of this mantra, we respect to you that you bestow us the light of knowledge, which is like the light of the Sun and the Moon. We pray that through our body, you will bring wholeness and restore health to the body of us.*

*The Goddess of healing dwells in the heavens high, while mankind stays in the world below. In the name of the Founder, may the heavens be reflected on the earth below so that the whole world is healed. We honor you, we honor the Buddha, we pray that this healing medicine may encircle the world.*

*We pray for the one whom we touch, that he (she) will be happy, peaceful, and that any illnesses will be released from him.”*

**5. Spiritual Practice and Dedication:** The practice of traditional medicine is almost always taught in a Buddhist context in Thai traditional medicine, but the religious practices peculiar to that country need not deter beginning students from other cultures from studying this art form. Both Thai traditional medicine and the cultivation of *Loving-Kindness* (Pāli: Mettā; Sanskrit: Maitrī) are compatible with any spiritual tradition. The



most important lesson which Buddhism has to offer is that it is universally desirable to make a sincere attempt to live honestly, humbly, and compassionately. Spiritual practice that emphasizes these virtues will benefit the practice of healing by decreasing the self-centeredness of the practitioner and increasing his or her attention to and compassion for others. The dedication is done after the conduct of practice to oneself and all sentient beings in six stages from an inner self then moves on to another who are the good, neutral, difficult ones, then, the four equally and gradually to the entire universe<sup>32</sup> by saying: “May I be free from suffering. May (NAME) be free from suffering. May they be free from suffering. May all sentient beings be free from suffering.”

The life of Jīvaka was depicted in many traditions and texts such as Pāli texts, Chinese canon of Buddhist scriptures – Āmrapāli and Jīvaka Avadāna Sūtra (T. 553); Āmrapāli and Jīvaka Sūtra (known as T. 554), Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, Mūlasarvāstivāda texts, Mahāsaṃghika texts, Sanskrit textual traditions – Āgama, Dharmaguptaka tradition, Manorathapūranī Atthakathā in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, Samantapāsādikā Atthakathā in Vinaya Piṭaka, Dhammapada Commentary (Verse 90), Majjhima Nikāya (M. 55), Sūtra (Sutanta) Piṭaka, Mahāsaṃghika textual traditions, Āmagandha Sūtra, etc. The life story of Jīvaka was found fragmented and scattered evidence in many textual traditions; however, Jivaka was and is for many Buddhists and traditional healers an icon and a source of inspiration<sup>33</sup>.

### ***Bhaiṣajyaguru, the Medicine Buddha in Vajrayāna***

In Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna Buddhist traditions of East Asia, *Bhaiṣajyaguru* (formally Bhaiṣajya-guru-vaiddūrya-prabhā-rāja) widely known as the “Medicine Master and King of Lapis Lazuli Light” occupies a very peculiar place in the hearts of the devout. Specializing in curing disease, both physical and mental – of which delusion is the root cause – the *Medicine Buddha* is referred to as the Buddha of medicinal healing and the

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<sup>32</sup>Pintong Chatnatrat. “Mindfulness Message: Compassionate Communication For Effective Interpersonal Relationship”. Journal of The International Association of Buddhist Universities (JIABU), Vol. 11, No. 2 (2018), Ayutthaya: International Buddhist Studies College of MCU.

<sup>33</sup>Chen, Thomas S. N.; Chen, Peter S. Y. “Jivaka, physician to the Buddha”, Journal of Medical Biography, May 2002, p. 91. 10 (2): 88–91, doi:10.1177/096777200201000206, ISSN 0967-7720, PMID 11956551.

Buddha of Wisdom<sup>34</sup>. Worshipped by many Buddhists in an ancient India, China, Japan, Vietnam, Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, Mongolia; the Medicine Buddha is commonly depicted as a special doctor who cures dukkha (suffering) using the medicine of his teachings. All around the world who holds life has sickness and suffering which partly comes because of related karmic fall. Until we can overcome from our internal desire, anger, and ignorance, pride and hatred, the suffering<sup>35</sup> is endless in the saṃsāra or life cycle. In recent years, people in many countries of Europe and in other parts of South Asia glorify the Medicine Buddha not only for his healing acts but also the prelude to supreme enlightenment for those seekers who have the meritorious karma to learn his teachings, his vows or just hear his name<sup>36</sup>. In the Vajrayāna tradition, *Bhaiṣajyaguru* or the Medicine Buddha is described with such healing power that by just recollecting or reciting his mantras, practitioners can get blessings and rise power of the medicine to get cured at fast. The Buddha taught medicine of Buddha for those who are sick and eventually to prevent from diseases for who are not sick. If one meditates on the Medicine Buddha, one shall eventually attain enlightenment, but in the meantime one will experience an increase in healing powers both for oneself and others and a decrease in physical and mental illness and suffering<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Minh Thanh and P.D. Leigh. *Sutra of The Medicine Buddha*, 2nd Ed., Translated and annotated under the guidance of Dharma Master Hsuan Jung, 2001. p. 4. North Hills, CA: International Buddhist Monastic Institute. (Archived Online: [http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf\\_file/medbudsutra.pdf](http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/medbudsutra.pdf)).

<sup>35</sup> Human body symptoms are developed by three doshas which are (1) Pitta from desire, lust and pride, (2) Vatta from anger and hatred, and (3) Kappa from ignorance.

<sup>36</sup> Minh Thanh and P.D. Leigh. *Sutra of The Medicine Buddha*, 2nd Ed. p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Lama Tashi Namgyal. "The Medicine Buddha Sadhana", in *Shenpen Ösel Magazine: The Clear Light of the Buddha's Teachings Which Benefits All Beings*, June 2000, p. 4, Vol.4, No.1. Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Choling (KSOC) Online Publication. (accessed September 28, 2019). (Archived Online: <http://ksoc.org/shenpenosel/ShenpenOselleIssue09.pdf>).

**1. The Story of *Bhaiṣajyaguru* (the Medicine Buddha):** It was a time when the Buddha was teaching to his followers at the place of *Vaishali*<sup>38</sup> in India, *Mañjuśrī*<sup>39</sup> stood up and asked the Buddha to instruct sentient how to get cleansed from the sins and how to get healed from sickness according to the Dharma. The Buddha, with great compassion, accepted and answered for this efficiency. In his pure land in the eastern quadrant of this universe, the Medicine Buddha continually turns the Wheel of Dharma, healing beings in all universes and giving teachings on all levels, especially the Mahāyāna. The whole realm of his pure land is a repository of medicines that heal all kinds of illness by balancing the elements of earth, air, fire, water, and space<sup>40</sup>.



**Source:** <https://tibetantherapeutics.com/about-tibetan-medicine/>

<sup>38</sup> Vaishali or Vesali was a city in present-day Bihar, India, and is now an archaeological site.

<sup>39</sup> Mañjuśrī (Manjushri) is a bodhisattva associated with prajñā (insight) in Mahāyāna Buddhism. In Tibetan Buddhism (He is also a Yidam – A special deity one works with in meditation as a means towards recognizing one’s own awakened nature – defined by Sarah Harding, a Tibetan translator and lama in the Kagyü school of Vajrayāna Buddhism) which means “Gentle Glory”.

<sup>40</sup> Minh Thanh and P.D. Leigh. Sutra of The Medicine Buddha, 2nd Ed. p. 17-18.

The Medicine Buddha, in his previous life as *Bodhisattva*, had twelve aspirations (vows) and made a prayer as:

1. *In my pure land, may all beings exhibit the thirty two auspicious marks and the eighty minor marks of the Buddha.*

2. *May all sentient beings born in my pure land radiate glowing light – a light that dispels all dwelling in dark-ness.*

3. *Whoever is born in that pure land, may they always enjoy material abundance and be free of all worldly concerns.*

4. *May the beings in that pure land possess a stable vision of the pure view.*

5. *May those born in my pure land pay utmost attention to the purity of their conduct. May the results of negative karma due to previous actions be deferred to the time of most benefit to spiritual growth.*

6. *May they all emanate health and growth in body and mind. May they be relieved of any discomfort or disorder that hinders spiritual growth.*

7. *May my name become a mantra that heals all ailments. May the sound of my name and the image of my Nirmanakaya<sup>41</sup> be a balm that eases all pain. May the sound of my name or visualization of my image cure physical troubles and sickness.*

8. *May those who wish to change gender have that wish be fulfilled. May that choice lead directly to enlightenment.*

9. *May those who hold wrong views or beliefs regarding dharma immediately develop right view when they hear my name. As a result, may they engage in bodhisattva activities.*

10. *May those who live in fear and are easily controlled, who feel threatened with incarceration and punishment, leave behind their fears of catastrophe.*

11. *May those whose subsistence has depended on predation and the killing of other beings have all their material needs met upon hearing my name. May their freedom result in the recognition of their innate bodhisattva nature.*

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<sup>41</sup> *Nirmānakāya* (Nirmanakaya) is the form of the Buddha that appears in the world to teach people the path to liberation. The enjoyment (or bliss) body *Sambhogakāya* (Sambhogakaya) is the celestial body of the Buddha to which contemplation can ascend.

12. *Upon hearing my name, may those who suffer from any kind of hunger, thirst, or cold have all their needs provided for. May their food, drink, and clothing free them from mundane concerns so that they may begin to benefit others.*

After the great Medicine Buddha made these bodhisattva vows, he kept these promises throughout all his lifetimes as Bodhisattva. Practicing the Medicine Buddha, is to remember these commitments and aspire to do the same, for the sake of all living beings; love, compassion, and *bodhicitta*, which is to benefit us and all other living beings. Some years ago, the Medicine Buddha was a human being like us. Destined for *Buddhahood*, his *bodhicitta* nature has grown over the course of countless lifetimes, thus creating the mind so vast that he easily gained knowledge of an infinite number of universes. At some point in time, the Medicine Buddha's awareness touched upon a universe whose transformation to pure land status would benefit a great number of beings. He then worked tirelessly toward his goal of purifying such universe. The Medicine Buddha's aspiration to emanate a pure land of healing was fulfilled simultaneously with his final attainment of the state of a living *Buddha*.

And also when Gautama Buddha meditated on healing, he emanated light toward the eastern direction, and streams of light returned to him from an eastern pure land. All who had gathered for the teaching began to see the eight Medicine Buddhas visible in the sky above them. At that moment, the Buddha *Shakyamuni* presented the teaching to be preserved as "Sutra of the Medicine Buddha"<sup>42</sup>. This teaching became very prominent in India and had practiced in many parts of India. This practice came to Tibet only in the eighth century. The Medicine Buddha practices are important in all schools of Buddhism. According to the teachings of Buddha *Shakyamuni* in the Sutra of the Medicine Buddha, the Medicine Buddha is a presently living Buddha who embodies the healing energy of the Buddhas. He possesses the power to pacify all physical, mental, and emotional obscurations.

According to the Buddha *Shakyamuni*'s teachings, there are seven other emanations of the Medicine Buddha, each with his own color and pure land. The Medicine Buddha we are discussing here is blue and dwells in 'Pleasing Upon Seeing'. These various Medicine Buddha emanations are of various colors, such as gold, yellow, pink, red, and blue. They

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<sup>42</sup>Hsing Yun. Sutra of the Medicine Buddha with and Introduction, Comments and Prayers. February 2002. US: Buddhas Light Pub., 192 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0971561298.

dwell in pure lands with names such as Undefeatable, Filled with Jewels, and Having No Suffering. The Eighth Medicine Buddha, who is gold in color, is Buddha *Shakyamuni* and his pure land, called “Inseparable,” is this world. Countless pure lands exist, extending in all directions. Pure lands are not spontaneously occurring phenomena; rather, they are the direct result of the aspirations and work of bodhisattvas. These great beings who are on the path to Buddhahood seek the best way to benefit beings. Bodhisattvas aspire to generate pure lands as a form of compassionate action; purified universes become havens that the bodhisattvas dedicate to the cultivation of the spiritual abilities of advanced beings. Eventually, bodhisattvas are able to refine the samsāric nature of a chosen universe to that two of the perfection of the pure-land state. Such an action greatly increases Bodhicitta in this and all universes.

The Medicine Buddha provides his pure land for advanced beings who aspire to take rebirth in order to heal and benefit beings caught in samsara. Highly advanced beings and bodhisattvas seek out his pure land in order to reach final enlightenment through prayer and spiritual practice. At some point in the process of becoming the *Buddha*, a bodhisattva gets defined the avenues by which he/she most directly and effectively benefit sentient beings. These clear aspirations arise from bodhicitta. In this way, countless types of pure lands come into existence for all types of beings, meeting the infinite diversity of their needs. As a form of skillful means arising out of bodhicitta, advanced beings and bodhisattvas are able to seek rebirth in a universe that will provide specific types of benefits.

**2. Preparation:** One is required to be a vegetarian during this period of practice. Most of the indigenous doctors have been practicing in the mountainous area, in ancient Tibet. Currently, Bhutanese indigenous doctors do it as their daily practice at homes and in their office also. It will be good if there is an altar, placing a statue on, or a painting of the Medicine Buddha. Preparing water with saffron, flowers, incense stick, candle, and vegetarian cakes are arranged.

**3. Image of Transformation:** With such feeling for the benefits, is one getting promised in practicing the Medicine Buddha, getting remembered the lineage grateful of the teachings.

*On lotus and moon mat, I become, Medicine Buddha which has bluish body. In the right hand is holding myrobalan arjuna medicine; (universal medicine). Left hand is in meditation pose and holding bowl filled by medicines. Body is gloriously accomplished by all major 32 and minor 80 marks of auspicious, Here*

then, I imagine seated in Padma crossed leg. In the right hand side, on lotus and moon, the reddish medicine Buddha, his right hand is in compassion posture and in left hand has a lotus holding sun and the heart. He seated in padma crossed leg. In the left hand side on moon, there is another white medicine Buddha. His right hand is in compassion posture and in his left hand has a lotus, holding moon at heart. Padma crossed leg with full adornment and respecting the middle Medicine Buddha. The offerings are done here with the multiplying blessing mantra ‘OM AH HUNG’.

**4. Mantra Recitation:** Getting blessed from directions of the Medicine Buddhas, radiating from **OM** of the head, **AH** from the neck, **HUNG** from the heart, the mantra is recited remembering at the heart base circle of the moon. Radiating light from mantras, it reaches to all directions of Buddha Pleasing them; the light reaches back returning with full empowerment in curing all diseases. The other radiation reaches to all the sentient, cures their sickness and pains. Getting them well, light of virtue returns in the mantra and dissolves at last into me.

**The short mantra is as:**

ཨོ་བཛྲཱེ་པ་ཚཱི་བཛྲཱེ་པ་མཉེ་བཛྲཱེ་པ་ར་ས་སྐྱེ་གྲོ་སྐྱེ་གྲོ།

(*Tad-ya-tha*) Om Be-kan-dze Be-kan-dze Ma-ha Be-kan-dze Ra-dza Sa-mung-ga-te So-ha

(Tibetan is from an entirely different language group from Sanskrit, and so it is even harder for Tibetans to approximate Sanskrit pronunciations than it is for English speakers).

**Indian Sanskritam scholars pronounce it as:**

(*tadyathā:*) om bhaisajye bhaisajye mahābhaisajye bhaisajyarāje samudgate svāhā.

The short form of the mantra could roughly be translated as “Om! Appear, O Healer, O Healer, O Great Healer, O King of Healing!” The optional “*tadyathā*” at the beginning means “thus,” and it is not really part of the mantra, but more of an introduction. “Bhaisajya” means “curativeness” or “healing efficacy,” while “guru” means “teacher” or “master.” Thus he is the “master of healing.” He is also known as Bhaisajyaraja, “raja” meaning “king.”



**The longer mantra is as:**

ཨོྃ་འཕྲོ་བླ་མ་ལྷ་མོ་ལྷ་མོ་བསྐྱེད་ཅུ། ཏ་ཐཱ་ཀ་ཏཱ་ཡ། ཨ་རྩྭ་ཏི་མ་མུ་མི་བྱང་རྣམ་པ་ལ། ཏུ་བྱུ། ཨོྃ་བསྐྱེད་ཅུ་  
བསྐྱེད་ཅུ་མ་ཏཱ་བསྐྱེད་ཅུ་ར་ཇ་མ་མུ་བླ་མ་ཏི་མུ་ཏཱ།

The long version could be rendered as, “Homage to the Blessed One, The Master of Healing, The King of *Vaidurya* Radiance, The One Thus-Come, The Worthy One, The Fully and Perfectly Awakened One, thus: ‘*Om!* Appear, O Healer, O Healer, O Great Healer, O King of Healing!’ ”

**5. Dedication:** For the Buddhist practitioners, the practice of the Medicine Buddha has been of a great effect from the very beginning in the Buddha’s time. Very recently, every type of medicines is gathered together and has been blessed by thousands of people together through this *mantra* practice around Himalayan region such as Bhutan, India, China, Nepal, Pakistan and gain popularity among other countries not only the root Tibetan but also Vietnam, Japan, etc. It has shown more help openly in the eyes of patients and health professional. Not to disappear the merit, one has to dedicate soon after a good conduct and thus;

*Me, by this merit sooner,  
After I get attained into the Medicine Buddha,  
Let not a single living in the saṃsāra,  
Let I get them into that land.*

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