

Chapter 17

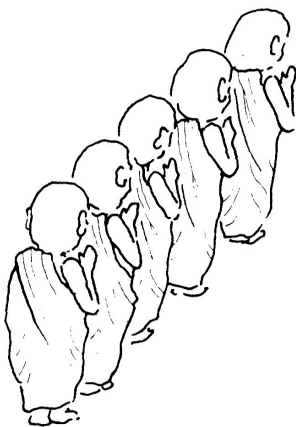
First Sermon

After returning from the Realm of Heaven, the Buddha had to save the people on earth from their sufferings. Guess who He taught first? He taught the five monks, including Kaunidinya. Do you remember them? They were the original servants of Prince Siddhartha. When the Prince gave up the self-denial practice, they deserted Him and continued their own practice of asceticism in the woods called Deer Park in Varanasi, India. The Buddha went to see them first.

When the five monks saw the Prince from far away, they talked to each other, saying, “The Prince who could not handle the hard training and quit the self-denial practice is not worth serving any more. We have nothing to do with him. Let’s pretend not to see Him when He comes to us!”



So at first, they tried not to see Him, however a strange thing happened. Against their wills, their bodies automatically moved toward the Buddha. The five monks lined up in a file and welcomed Him. They were surprised that their bodies moved without intending to. They put their palms together in *gassho* and bowed to Him.



When they released their bows and looked at Him, the five monks were shocked to see the noble appearance of the Prince. He looked so different compared to the time of his self-denial practice. His whole body was dazzling with radiance. Once they worshipped Him, their angry minds and worries disappeared immediately and they felt peace.

Then Kaunidinya, representing the five monks, asked, “Prince, what kinds of training did you do to look so honorable after you left the place of the self-denial practice?”

The Buddha smiled gently and said, “The self-denial practice did not make me attain Enlightenment, but the Middle Way did!” He explained to them that as a result of deep meditation under a Bodhi tree, he attained the One and Only Truth in the Universe and became a Buddha. The five monks were impressed with Him and were so happy they shed tears of joy. They said, “How lucky we are! We deserted you, but we are able to see you again. You are not the Prince any more but the Buddha who attained perfect Enlightenment!”

One after another, each said, “Oh, Buddha, please excuse our wrongdoings and lead us with your honorable teachings.” They apologized and appreciated the Buddha coming back to them.