

# The Story of the two Brothers

## Tapussa and Bhallika

တပုဿ, ဘလ္လိကညီနောင်



### Buddha Prophesied the Two Brothers Tapussa and Bhallika “My sons of the Future”

#### Introduction:

*We have in Myanmar many versions of the story of **Tapussa** and **Bhallika** while tracing back to the legend of **Shwedagon Pagoda**. One version said that the two merchant brothers were nephews of **King Okkalapa** of **Thuwonnabhumi** (Thaton). While they were on a trading tour in India, their past terrestrial Naga mother manifested into a dragon (Naga) appeared before them and guided them to the place where **Bodhisatta Gotama** attained the self-enlightenment. There, after offering their choicest food to the Buddha, in return, they were given eight strands of Relic hairs to be enshrined at a stupa for all to revere, now known as **Shwedagon Pagoda**.*

*This article presents an alternate version of the story of **Tapussa and Bhallika** based on the **Buddhavamsa** translated by Professor U Ko Lay.*

*Their aspiration started way back at the time of Buddha Padumuttara when the two brothers first witnessed the designation of the foremost Buddha disciples. Then, they went through the samsara - **thirty-one world-** cycles previous to the present world-cycle – in **Buddha Sikhi** – they made their aspiration again –*

*"Venerable Sir, for this good deed, let both of us get the opportunity of making the first alms-food to the Buddha in the future*

*Note here - The period of Sikhi Buddha - This period was 31 Maha kappas before the advent of the Gotama Buddha. That's how way back the two brothers had made their aspiration before the Buddha Sikhi. Where were we then?*

*In the life time of Buddha Gotama, with help of their past life mother – who took possession of a human- spoke to them and guided them to Bodhi tree, where Gotama Buddha attained the self-enlightenment. Buddha Gotama later designate the two brothers as –*

*"Bhikkhus, among my lay disciples who have taken refuge earliest in the Buddha and the Dhamma the merchant brothers Tapussa and Bhallika are the foremost."*

*Of the two, the younger brother Ballikka attained the arahatship; and the elder brother Tapussa attained the first stage of fruition Sotapanna. We may all want to emulate their path leading to the attainment of the holiness. Based on one other source, they were still awaiting to see the miracle Buddha Image – Yaung Daw Pyan Paya Pwe at the end of the Gotama Sasana – Sasana year 5,000.*

## **The Two Brothers' past aspirations**

The story of the brothers *Tapussa* and *Bhallika* based on the Commentary on the *Anguttara Nikaya* and the Commentary on the *Theragatha*, the *Ekaka nipata*.)

The Future-Tapussa and Future-Bhallika were born into a worthy family in the city of *Hamsavati* during the time of *Padumuttara Buddha*. When they were attending to a discourse by the Buddha, they saw two disciples designated as the foremost disciples in being the first of the Buddha's disciples who were established in the Three Refuges. The two brothers aspired to that distinction and after making an extraordinary offering, wished for that goal. (*Anguttara Commentary*)

## **Other past existences (in the intervening period).**

The two brothers lived a life full of meritorious deeds and after passing away from that memorable existence they never fell to the miserable states of *apaya* but were reborn only in the deva world and the human world. The Future-Bhallika was reborn, *thirty-one world- cycles previous to the present world-cycle*, in a period which was devoid of any Buddha,

as a man who offered all kinds of fruit to a *Paccekabuddha* named *Sumana*. For that good deed he fared only in the good destinations. During the time of *Sikhi Buddha* he was born into a brahmin family in the city of *Arunavati*. He heard the news that the two merchant brothers, *Ujita* and *Ojita*, had opportunity of offering first alms-food to Sikhi Buddha who had arisen from the seventh seven-day abiding in the attainment in Cessation and who was about to begin his eight seven-day abiding in the attainment of Cessation. He went to see Sikhi Buddha together with his friend, (the Future-*Tapussa*), and after paying homage to the Buddha, requested him to accept their alms-food offering the next day. On the next day they made an extra-ordinary offering to the Buddha and said,

*"Venerable Sir, for this good deed, let both of us get the opportunity of making the first alms-food to the Buddha in the future."*

The two friends fared in various existences during which they performed meritorious deeds together, resulting in rebirth at the fortunate destinations. During the time of *Kassapa Buddha* they were born into the family of a cattle merchant. For a long period of life lasting many years they offered milk-food to the Samgha. (These events are described in the Commentary on the *Theragattha*.)

### **In their last existence (Discipleship).**

The two friends fared in the fortunate destinations for the infinite years that constituted the *interim period between the two Buddha's*. During the time of *Gotama Buddha* before the Buddha won Perfect Enlightenment, they were reborn as two sons of a traveling merchant who carried on their trade using a big caravan for carrying the goods from place to place. Their native town was called *Asitancana* (the Commentary on *Theragattha* refers to it as *Pokkharavati*). The elder brother was named *Tapussa*; the younger, *Bhallika*.

They became householders and carried on trading together using a caravan of five hundred bullock carts. It was at that time Gotama Buddha had won Perfect Enlightenment, had passed seven times seven days of abiding in the attainment of Cessation, and was about to enter into the eighth seven-days period of abiding in the attainment of Cessation at the foot of a 'Linlun' tree, (the *Sapium baccatum*).

The caravans of the two merchant brothers were located, then not far from the tree. At that time the deva who had been mother to the merchant brothers in the immediately previous existence saw the dire need of the Buddha for sustenance who, after staying for *forty-nine days* (having last taken Sujata's milk-rice in forty-nine morsels), must eat that day for his survival. She thought her two sons should very well provide the food just in time. So she made the bullocks unable to go using her powers.

The two brothers inspected the bullocks, the carts, and all relevant conditions that made the carts immobile. They were at their wit's end to find the reason. *The deva mother of the previous existence, seeing them disheartened, possessed a man in the caravan and said to them, "Dear sons, you are not harassed by any demon or *peta* or *naga* but it is me, a deva of the terrestrial realm, who was your mother in your last existence, who have done this. (Now, sons,) the Buddha who is endowed with Ten Powers, is staying at the foot of a 'Linlun' tree. Go and offer alms-food to the Buddha which will be the first food he takes after attainment of Buddhahood"*

The two brothers were delighted by the deva's word. And thinking that if they were to cook alms-food it would take too much time, they took some of their choicest preserved food, put it in a gold salver, and going near the Buddha, said, "Venerable Sir, may you out of compassion, accept this victual." The Buddha reviewed the situation and considered what course the previous Buddha followed in such a case. The four Great Deva Kings then came to the Buddha and offered an alms-bowl each, which was of granite having the color of the green gram. The Buddha considered the great benefit that would accrue to the four devas, and so accepted all the four bowls, and (placing them one a top the other,) willed that the four bowls become one, and accordingly, the four granite bowls became a single alms-bowl with four rims.

The two brothers put their alms-food into the Buddha's alms-bowl. (The Buddha ate the food.) After the Buddha finished their offerings, the brothers offered water for drinking and washing. Then they made obeisance to the Buddha and sat in a suitable place. The Buddha gave them a discourse at the end of which both the two brothers were established in the '*Two Refuges*' (The story of the establishment of the two brothers in the Two Refuges (*dve vacika saranagamana*).

After having established in the Two Refuges, before departing the two brothers said to the Buddha, "Venerable Sir, may the Bhagava, out of compassion, bestow on us something which we may revere every day" The Buddha passed his right hand on the head and gave them eight hairs as relics. The brothers put the hairs in a gold casket and took them home. Back at their town they put up a shrine at the entrance of the town of *Asitancana* where the eight relics from the living Buddha were enshrined. On uposatha (sabbath) days the shrine used to emit Buddha-rays.

### The two brothers designated as foremost lay disciples.

On another occasion when the Buddha was residing at the Jetavana monastery and conferred titles of distinction on lay disciples accordingly to their merit, he declared

*"Bhikkhus, among my lay disciples who have taken refuge earliest in the Buddha and the Dhamma the merchant brothers Tapussa and Bhallika are the foremost."*

### The attainment of Path-Knowledge.

**Tapussa** and **Bhallika** were the earliest of the Buddha's lay disciples who took refuge in the Buddha and the Dhamma. Later the Buddha made his first discourse, the *Dhammacakka* at the *Migadavana* forest near *Baranasi*. After that he went and resided in *Rajagaha*. The two brothers got to Rajagaha on a trading trip They visited the Buddha, made obeisance and sat in a suitable place. The Buddha gave discourse to them at the end of which the elder brother *Tapussa* was established in Stream-Entry (*Sotapanna*) Knowledge and its Fruition. The younger brother turned bhikkhu and in due course attained *Arahatship* endowed with the six Supernormal Powers. (Commentary on the *Theragattha*, Book 1).

Ref: <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/buddhism/gcoblmd1.htm>

Ananta Metta

Maung Paw