9 *Viśvaṃtara*

THOSE WHO ARE MEAN OF HEART scarcely even approve of the way a Bodhisattva acts, let alone follow his example.

According to tradition there was once a king of the Śibis[1] who was called Saṃjaya. Controlling his senses had become second nature to him, so that his vigorous enterprise, tempered by discretion and modesty, met with triumphant success. By paying strict attention to the elders, he had gained a thorough mastery of the Vedas and of logic, and his just rule showed in the way his devoted subjects were each content with his own lot and were used to a carefree and happy life: under him the various trades and professions flourished.[2] |1| Like a virtuous woman, Royal Fortune kept faith with him because of his great qualities, while to other kings she remained as unimaginable as a lion's guarded den is to other beasts. |2| Those who devoted their efforts to a life of austerity or to the arts and sciences would visit his court, and they had only to show their worth to be sure of earning his particular esteem and respect.

The king had a son called Viśvaṃtara who was heir apparent and next to him in rank, though his equal in the number of good qualities he displayed. |3| Though young still, the prince had the pleasing serenity of the old; though spirited, he was naturally forbearing; though learned, he was innocent of intellectual pride; though living in state, there was no trace of arrogance in him. |4| His fame spread far and wide in every direction until it pervaded all three spheres. There was no room for other people's trifling claims to fame: they hardly dared to put themselves forward.

|5| Viśvaṃtara could not bear that distress should hold

proud sway over his people, and he engaged it, in all the fury of battle, with a shower of arrows in the form of gifts from his broad bow of compassion. Every day he delighted the gathering of petitioners by giving them more even than they asked for, stinting nothing and adding to their pleasure by talking kindly and showing them attention. At the end of each week, exemplary in observing both the duties and the calm of the holy day, he would wash and perfume his head, put on a fresh linen garment, and mount the royal elephant, a superb tusker, famous as a must-elephant and remarkable for its speed and energy, its docility, and the auspicious marks on its body, which, in size and color, was like a peak in the Himalaya. When in rut, streams of ichor patterned its face.[3]

Viśvaṃtara would ride this elephant to inspect his alms halls which were situated all over the city and had become places of refuge for the needy. This gave him immense pleasure, since |6| money that lies idle at home gives far less satisfaction to a generous person than does that which is consigned to the needy.

One day a neighboring king heard about Viśvaṃtara's passion for charity from successful petitioners, who in their joy were spreading the news far and wide. He concluded that, by playing upon this addiction of Viśvaṃtara's, it would be possible to outwit him. Accordingly, he dispatched some brahmins to carry off that prize elephant.

Viśvaṃtara was inspecting his alms halls, the pleasure of it showing in his visibly brightening features, when these brahmins came and stood before him, right hands raised and outstretched, loudly hailing him with cries of "Victory!" He reined in his elephant, exchanged polite formalities, and then enquired what might be the purpose of their visit, adding that he was theirs to command. To this the brahmins answered: |7| "The qualities of this elephant, which moves with such grace and dignity, together with your own munificence, have transformed us into beggars: |8| present us with this elephant, which resembles the peak of Kailāsa,[4] and, in so doing, completely astound the universe."

The Bodhisattva's heart filled with joy at what they said,

and he thought: "At long last I have some petitioners who are prepared to make a serious demand. And yet, what can these brahmins want with a lordly elephant such as this? Obviously this is some miserable ploy concocted by a king who is eaten up with greed and envy. [9] Very well, then, since he seems bent on doing me good, regardless of his own reputation and moral duty, let him not suffer disappointment."

On reaching this decision the Noble One promptly dismounted and, standing before them with a golden pitcher raised aloft,[5] begged them to accept the elephant. [10] Though he knew that for reasons of state one had to stray from the path of goodness in pursuit of one's own advantage, he nonetheless gave away that magnificent elephant, so attached was he to doing good. Base considerations of expediency could not sway him. [11] The prince felt utterly happy about giving away that noble elephant, adorned with its bright trappings of gold which looked like forked lightning against an autumn cloud mass. The city, however, preferred the path of prudence and was upset.

In fact, the Śibis were furious when they heard that their best elephant had been given away. The brahmin elders, the ministers, military leaders, and prominent citizens created a terrible fuss and went to see King Saṃjaya. So incensed were they and so indignant, that they threw politeness and tact to the winds, saying: "Your highness, you are not going to turn a blind eye to this seizure of the Royal Mascot? Your highness must surely realize that in so doing you would increase the chances of disaster overtaking the realm?"

When the king, in alarm, asked them what they were talking about, they answered: "What, your highness does not know? [12] That elephant whose face is aswarm with humming bees and whom the breeze, fragrant with its ichor, is wont to caress, easily and effortlessly freeing itself from all traces of the ichor of other proud elephants, [13] that elephant whose vigor cows the valor of enemy armies, casting a spell of sleep upon their pride,—that elephant, our mascot, has been presented to our neighbors by Viśvaṃtara and is at this moment being led away. [14] Cows, gold, food, and clothing are suitable

presents for brahmins, your majesty, but to give away this superb elephant who assures us of victory—that really is taking generosity too far. [15] How can Royal Fortune be expected to attend someone so aloof from practical considerations? This is not a matter your majesty can overlook: before long he will be giving your enemies cause for joy."

The king loved his son, and hearing this made him feel less than friendly toward these spokesmen. But out of duty he feigned alarm and said: "Yes, yes of course." Then he tried to appease the Śibis: "I know Viśvaṃtara is passionately addicted to giving things away, regardless of considerations of state, and, for someone entrusted with the responsibility of ruling, this is not how to behave. But now that he has disposed of his own elephant as though it were his vomit, who is going to reclaim it? Anyway, I myself will see to it that in future Viśvaṃtara recognizes some limit to what he can give away. So please stop being angry." "Your highness," replied the Śibis, "you certainly won't convince Viśvaṃtara on this matter simply by administering a reprimand." "Well, what else can I do?" asked Saṃjaya. [16] "He will have nothing to do with anything evil. His sole vice is his addiction to doing good. Would I be making amends for this elephant by putting my own son in prison, by executing him? So, calm yourselves. I shall restrain Viśvaṃtara."

But the Śibis had been roused to anger, and they said to the king: [17] "Sire, nobody is asking for your son to be executed or to suffer imprisonment. But, being so religious, so tenderhearted, and so compassionate, he will not bear the strain of having to rule. [18] The throne is for those who have earned a name for themselves by showing enterprise and who are able to cultivate all three of the objects of life—goodness, happiness, and prosperity.[6] Viśvaṃtara's exclusive devotion to goodness makes him heedless of practical good sense. He ought to go and live in a hermitage. [19] When kings mishandle affairs, it is their subjects who suffer the consequences. The subjects, as you know, manage to survive—but not so the kings, whose authority is then undermined. [20] But why all this talk? We Śibis cannot connive at your ruin, and have

decided that the prince had best cultivate his spiritual leaning by going to Mount Vaṅka, a favorite resort of holy adepts."

The people could foresee the disastrous consequences of Viśvaṃtara's indiscretion, and it was purely out of affection and a feeling of intimacy, as well as concern for the king's own good, that they spoke to him in such brutal terms. But the king was embarrassed by his subjects' angry reaction, and bowed his head. The thought of being parted from his son overwhelmed him and, heaving a sigh of distress, he said to the Śibis: "If you insist on it, gentlemen, then at least allow him twenty-four hours' grace. Tomorrow at daybreak Viśvaṃtara will comply with your wish." The Śibis agreed to this humble request, and the king asked his chamberlain to inform Viśvaṃtara of what had taken place.

With tears of grief streaming down his face, the chamberlain obediently went to Viśvaṃtara, who was in his palace, and fell at his feet, weeping loudly under the stress of emotion and grief. "Is everything alright at court?" asked Viśvaṃtara anxiously. The chamberlain broke down and indistinctly blurted out: "Yes, all is well at court." "Then why are you in such a state?" asked Viśvaṃtara. The chamberlain was choking with tears, but between sobs and heavy sighs he managed slowly, syllable by syllable, to gasp out the following: [21] "The Śibis have rudely disregarded the king's wishes, though couched in the mildest terms, and in their anger have had you banished from the realm, my lord." "Me . . . the Śibis . . . have banished . . . in their anger. What does this mean?" asked Viśvaṃtara. [22] "I have never taken pleasure in flouting morality, and I loathe any sort of laxity. What crime have I committed unawares to make the Śibis angry with me?" "You have been overgenerous," replied the chamberlain. [23] "Your pleasure was unclouded by selfish thoughts, but the delight those beggars felt was thoroughly selfish. When you gave that noble elephant away, your honor, the Śibis lost their temper, [24] and, breaking all bounds, have vented their anger on you. Now you will have to follow the path of exile."

Then the Bodhisattva showed both his tender love toward beggars, which sprang from deep-rooted compassion, and his

extraordinary composure, by saying: "The Śibis are, of course, fickle by nature, and, it would appear, ignorant of my true character. [25] Quite apart from outward possessions, I would give away my own eyes, my head—it is purely for the good of the world that I keep my body alive. As to clothes or beasts of burden, that goes without saying. [26] If a beggar demands it, I am ready to offer him my whole body. And they imagine that by intimidating me they can stop me giving. That shows how foolish and superficial they must be. [27] Let the entire nation come and banish me or put me to death; I shall never stop giving. Still, to the hermitage I will go."

Then the Bodhisattva said to his wife, who looked distraught at the unpleasant things she heard: "My lady, you have heard what the Śibis have decided?" "I have, my lord," replied Madrī. Viśvaṃtara continued: [28] "Then, my flawless beauty, put away your money—whatever you may have got from me, as well as your own patrimony." "But, my lord, where am I to put it?" asked Madrī. [29] "I mean, always give generously to people of integrity," answered Viśvaṃtara, "and do so with good grace. Money so given is a lasting treasure and cannot be taken from you. [30] Be kind to your mother- and father-in-law and look after our children. Behave properly, take care, and do not grieve at my absence."

Though in her heart she felt anguish at what she heard, she did not want to make her husband falter. So, regardless of her grief and misery, she said: [31] "It is not right, your majesty, that you should go to the forest alone. Wherever you go, my lord, I shall follow. [32] I would happily die, so long as I can remain at your side. To live without you would be a fate worse than death. Nor does life in the forest seem to me such a hardship, my lord. For [33] there are no nasty people there. The rivers and trees are untouched. The air echoes with all sorts of birdsong. There are deer everywhere and lovely grass, as green as a pavement of beryl. In fact forest retreats are more delightful than our own pleasure gardens. Besides, my lord, [34] when you see our two children decked out and crowned with garlands, playing in the wild thickets, you will forget about being king. [35] The forest's ever-changing beauty, care-

fully contrived by each successive season, and its watery river brakes will delight you. [36] The varied music of the birds' mating cries, the peacocks' dances, whose steps are taught them by that learned dancing master Passion, [37] and the hum of bees whose charm never grows stale—this woodland concert will delight your heart. [38] The rock faces at night, veiled with gauzy moonlight, the caressing forest breeze, scented by flowering trees, [39] the soft murmur of river water tumbling over loose pebbles like the clash of women's jewelery—all this will gladden your heart in the forest."

His wife's entreaty made him eager to set out for the forest. But he did not forget the needy, and first made ready to bestow great largesse.

Meanwhile, as news of Viśvaṃtara's banishment reached the royal palace, a confused sound of wailing arose, and the beggar folk were so overcome with grief and sorrow that they almost fell into a swoon or else acted as if they were raving mad, pouring out laments such as: [40] "Mother Earth must have lost her senses to let the hatchets fell this shady tree that gives sweet fruit, and yet feel no shame. [41] If there is no one to prevent those who want to destroy that well of cool, pure, sweet water, then the Guardians of the World are misnamed, or absent abroad, or nothing but hearsay. [42] Injustice is surely awake and Justice asleep or perhaps dead when Prince Viśvaṃtara is thrown out of his kingdom. [43] Who has such a sharp appetite for wrong that he can be so savagely intent on liquidating us who innocently scrape a pittance by begging?"

Thereupon the Bodhisattva presented his entire fortune to the beggars, giving to each according to his deserts—first, the contents of his treasury, which was packed with gold, silver, and precious gems amounting to many hundreds of thousands, then money and grain of various kinds which were piled up in the vaults and granaries, then menservants and women servants, carriages, draft animals, clothes, personal belongings, and so on. After that he prostrated himself at the feet of his parents, whose composure had given way to overpowering grief and sorrow. Then, with his wife and children, he mounted his royal carriage. From the huge crowd

came the sound of lamentation, like a sad farewell, as he left the capital. He had difficulty in turning back the crowd, who followed him out of affection, their faces streaming with tears of grief. Taking hold of the reins himself, he set out along the road to Mount Vaṅka. Calmly he passed the outskirts of the city, encircled by beautiful parkland, and in due course came to open country where shady trees were few and far between and the population sparse. The horizon was clear all round, herds of deer were roaming at large, and the chirping of crickets filled the air. Then, out of the blue, appeared some brahmins who begged him for the horses that were drawing his carriage. [44] Delighted at being able to give something away and regardless of the consequences, he gave his four horses to the brahmins, even though he was on a journey of many miles, without companions and with a wife to look after.

Then, just as the Bodhisattva was tying his belt tighter, with the intention of himself taking the place of the carriage horses, four young sprites in the guise of red deer came up to the carriage and of their own accord put their shoulders to the yoke, just like well-schooled, docile horses. On seeing them, the Bodhisattva said to Madrī, who was wide-eyed with astonishment and delight: [45] "See what a powerful atmosphere there is in this forest, thanks to the hermits who grace it with their presence. Kindness to strangers has taken root even in these marvelous antelopes." [46] "I suspect this is due to your own superhuman powers," replied Madrī. "Goodness, however deep-rooted it may be, does not manifest itself alike in all circumstances. [47] When the beauty of stars reflected in water is outshone by luminous night lilies, the cause lies in the moon emitting its rays, as if in curiosity."

And so they talked affectionately to one another, in mutual harmony, as they traveled along the road. Then another brahmin approached, and begged the Bodhisattva for the royal carriage. [48] And since he was indifferent to his own comfort but a dear friend to any beggar, the Bodhisattva fulfilled the brahmin's wish. Gladly he helped his family out of the carriage, presented it to the brahmin, and, taking the boy Jālin on his hip, set off on foot, while Madrī, in no way down-

hearted, took the girl Kṛṣṇājinā on her hip and followed behind.

|49| The trees seemed to invite him to feast on their delicious fruit by bending down the tips of their branches and, like humble disciples, bowed low at the sight of him because of his great merit. |50| Wherever he wanted a drink, ponds appeared, covered with orange pollen and filaments from lotuses shaken by the wings of geese. |51| Clouds provided a lovely canopy, soft and sweet blew the wind, and magic spirits shortened the road, finding it intolerable that he should suffer fatigue.

And so the Bodhisattva, with his wife and children, enjoyed the walk as much as a stroll in the royal park, without any of the weariness of tramping the road, and, on arriving there, he caught sight of Mount Vaṅka. A forester showed him the way, and he entered the sacred wood situated on that mountain. Here all sorts of beautiful trees grew in profusion, with a fine show of flowers, fruit, and sprays of foliage. The air echoed with the various cries of birds joyfully courting each other. A flock of peacocks added beauty to the scene by performing their dances, and numbers of deer roamed at large. The gentle wind was flecked red with pollen, and, around all this, like a girdle, flowed a river of pure, blue water. Here he settled in a solitary leaf hut constructed by Viśvakarman[7] himself on Śakra's orders. It looked delightful and was pleasant in all seasons. |52| For over half a year, attended by his dear wife, listening to the sweet, artless chatter of his children, and forgetting the cares of kingship, as though he were in the royal park, he practiced austerity in that forest.

One day, the princess had gone to gather fruit and edible roots and the prince was staying in the hermitage to keep an eye on the children, when a brahmin arrived. His feet and ankles were dirty with the dust of the road, his eyes were sunken, and his face was drawn with weariness. He carried a wooden stick over his shoulder, and from it hung a gourd. His wife had given him strict orders to find some servants. At the sight of a beggar approaching after such a long time, the

Bodhisattva felt so glad that his eyes and face grew bright. He went out to meet him, greeted him warmly, invited him into the hermitage, offered hospitality, and then asked the purpose of his visit. The brahmin was so devoted to his wife that he had banished all reserve or feeling of shame and was set solely on getting what he wanted. So he spoke bluntly, to this effect: |53| "People travel where the road is smooth and the visibility good, not by the dark and difficult path. But that and no other is the path my request must take, this world being for the most part wrapped in the dark of selfishness. |54| Your reputation for generosity on a heroic scale has spread, as it must do, everywhere. That is why I have taken upon myself this irksome task of begging. Please give me your children as servants."

The Bodhisattva, that Great Being, |55| for whom the pleasure of giving had become a habit and who had never learned how to refuse, gladly agreed to this request. "I shall even give you my two beloved children." "Bless you!" cried the brahmin. "Well then, what are you waiting for?"

At the mention of their being given away, the children grew desperate and their eyes swam with tears. The Bodhisattva felt a surge of affection in his heart and said: |56| "These two are yours—I have given them to you—but their mother is away in the forest gathering fruit and edible roots. She will be back this evening. |57| Let her see them once more decked out with garlands on their heads, and let her kiss them goodbye, while you rest here overnight. Then tomorrow you can go off with my children." "My good man, please don't insist on it," replied the brahmin. |58| " 'Perverse' is a common epithet for womankind, and she herself might object to this gift. So I have no wish to delay." "Don't worry about her possibly objecting to their being given away," said the Bodhisattva. "She is a true wife and helps me to fulfil my duties. However, do as you please, dear sir. Another thing though, your holiness, is that |59| these two are still at a tender age—mere children—with no experience of doing chores. Are they really going to give you any sort of satisfaction as servants? |60| Now if the king of Śibi, their grandfather, were to see them reduced to such cir-

cumstances, he would certainly ransom them at whatever price you name. [61] So do, please, take them to his realm. You will be doing a good deed as well as making a handsome fortune." "No," said the brahmin, "I cannot go to the king with such a hateful offer. It would be as dangerous as approaching a venomous snake. [62] He might snatch these two away from me or inflict some punishment on me. So I shall take them as servants for my brahmin wife." "In that case, so be it," replied the Bodhisattva, without saying any more. Gently he told the children how to behave as servants. Then he tipped the water pot over the brahmin's hand, stretched out to receive the gift.[8] [63] By an effort of his will, water fell from the water pot. Effortlessly it fell from his eyes, dark red as lotus petals.

The brahmin was so overjoyed at his success that he became quite distracted and, in his haste to carry off the Bodhisattva's children, gave only a cursory blessing. Then, ordering them in a harsh tone to get out, he began to drive the children out of the hermitage. But their hearts quailed in utter dismay at being separated, and they fell at their father's feet. With tears streaming from their eyes, they implored him: [64] "Daddy, you are ready to give us away while Mummy is out, but please don't until we have seen her once more."

Thinking that their mother would be back shortly or else that affection for his children would make their father repent, the brahmin tied their hands, like a bunch of lotuses, with a creeper. Threatening them as they struggled and turned around to look at their father, he dragged those sensitive children away.

Then Kṛṣṇājinā, the girl, broke into loud sobs at this her first experience of unhappiness and said to her father: [65] "Daddy, this cruel brahmin is hurting me with a creeper. Obviously he isn't a brahmin. Brahmins are supposed to be good. [66] It is an ogre disguised as a brahmin. I'm sure he's carrying us off to eat us. Daddy, how can you take no notice when we're being carried off by a goblin?"

Then Jālin, the boy, bewailing his mother, said: [67] "It isn't the brahmin hurting me that makes me unhappy but that I

haven't seen Mummy today. That really breaks my heart. [68] Mummy is bound to cry for hours when she finds the hermitage empty. She will be miserable without her children, like a thrush when her chicks have been killed. [69] What will Mummy do when, after gathering lots of fruit and roots for us, she returns from the forest to find the hermitage empty? [70] Here, Daddy, are our toy horses and elephants and chariots. Give half of them to Mummy. They will stop her being sad. [71] Say goodbye to her for us and, at all events, keep her from feeling sad, even though we're hardly likely to see either of you ever again. [72] Come on, Kṛṣṇā, we may as well die. What's the point in our going on living now that Father has given us to a greedy brahmin?" With these words they departed.

Though shaken by his children's pathetic lament, the Bodhisattva asked himself how anyone could feel remorse after making a gift in such circumstances. But his heart was consumed by a burning grief that was not to be assuaged. He felt so greatly disturbed, it was as though he were being drugged by some powerful poison, and he sank down on the spot. The cool wind fanned him, and he regained consciousness. But when he noticed how still the hermitage was without the children, he said to himself, choking with sobs and tears: [73] "Oh, that shameless brahmin! How is it that he did not hesitate to strike quite openly at my heart, that is, my children? [74] How will they last out the journey, walking barefoot and, at their tender age, quite without stamina, now that they have become that man's servants? [75] Wayworn and weary, who will now give them rest? Whom can they go and appeal to, when overcome with hunger and thirst? [76] If I, who cultivate fortitude, am made to suffer like this, what sort of state can my two children be in, who were brought up in comfort? [77] Oh! it sears my heart to be deprived of my children, Yet, could anyone who knows where a good man's duty lies feel regret?"

Meanwhile, Madrī was growing nervous because of certain evil omens that seemed to forebode something unpleasant. Gathering up her fruit and roots, she wanted to return home as quickly as possible. But wild beasts barred her path, so it took her longer to reach the hermitage. When she didn't see

9 · 78 her children either at the spot where they usually came out to meet her or in the places where they played, she grew even more anxious. |78| Sensing something amiss, she glanced around nervously for her children, and, when no answer came to her repeated calls, she felt so distraught that she began to wail aloud: |79| "The forest, echoing with the children's chatter, has always seemed such a lively place. But, now that they have vanished, it has turned into a forbidding wilderness. Could those two little ones possibly |80| have tired themselves out playing, felt drowsy, and fallen asleep? Or might they have got lost in the depths of the forest? Or are they hiding somewhere in childish pique at my being back so late? |81| But why aren't even the birds singing? Perhaps they have seen them come to grief and are too upset? Or could the strong current of the river have carried them off in the unbridled fury of its splashing waves? Oh, but may my suspicions prove vain and empty even so, and may all be well with the prince and the children. Or at least let these forebodings of evil take effect on my own person. But, then, why should I feel drained of joy for no apparent reason: why is my heart engulfed in dark distress and ready to split in twain? My legs seem to be giving way. I am losing my bearings, and the forest has grown dim and seems to be spinning around."

She then entered the hermitage, put away her fruit and roots, went up to her husband and, after greeting him respectfully, asked where the children were.

The Bodhisattva knew the tender affection in a mother's heart and found it hard to tell her the unpleasant news. So he could make no reply. |82| For, if one is sensitive, it is extremely hard to inflict pain on someone by telling him something unpleasant when he comes deserving to hear something pleasant.

From her husband's silence, which betrayed deep sorrow, Madrī realized that all was clearly not well with her children. Like one distracted, she scanned every corner of the hermitage, and, not seeing her children, she spoke again, her voice quavering with tears: |83| "I cannot see the children, and you

do not say a word to me. I feel wretched and miserable: silence usually means bad news." 9 · 91

Delivering these words that came from a heart-seared with sorrow, she collapsed like a creeper severed at the root. But the Bodhisattva caught her as she fell, carried her to a bed of grass, sprinkled cold water over her, and, when she recovered her senses, comforted her, saying: |84| "Madrī, I did not tell you the bad news immediately because one cannot expect endurance in a heart that is tender with affection. |85| A brahmin came to me. He was suffering from old age and poverty. I gave him both our children. Be brave! Do not lose heart. |86| Look to me, Madrī, not to the children. Do not lament, my lady. Do not strike at my heart, which is already pierced with grief for our children. |87| Were I asked to give my life, could I withhold it? So, my dear, try and accept my having made a gift of the children."

When Madrī, whose deepest fear had been that the children were dead, heard that they were still alive, her anguish abated. Not wanting her husband to falter, she dried her eyes and, looking up at him with wonder, said: "Astonishing! What else can I say? |88| Surely even the gods above must be amazed to see how selfishness has no sway over your heart— |89| which is why, in their eagerness to spread your fame, they have filled the heavens with a continuous but distinct flow of words, while, all around, the roll of celestial drums reverberates in every direction. |90| The Earth heaves her breasts, the great mountains, as though shivering in ecstasy. Flowers of gold fall from the heavens so that the sky seems ablaze with lightning. |91| So do not give way to sorrow. Be glad that you have made a gift. Be a refuge for all creation—and give yet again!"

When the earth shook, Meru, lord of mountains, radiant with the gleam of many different gems, itself felt a tremor, and Śakra, lord of the gods, wondered what this could mean. When he discovered from the World Protectors, who were wide-eyed in wonder, that the earthquake was caused by Viśvaṃtara's gift of his children, he felt giddy with wonder and

delight and, disguised as a brahmin with a favor to ask, went to Viśvaṃtara at daybreak. The Bodhisattva received him hospitably and then enquired what it was he wanted. Śakra then begged him for his wife. [92] "A good man's duty to give no more dries up than does water in a big lake. So I beg you for your wife who looks like a goddess: please give her to me."

The Bodhisattva, without at all losing his composure, agreed to do so. [93] Taking Madrī with his left hand and a water pot with his right,[8] he poured water over the brahmin's fingers but scorching fire on Māra's[9] soul. [94] Yet, Madrī was not angry, neither did she weep. For she knew his character. Suffering under this fresh burden of misery, she just stood, motionless as a picture, looking at him.

At the sight of this, Śakra was overcome with utter amazement and praised the Great Being, saying: [95] "Oh! what a gulf lies between the good and the bad in the way they behave. The spiritually ignorant could not even believe such an act possible. [96] Still to feel love, and yet to give away one's own dear wife and children like this, unselfishly—what true nobility! [97] When your fame spreads to every quarter, thanks to the reports of those who admire your virtue, it will certainly eclipse the renown of other men, however brilliant, as the blaze of the sun outshines all other lights. [98] Already this superhuman act of yours is being applauded by the whole hierarchy of heaven, including myself."

So saying, Śakra resumed his own brilliant appearance and, revealing his identity, said to the Bodhisattva: [99] "To you I now restore Madrī, your wife. For moonlight cannot exist without the moon. [100] Do not be anxious about being parted from your children, nor fret for your lost kingdom. Your father will arrive with them and will provide for the kingdom by providing it with you!"

With these words Śakra disappeared there and then. Thanks to him the brahmin brought the Bodhisattva's children to that very same kingdom of Śibi, and, when the Śibis and their king Saṃjaya heard about the Bodhisattva's extremely compassionate, immensely difficult deed, their hearts melted. They ransomed the children back from the

brahmin, and, after making amends to Viśvaṃtara and recalling him from exile, they instated him as king.

So, then—the doings of a Bodhisattva are miraculous. Consequently one must neither despise nor hinder such exceptional beings as strive to attain that state.