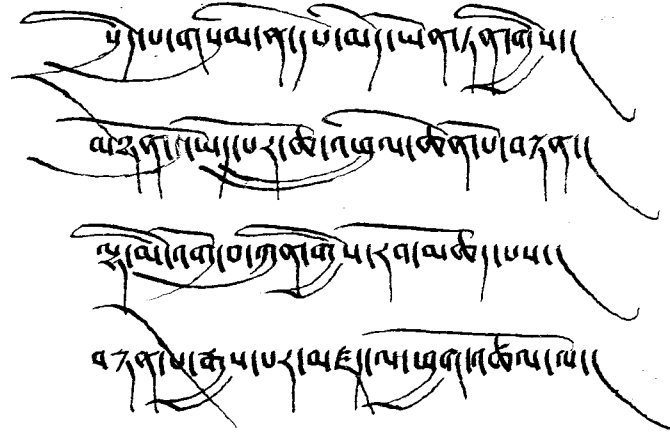


Buddha's Display of Miracles at Shravasti



*"Homage to you who performed great miracles at Shravasti
With a prowess unmatched throughout the three worlds
So that gods and men alike adored the Dharma
And it was greatly spread."*

Below is a short account of the month of miracles in Shravasti and how Buddha Shakyamuni skillfully brought the Dharma to over ninety-thousand people with mistaken views at that time.

The leaders of India's six main philosophical schools had challenged the Buddha to a contest of miraculous powers many times as he wandered through the surrounding kingdoms. Six evil, heretic teachers led by Purnakasyapa had become mad with resentment and jealousy against the Buddha, and tried to engage him in a contest of miraculous powers, which Mara had persuaded them they could win. King Bimbisara laughed them out of court when they petitioned him, but they persisted, and finally he went to request the Buddha's participation.

The Buddha agreed, but stipulated that he would set the time of the contest. A teaching throne was set up in a large arena at Rajagṛha, but shortly before the proposed contest, the Buddha and all his followers departed for Vaisali. Seeing this as an admission of defeat, the six heretic teachers were elated, and rushed after the Buddha, with their ninety thousand followers, and after them, king Bimbisara and his entourage. The heretics urged the Licchavi king to stage the contest there, and the Buddha again accepted, but said he would set the time.

The Buddha then moved on, from one city to the next; each time giving the same answer, and gathering a new following, until they came to Shravasti. The heretics soon arrived, and remonstrated with king Prasenajit not to allow any further postponement, and the Buddha assented that the time had now come. Buddha was fifty-seven years old when the

conditions were most auspicious to accept this challenge.

King Prasenajit built a hall in Shravasti especially for the event; in it seven thrones were erected. On the new moon of the first month of spring (*what is now known as losar, the beginning of the Tibetan new year*), the six other teachers took their seats and Shakyamuni came to his flying through the air. He was honored with extensive offerings. He then sent forth fire and water from his body and the hall was destroyed and reformed as a transparent palace.

Before the kings of all the capitals he had passed through, the six heretics and their followers, and a huge assembly of gods and humans, he performed inconceivable miracles for the next fifteen days. On the first day, he created a bounteous tree by planting his tooth-pick in the ground, causing a great tree to spring up, fragrant and fully laden with flowers and ripe fruit. On the second day, he manifested two jeweled mountains. On the third day, he produced a jewel lake. On the fourth, voices came from the lake explaining all aspects of the Dharma. On the fifth day, golden light spread from his countenance and filled the world, purifying the emotional poisons of sentient beings. On the sixth day, he allowed people to read each others' thoughts. On the seventh, he transformed his benefactors into world-rulers. On the eighth day, the Buddha pressed down on the throne with the fingers of his right hand, and with a thunderous roar, the fierce Vajrapani appeared from beneath, brandishing a flaming vajra at the heretic teachers. Four beings in Vajrapani's retinue scattered the heretics and smashed their thrones. The heretics were so scared that they leapt into the river. Then, the Buddha radiated eighty four thousand rays of light, one from each pore of his skin, which filled the sky. On the tip of each ray was a lotus, and on each lotus a buddha, with attendants, teaching Dharma, and all were amazed, and some were liberated by the sight of it.

In these eight days Buddha Shakyamuni utterly defeated his opponents. The ninety thousand followers of the six heretic teachers adopted the Buddhist doctrines, joined the monkhood, and later became arhats. For a further seven days Buddha Shakyamuni continued to show miracles and give teachings to the great assembly.

(Extracted from The Eight Places of Buddhist Pilgrimage by Jeremy Russell; Teachings from Tushita: Journal of Tushita Mahayana Meditation Centre; and The Twelve Deeds of the Buddha by Matthew Akester, Shechen Publications, 2003.)