

## King Ajatashatru

*In his lecture on "The Opening of the Eyes," President Ikeda mentions Shakyamuni Buddha's concern for King Ajatashatru. The story of King Ajatashatru is related in the following:*

DURING the time of Shakyamuni, King Ajatashatru ruled the kingdom of Magadha, one of the most powerful regions of India. Ajatashatru's father was King Bimbisara, who became a devoted follower of the Buddha.

Bimbisara and his wife, Vaidehi, desperately wanted to conceive an heir to the throne but had been unable to do so. The king consulted a seer who said that there was a hermit presently living in the nearby mountains who, after he died, would be reborn as Bimbisara's son. Bimbisara was so impatient for an heir that he had the hermit killed. Shortly after, Vaidehi conceived, but the seer foretold that the child would become the king's enemy. This child was Ajatashatru. The Chinese version of his name means "enemy before birth."

In fear of this child, Bimbisara dropped him from a high tower, but Ajatashatru only broke a finger. He was sometimes called "Broken Finger."

According to legend, Shakyamuni met Bimbisara at some point during his search for enlightenment. Impressed with Shakyamuni's noble bearing, the king offered him riches and command of his armies. Shakyamuni replied that he was only seeking the truth of enlightenment and refused the generous offer. The king then requested that when Shakyamuni found the truth he was seeking that he return to Magadha and teach it to the king. After Shakyamuni's awakening, he did indeed return and the king became his follower.

When Ajatashatru was a young man, he fell under the influence of an enemy of Shakyamuni's, Devadatta. Devadatta told Ajatashatru the story of his birth and convinced him to turn against his father, the king. Ajatashatru had both his parents imprisoned and assumed the throne under the evil council of Devadatta.

Eventually, Ajatashatru became seriously ill and came to regret the treatment of his father. However, by the time Ajatashatru's men arrived to release his father, Bimbisara had died. According to several accounts, Bimbisara either starved to death or took his own life.

Tormented over the death of his father, Ajatashatru's body broke out in boils and it was predicted that he would die an early death on the seventh day of the third month. On the advice of his physician, he sought out Shakyamuni Buddha who taught him the doctrines of the Nirvana Sutra, enabling him to change his karma and prolong his life. After the death of the Buddha, Ajatashatru assisted in the gathering of Buddhist scriptures in what is known as the First Council. □

Title: King Ajatashatru

Subject: Living Buddhism 01/98 v.2 n.1 p.23 LB9801p23

Author:

Keywords: Ajatashatru Background Buddha Daishonin Eyes followers History King Nichiren Opening Shakyamuni Writings