

Nanda

Radhika Abeysekera

Nanda was the son of King Suddhodana and Queen *Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī*. He was the step-brother of Prince *Siddhattha*.

Nanda was celebrating three important events on the day that the Buddha visited the palace for His noonday meal. He was celebrating his consecration to the throne, his marriage to *Janapada Kalyānī*, and his housewarming ceremony.

After the meal the Buddha handed His bowl to Nanda and left the palace to return to the monastery. Out of respect for the Buddha, Nanda followed Him with bowl in hand, thinking, "Surely the Lord will take the bowl from me shortly."

The Buddha, however, did not take back the bowl. Nanda, who respected His older brother, the Buddha, followed Him to the monastery. His betrothed, seeing him following the Buddha, ran after him in tears, saying, "Return quickly, O Noble Lord." These affectionate words and his beloved's tears moved Nanda deeply. But so great was his reverence for the Buddha that he could not hand back the bowl.

On reaching the monastery the Buddha, who saw that Nanda had the potential of reaching *Arahanthship*, asked him if he would like to be ordained as a monk. Nanda was torn. He wanted to go back to his betrothed. But how could he refuse the Buddha? So great was his respect for his older brother, the Buddha, that he reluctantly agreed.

Nanda, the Bhikkhu, was not happy. He kept thinking of his bride-to-be. Finally, in desperation, he approached his fellow monks and related his troubles to them. Nanda informed them that he intended to give up the holy life and go back to the life of a householder.

The news of Nanda's decision soon reached the Buddha. Approaching Nanda, the Buddha questioned him as to the problem. Nanda informed the Buddha that he was distracted and worried because he had left his beautiful bride on their wedding day. The Buddha, who with His divine eye saw that Nanda, with a little effort, could reach the supreme happiness of enlightenment, thought of a way to keep him in the Holy Life which was in keeping with his present frame of mind.

Using His psychic powers the Buddha transported Nanda to the *Tāvātimsa* Heaven. On the way He showed Nanda a singed female monkey who had lost her ears, nose and tail in a forest fire. Pointing to the celestial nymphs the Buddha asked Nanda who was the fairer, the celestial nymphs or his bride-to-be. Nanda, enticed by the extraordinary beauty of the celestial nymphs, replied that his bride-to-be was like the singed female monkey that they had seen on their way, when compared to the celestial nymphs.

The Buddha, reading his immature mind, then said, "I guarantee that you will possess the celestial nymphs if you persevere and follow my instruction." Nanda, who was totally obsessed with the beauty of the celestial nymphs, childishly agreed.

Nanda then informed his fellow monks of his decision to remain in the Holy order and the reason for his change of mind. Before long everybody knew that Nanda was following the Holy Order in the hope of possessing celestial nymphs. The young monks laughed and teased Nanda, calling him rude names. Their teasing brought Nanda to his senses. Ashamed of his base motives he set his mind towards enlightenment. Shortly after, by practising with diligence, Nanda achieved *Arahanthship*. Nanda describes his attachment, final deliverance and gratitude as follows:

*“Because of unreasoned thinking,
I was addicted to ornament.
I was conceited, vain
And afflicted by desire for sense pleasures.
With (the aid of) the Buddha
Skilled in means, kinsman of the sun
I practised properly,
Plucked out my mind (desire)
For existence.”
-- (Theragāthā 157,158)*

On realizing the exquisite happiness of Nibbana, Nanda approached the Buddha and thanked Him respectfully by saying, "Lord I release you from your promise of celestial bliss." The Buddha then informed Nanda that He had been released from the promise the moment he had reached the supreme bliss of *Nibbāna*, because the bliss of Nibbana was greater and transcended any celestial bliss.

Author: Relatives and Disciples of the Buddha by Radhika Abeysekera