

## Mogao Magic - Script

**Buddha-** Welcome to my cave, well one of almost 500 cave temples situated along a cliff face. Transport yourself 7,000 miles to Dunhuang, China, between two great deserts the rocky Gobi and the sandy Taklimakan, the last outpost of the Great Wall, thousands of miles from any big city. Once situated on the silk road monks from Korea, India, Tibet and throughout China came to spread information of my life and past lives through the art in caves like this one. Since most people in the 4th to 14th centuries could not read, artists would create murals to tell legends and fables of my philosophy of life. Here are five such stories. They were made to inspire devotion, give instructions on living correctly and fill people with hope to end suffering. My eldest friend Great Kassapa, who gave up a life as a Brahmin to follow my teachings has a story to tell you.

**Kassapa-** I have lived a long life as a monk, I'm wrinkled and thin. It is not easy being a Buddhist monk. There have been many temptations. Here is the story of another such monk that did not do as well with temptation as I have.

**Father-** My only son, I will send you to a monastery so you can learn to be a scholar and grow up to be a man of good character.

**Sramanera-** Yes, father. That is my wish as well.

**Kassapa-** And that is what the little novice Sramanera did, he studied the teachings of the Buddha by heart. However, not far from the monastery was a well-to-do family that sent alms to the monks every day after their evening meal.

**Youposa-** This evening the family has been invited to dine at a friend's home. Dear daughter would you stay home to manage the house without me. (she nods and he waves goodbye) I feel like I forgot to tell her something.

**Monk-** I wonder why our supper has not arrived from the home of the kind Youposa. Sramanera would you go to his home to collect our dinner. Always remember the Buddha's teachings are easy enough to memorize, but difficult to live up to.

**Sramanera-** I understand. I strive to be worthy of his sincere teachings. (walks to girl's house and knocks at door)

**Girl-** Hello. Oh, are you Sramanera? I have heard you were intelligent and I see you are handsome too. Please come in. (he hesitates and looks down- she grabs his arm and pulls him in)

**Sramanera-** Please give me some food and let me leave.

**Girl-** Oh no have some fruit, and some cake, oh stay and talk for a while (dance around to get his attention-clearly she is in love with him)

**Sramanera-** Amitabha, Great Buddha help me.(to the heavens) You are too kind. My Great Master has asked me to come for some food. I must study the Buddha's teachings and not be distracted.

**Girl-** Sramanera I don't understand why you would want to follow the Buddha all day, living in a boring monastery. You will have nothing. Marry me and live a rich life with everything your heart desires. And me. (wink, oh la la, grab his hand)

**Sramanera-** (pulls hands away) I am already a disciple of the Buddha. It is the path I have chosen for myself.

**Girl-** I cannot be happy without you. I will have to kill myself.

**Sramanera-** But we just met?? Let me give your offer special consideration for a few moments while I make a decision.

**Girl-** Wonderful. I'll make some food while I await your good news.(goes into the other room to cook some dishes)

**Sramanera-** Amitabha, what can I do. She is set on marrying me. I will sacrifice my life as I cannot break my discipline. (dies on the spot) (Girl comes in to see him on the ground and faints)

**Youposa-** What is this? Are you ok? (bends down to daughter and Sramanera)

**Girl-** Father, what have I done. If I had known that this was going to happen I would not have tried to force him to marry me.

**Kassapa (Aralia)-** The head monk at the monastery with Youposa's money was so moved by Sramanera's devotion that he had a seven treasures chariot built that would carry Sramanera's body throughout the city with the contrite daughter steering the horse all the way. The body of the young monk was cremated and placed in a pagoda to mark his (follows in procession off stage) devotion and following one's principles even to the extreme of death.

**Ananda-** He told you the life of a monk is not an easy one. I am the youngest of the Buddha's followers, and a monk as well. I was there in his lifetime as his assistant and I memorized all of his stories to tell them to others after his death. Here is an intense one he told of one of his past lives - when he was a king long ago in India.

**Sakra/Hawk-** I have heard of a humane and fair-minded king, but I want to test him myself. I'll turn into an eagle and you, my heavenly god friend, turn into a dove. I have a plan.

**Vishvakarman/dove-** Will do.

**Ananda-** The two god's transformed themselves into birds swooping, the dove evading the hunting hawk.

**King Sivi-** Come and hide with me (waves to bird and bird nestles under his arm)

**Sakra/Hawk-** I am very hungry and you have my prey. What am I to do now?

**King Sivi-** Go somewhere else and find some meat.

**Sakra/Hawk-** I haven't eaten for days and this is my chance for survival. You who are well-fed have no idea how the starving suffer. Release the dove and let me eat my meal.

**Ananda-** The king had long ago made a promise not to harm any living thing. He had a terrible dilemma: if he released the dove it would surely die and if he didn't the hawk would die. There was only one solution.

**King Sivi** - I offer you my own flesh. Servant come here and bring a scale. I will give you the weight of this dove off my own leg.

**Sakra/Hawk** - I accept your offer.

**Vishvakarman/dove** - Thank you. Selfless king.

**Servant-** Dear King, it is not enough to right the scales.

**King Sivi** - Then take some more. Take the flesh of this leg as well.

**Servant** - Still it will not balance.

**King Sivi** - Do not stop until my sacrifice equals the weight of the dove.

**Servant** - Yes, sir.

**Ananda-** With this ultimate act of self sacrifice the earth shook and the heavens rained flower petals on King Sivi while the apsaras danced in the heavens. He was restored to his original, whole self and the dove and hawk returned to their god forms in the heavens knowing that this king was to one day become a future Buddha.

**Bodhisattva Guanyin** - I, Guanyin, was given the chance to be a Buddha as well, but I choose to help others attain enlightenment and end suffering before I take my turn. On this wall (gesture to mural) is the story of the 500 robbers and what their choices led them to.

**Robber 1-** Our land is ruled by a tyrant. What are we to do?

**Robber 2-** This is ridiculous our families are starving.

**Robber 3** - I know let's hide in the mountains and attack the wealthy rulers. I know many friends of mine would love to help.

**Robber 2**- I probably know about 497 people who would join our cause.

**Robber 1**- That's a great idea. Then we can redistribute whatever we steal to whoever needs it.

**Robber 3** - They have been trying to catch us to no avail for months now, but I heard the king is finally sending someone after us with some might.

**Bodhisattva**- The five hundred fought a long and bloody battle against the king's elite force, but could not withstand their overwhelming strength.

**King's soldier** - My crew will finally subdue your 500 and just so you don't forget us we'll cut your eyes out. (pinions robbers and removes their eyes, they grope around blindly, bump into each other and fall down on knees)

**Robber 1**- Have you heard of the compassionate one, Guanyin, who listens for the cries of the needy?

**Robber 2**- What should we do?

**Robber 1**- If we cry out with one voice she can hear our prayers. We will need all the remaining robbers to speak together.

**Robber 1,2,3**- Great compassionate Guanyin, May I quickly know all Dharmas;

Great compassionate Guanyin, May I soon obtain the Wisdom Eye;

Great compassionate Guanyin, May I quickly board the Wisdom Boat;

Great compassionate Guanyin, May I soon transcend the ocean of suffering;

Great compassionate Guanyin, May I soon ascend the mountain of Nirvana;

**Bodhisattva Guanyin-** Stop crying. I am here to help you out of our abyss of misery. I know that circumstances compelled you to become bandits and that it was not a life you freely chose. (blows flowers/glitter onto them)

**Robber 3-** My sight, I can see.

**Robber 2-** It is restored.

**Robber 1-** I see the beauty of the world again.

**Robber 3-** We must all follow the teachings of the Buddha.

**Robber 2-** We will be the 500 arhats.

**Robber 1-** The 500 followers of Buddha, thanks to Guanyin's compassion, we are restored.

**Bodhisattva Guanyin-** They devoted their lives to Buddhism, harming no one else in the process. As long as a sword is laid down, there is always a chance for forgiveness and renewal. My friend Heavenly King Zēng Zhǎng Tiānwáng you have a sword, but it is to protect the Dharma, the Buddha's teachings. I bet you have a story to tell too.

**Heavenly King -** I do have a story about a different kind of King, an earthly one with little foresight. King Bimbisara was getting quite old to have a family and he and Queen Vaidehi had no luck conceiving a child. Bimbisara was not a kind man, he destroyed everything and everyone in his path without listening to them or caring. He was so ill tempered most people stayed away from him.

**Queen Vaidehi -** I have prayed for a child, but all in vain.

**Soothsayer -** My Queen, there is a monk, a sage in the southern mountains. He will soon pass away and be reborn into your family in three years. My King you could certainly have a son.

**King Bimbisara-** I'm not one to wait long. I am already 50 and need a son to pass my crown to. I will take care of that sage and speed up his reincarnation. (travels to Sage). I demand that you die immediately.

**Sage/hare/Prince Ajatasattu-** It is not my time to die. Are you utterly devoid of conscience? If I became your son would you want me to request the same of you so I could take my place as your heir?

**King Bimbisara** - I will cut off your food and water and then we'll see how long you live. (walk in a circle to show time passing) Still alive? It's been days. You must die so I will have my son. (slays the sage. Sage lays dead with hare puppet hidden- king returns to Queen)

**Queen Vaidehi** - It has been months since you returned king and still we have no child. I asked the soothsayer and he said since the sage did not die naturally he was reincarnated as a hare in our garden, to bide his time.

**King Bimbisara** - A hare you say! The one eating our vegetables right now. I will teach him to bide his time. I want my son now! (grabs the hare puppet and strangles it)

**Queen Vaidehi** - All it took was the hare's death and I had a lovely boy who is now grown and my King and I are quite old. It is time for my husband to make our son king.

**King Bimbisara** - I pass my crown to you son.

**Prince Ajatasattu** - Thank you father. I will go throughout the city to see my subjects. (walks around and runs into the soothsayer) Hello there. You look oddly familiar.

**Soothsayer-** Yes prince. I am the soothsayer that foretold your rebirth, although I am surprised you have lived such a peaceful existence, with how you left the world in your last two incarnations.

**Prince Ajatasattu-** What do you mean?

**Soothsayer-** Didn't anyone tell you? Your father was so impatient for his son to be born that he killed a wise mountain sage before his time that was reborn into a hare in your royal garden that he himself strangled to hasten your birth. What a pity. You should treat your father as your enemy. It is wrong to show blind obedience to a tyrant king.

**Prince Ajatasattu-** If this is true my father must pay. (returns to father) You father must stay in a cell with no food and no one to visit you except for mother.

**Heavenly King -** But King Bimbisara did not die. His loyal wife secretly brought him food hidden in her clothes. When Prince Ajatasattu found out and stopped this, she carried food in her hair knot. Again Ajatasattu found out. Finally, the queen had to bathe her body and cover it with a mixture of honey, butter and sugar. By licking this food off her arms, the good king survived. At last Ajatasattu found out his mother's plan and banned her from visiting his father at all. Now the king had no food at to sustain him and would surely die.

**Queen Vaidehi -** Lord Buddha I cannot understand why I bore such an evil son. What wrongs have I done?

**Buddha -** It is not you, but your husband who was full of ill will towards others who did not deserve his cruelty. And as you said nothing on thier behalf you are complicit. This is the retribution for these evils.

**Queen Vaidehi -** Please forgive me for staying with such a man who would willfully make others suffer for his own gain. I promise to live the rest of my life in service to others. I will follow your teachings from this day forth.

**Heavenly King -** And that is what she did chanting the words of the Buddha every day until she was ascended to the Pure Land.

**Buddha-** I have one final story to tell. One of my lives so long ago that I'm glad I have a long memory. I wonder if you will be able to guess who I am in this story.

**Deer -** What a joy it is to leap through the forest's beauty every day. What a wonderful life I lead. (Sofie and Rachel- with blue silks move the water above Felipe's head)



**Tiao Da-** (pokes head out between silks) Help, help. I can't swim. Mountain god, tree god, dragon god, any god, come to my aid.

**Deer** - I'll do my best to save you (gets into the water- Filipe puts arms around neck)

**Tiao Da-** You saved my life and I am your willing servant to the day I die.

**Deer-** It is my pleasure to help you. All I ask is that you not reveal my whereabouts to anyone. I love the peace and tranquility of the forest.

**Tiao Da-** Of course, you saved my life. (returns to home off stage)

**Queen-** I just had the most remarkable dream my dear. There was a 9 colored gorgeous deer in the forest not far from here and wouldn't that just make the most lovely coat?

**King** - sure honey (not paying attention)

**Queen** - Oh I've just got to have it. (pulls on his arm and gets flirty) You're the most powerful king in the land, if anyone can get me that coat I know you can. Right, my darling? (he ignores her) I must have that deer skin coat. It is all I ever wanted. I can wear nothing else. I must have it now. I can think of nothing else. (she is totally obsessed and falling apart)

**King-** You look awful my queen. Is this all about that deer coat you dreamed of? (shrinking, she nods yes) Then I will get it for you. Anyone with information leading to the capture of this nine colored deer will be rewarded with gold and half of the kingdom.

**Tiao Da-** I happen to know where this deer is my king. I have even seen and spoken to him. Follow me. (after being led to riverside with deer sitting there the king trains an arrow on the deer)

**Deer-** I have one request before you kill me Great King. Who was it that told you that I was here?

**King-** It was him. (points to Tiao Da)

**Deer-** Your majesty, I rescued this man from drowning not long ago and he promised to never reveal my location to anyone in reward for the service of saving his life. To have such a base person in your kingdom shames you. He is a promise breaker. He repays kindness with enmity. Now that you have heard me out you may take my life. (bows to king)

**King-** (bows to Deer) I am so sorry this man has revealed your whereabouts. I banish him from my kingdom. Be gone Tiao Da. Never return! As for you my dear, we will not harm you or any of your kind. I proclaim that no animals are to be harmed from now on. We are to be vegetarians in this kingdom from today forth. We will weave our clothing from plants as well.

**Buddha-** Well what do you think? Who was I? The king? No. The queen? Of course not! Not the awful promise breaker Tiao Da. I was the deer, of course. What have you learned from these tales on the walls in far, far, western China? from the nine colored deer  
(deer group moves next to their mural)

**9 colored deer group-** keep your promises

**Heavenly King-** from King Bimbisara  
(king bimbisara group enters and moves next to their mural)

**King Bimbisara group-** patience will be rewarded and cruelty, punished.

**Guanyin-** from the 500 robbers  
(500 Robbers group enters and moves next to their mural)

**500 Robbers group-** forgiveness, if asked for, will be granted

**Ananda-** From King Sivi  
(King Sivi group enters and moves next to their mural)

**King Sivi Group-** selflessness to the extreme

**Kasapa-** from the young Sramanera  
(Sramanera group enters and moves next to their mural)

**Sramanera group-** live according to your principles

**All-** these are just some of the lessons from the walls of this cave

**Buddha-** Thank you for coming all the way to the Mogao Grotto, the oldest  
Buddhist temple site in China.















