



# Devadatta

Devadatta was the Buddha's cousin. They grew up together as children but from the earliest times it was clear that they had sharply different personalities. Devadatta thought in a worldly way and always about his self-interest whereas Siddhartha's actions were ruled by compassion and kindness.

As an adult Devadatta became a monk and follower of the Buddha but he turned out to be the archetypal troublemaker. He orchestrated three assassination attempts against the Buddha and also tried to create a split within the Buddhist community. In the long term, he failed but the stories about his adventures show that, for all the Buddha's greatness, he did not succeed in converting everyone around him. They also illustrate the Buddha's non-violent approach to solving problems.

Devadatta tried to kill the Buddha on three separate occasions. First, he hired assassins to kill him, but when they came into the Buddha's presence they were moved by his persuasiveness and became converts instead. Second, Devadatta climbed to the top of a mountain called Vulture Peak and hurled a rock down on the Buddha as he was passing below. The rock narrowly missed him and wounded him slightly. On his third attempt, Devadatta sent a wild elephant to attack the Buddha. The elephant charged down the road towards the Buddha, but as it neared him it unexpectedly slowed down and became quite tame. The Buddha used the power of love to subdue it.

Towards the end of his life, having failed to create a rival break-away group and after a long illness, Devadatta finally repented his behaviour and had himself carried on a litter into the Buddha's presence. He cried out, "I seek Refuge in the Buddha" and was received back into the community. The Buddha prophesied that he would eventually attain enlightenment.

From *Discovering Buddhism* by Dominique Side

## Discussion

What can we learn from the story of Devadatta?



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