



# 16 ARHATS

*Murals at the Vajra Vidya Institute*



VAJRA VIDYA INSTITUTE LIBRARY



# 16 ARHATS

*Murals at the Vajra Vidya Institute*

Text and Photos by Gene Kudirka



VAJRA VIDYA INSTITUTE LIBRARY

## About These Murals

THE 16 ARHATS

*Neten Chu Druk*

---

ANGAJA

*Yenlag Jung*

---

AJITA

*Miphampa*

---

VANAVASIN

*Nakna Ne*

---

KALIKA

*Dhu Dhen*

---

VAJRIPUTRA

*Dorji Mo Ye Bu*

---

BHADRA

*Sangpo*

---

KANAKAVASTA

*Ser Beu*

---

KANAKA BHARADVAJA

*Bharadhadza Serchen*

---

BAKULA

*Bakula*

---

RAHULA

*Drachendzin*

---

CHUDA PANTHAKA

*Lam Thren Ten*

---

PINDOLA BHARADVAJA

*Bharadhadza Sonyom Len*

---

PANTHAKA

*Lam Ten*

---

NAGASENA

*Lu Yi De*

---

GOPAKA

*Beche*

---

ABHEDA

*Michepa*

---

DHARMATALA

*Genyen Dharmata*

---

HUASHANG

*Gyalpo Ha Shang*

---



Vajra Vidya Institute in Sarnath, India.

## ABOUT THESE MURALS

The murals are copies of original thangkas executed by Khenpo Karma Rinchen Dargye. Depicted are the sixteen arhats and two additional figures, the Chinese layman called Huashang the benefactor of the sixteen arhats, and Dharmatala, attendant of the sixteen arhats.



Ven. Thrangu Rinpoche assigned this project to a monk from Tibet, Lama Rigzin. Lama Rigzin drew the figures and oversaw a team of thirty-five monks and Nepali artists who assisted him in completing the murals over the course of three years. Not only does the style of painting follow the tradition of Khenpo Karma Rinchen Dargye in the Karma Gardi style, the pigments were also prepared in the traditional way by grinding precious stones, which gives the murals their rich color. The murals were consecrated March, 2003.

## ABOUT THESE MURALS

In addition, Lama Rigzin created murals in the guest suites for high lamas at the Vajra Vidya Institute, the Wheel of Life and All-Good Wheel in the portico, and the bas relief sculpture of the Four Kings at the gate of the Vajra Vidya Institute.

The first images of the arhats were painted in 880 by a Chinese artists named Kuan Hsiu and given to a Buddhist monastery.

# THE 16 ARHATS

## *Neten Chu Druk*

The Sanskrit term *arhat* means “worthy one” or “elder ” and its Tibetan equivalent means “foe-destroyer.” These monks were specially chosen by the Buddha Shakyamuni from among his major disciples to become the protectors and preservers of his teachings. They watch over and care for the religious welfare of laypeople and monastics and protect the spiritual interests of Buddhism. They are fully realized and have attained freedom from the cycle of rebirth and suffering and being very wise they are destined to become bodhisattvas.

When he was about to die, the Buddha entrusted his teachings to these sixteen great arhats. They vowed to prolong their lives in order to continue the work of the Buddha and not to experience final nirvana until the advent of Maitreya as Buddha. They promised to use their special powers to reveal and protect the Dharma. Since then, the sixteen great arhats

## THE 16 ARHATS

have occasionally appeared to inspire the devoted and to encourage confidence in the Dharma.

After the Buddha's parinirvana they left for various regions, dwelling on remote mountains and in sacred forests. The sixteen arhats are divided among the four quarters of the world. Along with the four guardian kings (*lokapalas*), they watch over the four directions, symbolizing the diffusion of the Dharma throughout space. Vaishravana, golden guardian of the North, is holding a victory banner and is king of the Yakshas. Dhritarastra holding a lute is the white king of the east and of the Gandharvas or celestial musicians. Virudhaka, blue king of the south is holding a sword. Virupaksa, red king of the west, is holding a stupa (see last page). Thus the arhats remain alive indefinitely and reside with their numerous disciples, in their reclusive abodes or paradises. Forsaking their own nirvana until the time of the future Buddha, the arhats maintain the Dharma and provide a temporal link between the present and the time of the future Buddha, Maitreya. These sixteen arhats possess miraculous powers, which enable them to travel to various parts of the world to spread the Buddha dharma.

## THE 16 ARHATS

It is said that when beings are no longer able to understand the buddhadharma and the teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni have disappeared from this world, the sixteen arhats will gather all that remains of the sacred texts and collect all the relics of Shakyamuni and place them in a magnificent stupa made of seven precious jewels. They will pay their last worship to the relics and homage to the stupa. This stupa will then sink into the earth and no vestige of the dharma will remain. The arhats will then pass from this world leaving no trace. Until Maitreya becomes enlightened and speaks with the lion's roar of the great Buddhas, the Dharma will no longer be heard in this world.

In the main shrine room of the Vajra Vidya, there are eight arhats on the east wall and eight on the west wall of the main shrine room. They are placed according to their rank with the most senior closest to the Buddha statue. The two attendants, Huashang and Dharmatala are placed on the south wall. They are both laymen; Huashang the plump Chinese sponsor who is surrounded by playful children and Dharmatala is the great Indian master who can be seen carrying a basket of texts. They are not counted among the sixteen original arhats since they are laymen not monks, but they are always

## THE 16 ARHATS

pictured as part of the group. The four guardian kings can be seen upon entering the Vajra Vidya Institute compound as the facing wall.

Meditation on the sixteen great arhats and the dharma symbols they hold stimulates insight into the various aspects of the Buddha's teachings.



The Buddha statue with “teaching mudra” at the main shrine hall of the Vajra Vidya Institute.

# ANGAJA

## *Yenlag Jung*

Angaja dwells on Mount Kailash with a retinue of 1,300 arhats. Before his birth, the Buddha prophesied that Angaja would be rich, would become a monk and then would become an arhat. He did achieve great riches but renounced his wealth and became a monk. Through constant practice and meditation, he attained arhathood at the age of twenty seven. Angaja was noted for the cleanliness and fragrance of his body and has been described as being perfect in all things.

He holds a whisk and an incense bowl, whose fragrance of discipline frees beings from suffering and purifies them of physical and mental obscurations.



Arhat Angaja

# AJITA

## *Miphampa*

Ajita lives with 100 arhats on a mountain in the Crystal Wood of the Sages. He was born with great beauty and at birth a golden wish-fulfilling elephant was bestowed upon his family. This elephant granted all the wishes of Ajita and made him extremely successful. He gave this elephant to the king, who was very pleased with this gift and granted him his daughter in marriage. The king then presented these two to the Buddha who ordained them. Through diligence and practice they became realized beings, Ajita in particular understood the law of impermanence and the futility of worldly pursuits. After considerable practice and meditation he attained arhathood and spread the teachings of the Buddha.

Whoever sees and remembers his image will be purified and liberated from all obstacles to mental tranquillity. Ajita bestows the ability to enter into meditation while protecting and aiding in steadfast devotion to practice.



Arhat Ajita

# VANAVASIN

## *Nakna Ne*

Vanavasin sits meditating in a cave on Saptaparni Mountain with a retinue of 1,400 arhats. He was born into a Brahmin family and was taught the Brahmin precepts. He left home, became a monk, and meditated. Through sustained practice, he attained arhathood.

He holds a fly whisk in his left hand, and whoever feels its breeze, is cooled from the heat of ignorance and sown with the seed of liberation. His right hand is in the threatening mudra. It is said that whoever imagines the mudra is immediately liberated and purified of all past negative karma.

Those who invoke his aid obtain victory over delusion and protection from all harm, whether natural or caused by human beings. According to a prophecy by Maitreya, anyone who wishes to atone for evil deeds should pray to Vanavasin for forgiveness.



Arhat Vanavasin

# KALIKA

## *Dhu Dhen*

Kalika dwells in Tamradvipa in northeast India and holds an earring in each hand. He has 1,100 other arhats with him. At his birth, a great variety of flowers fell from the heavens to bless his parent's home. Once he visited the heaven of the world of desire to free the divine beings from cyclic existence. These beings offered numerous ornaments as tokens of appreciation. He transformed them all into a single pair of precious gold earrings and blessed them.

Visualizing these earrings enables practitioners to penetrate illusion and become blessed with present and permanent happiness.



Arhat Kalika

# VAJRIPUTRA

## *Dorji Mo Ye Bu*

Vajriputra dwells in Singala (Sri Lanka) and holds a scented fly whisk in his right hand. His retinue consists of 1,000 arhats. Once, he gave teachings in the land of Gandharvas, liberating many beings from cyclic existence. Gratefully, they presented him with many perfumed whisks, which he transformed into a single whisk and blessed it. Whoever sees this whisk will attain happiness.

Meditation on Vajriputra strengthens concentration and wisdom in those working for others.



Arhat Vajriputra

# BHADRA

## *Sangpo*

Bhadra lives on an island in the Yamuna River. He is surrounded by 1,200 arhats. His right hand is in the Dharma teaching mudra and his left hand in the meditation mudra. These mudras signify that he is spreading the Buddha's teachings and has possession of great wisdom. One of the Buddha's great disciples, he was a good teacher who could teach in clear, simple language. His first students were his parents, who after some time also attained arhathood. As he continued to teach, he liberated countless beings from cyclic existence. Through his teachings they realized the futility of the material world. Meditation on Bhadra develops the wisdom of correct discernment, essential for understanding emptiness and perfecting compassion.



Arhat Bhadra

# KANAKAVASTA

## *Ser Beu*

Kanakavasta dwells in Kashmir with a retinue of 500 other arhats. He holds a chain of precious stones that was given to him by the nagas when he went down into the naga realm to convert them to Buddhism. He gave many teachings there and liberated many by generating bodhicitta in their minds. In return they offered many wish-fulfilling jewels, which he transformed into a single bejeweled golden lasso and blessed it. Whoever touches or sees this precious strand of jewels receives the wisdom-mind. It was said that he comprehended all systems good and bad.

Through being mindful of him, one develops a superb memory and control over one's mind, as well as strengthening the bond with one's teacher.



Arhat Kanakavasta

# KANAKA BHARADVAJA

## *Bharadhadza Serchen*

Kanaka Bharadvaja lives in the western continent of Aparagodaniya with 700 arhats in his retinue. When he was born he had a gold coin in each hand, and as they were removed, more appeared. He is known for always having golden coins available to distribute to the needy. According to a prophecy of Maitreya Buddha, it is said that whoever desires a good name or a better rebirth in their next life should pray to him and their wish will be granted.

Invoking him opens opportunities for practicing the six paramitas and developing along the Mahayana path.



Arhat Kanaka Bharadvaja

# BAKULA

## *Bakula*

Bakula lives in Jang Dramenyen-North continent in India and he has a retinue of 900 arhats. He leads a solitary, self-contained life never teaching. He is noted for his longevity and health and holds a mongoose that conveys the power to grant understanding of all the Buddha's teaching. Whoever sees Bakula with this gem-producing mongoose will be freed from poverty and will have all their wishes fulfilled.

By visualizing him one acquires the boundless treasures of realization and freedom from spiritual poverty.



Arhat Bakula

# RAHULA

## *Drachendzin*

Rahula, Buddha's only son, resides in the northern side of Jambudvīpa, the land of aromatic herbs. He lives in a palace of clouds along with 1,100 arhats. He will return to this world as Buddha's son for several lifetimes and will not attain nirvana or pass out of existence for a very long time. He holds a jeweled diadem to indicate his princely status. He received this diadem as an offering from the gods of the thirty-three celestial realms. It is a remembrance of his visit to explain the Buddha's teachings to the children of the gods. It is said that whoever see the diadem will not suffer from hindrances and will receive blessings from all the Buddhas. He is noted for his diligent study of the canon and his observance of the rules of the order.

Invoking his aid cools the heat of passion as one enters the path to enlightenment.



Arhat Rahula

# CHUDA PANTHAKA

## *Lam Thren Ten*

Chuda Panthaka lives on Vulture's Peak, Rajkiri, India with 1,600 arhats. Little Pantha was exceedingly dull and stupid and could not apply his mind or memorize even one stanza of doctrine. He was slighted by the sangha, but the Master always had patience with him. When Chuda Panthaka was expelled by his brother for stupidity, Buddha had pity on him and brought him back. He comforted his sorrowing disciple and asked him to clean the monk's shoes and sweep the temple, giving him the words "sweeping broom" as a mantra. With that, he came to see that the two words meant that all attachment to things of this world was defilement to be swept away by the broom of Buddha's doctrine. He achieved perfection and was chiefly occupied with the mind and mental contemplation.

Invoking him dispels desire, hatred, and ignorance—the poisons that create suffering.



Arhat Chuda Panthaka

# PINDOLA BHARADVAJA

*Bharadhadza Sonyom Len*

Pindola Bharadvaja dwells in a cave on the eastern continent of Puravideha and has a retinue of 1,000 arhats. He holds a book in his right hand and an alms bowl in his left. Bharadvaja has a voice like a lion's roar and was one of the Buddha's great disciples. He was distinguished as a successful debater and defender of orthodoxy. However, he had a weakness for exhibiting his magical powers. Once in order to show his superhuman powers, he rose in the air, took a sandalwood bowl off a very high pole, and floated about with it. For this the Master rebuked him. The begging bowl in his left hand symbolizes his tireless work for the happiness of all sentient beings, while anyone who sees his book is blessed with happiness and all they wish for.

Meditation on him increases wisdom and favorable conditions for practicing the Dharma.



Arhat Pindola Bharadvaja

# PANTHAKA

## *Lam Ten*

Panthaka dwells in the heaven of the thirty-three gods, surrounded by 900 arhats. His left hand is in the teaching mudra and his right hand holds a book, Panthaka was among the highest of Buddha's disciples, who by thought aimed at excellence. He was expert in resolving doubts and difficulties in doctrine for weaker students. He also had siddhi. He could pass through solids and shoot through the air, and cause fire and water to appear. He was said to be able to shrink himself down to nothing. When he achieved arhathood, he decided to serve the Buddha by repaying his kindness through preaching the Dharma for the benefit of all sentient beings. It is said that whoever prays to him will not meet with an untimely death and will become extremely learned.

He aids those who earnestly wish to study and practice the Buddha's teachings.



Arhat Panthaka

# NAGASENA

*Lu Yi De*

Nagasena lives on Mount Urumunda with 1,200 arhats. He is a noted teacher of Buddhist principles, who was a monk for 30 years before becoming an arhat. He delayed reaching that spiritual state so he could complete a treatise, Abhidharma-kosha. He defends the Buddha's teachings and explains hard doctrines with clarity. He holds a staff used to heal sickness. Visualizing his staff and listening to its bells frees the mind from confusion, instills an unfailing faith in Dharma, and also awakens confidence in the three jewels.



Arhat Nagasena

# GOPAKA

## *Beche*

Gopaka resides on Mount Bihula with 1,400 arhats. He has a book next to him symbolizing his compassionate work for all sentient beings, his promise to the Buddha to spread the Dharma, and his ability to teach. It is said that whoever sees the books will master all the sciences, be rid all all impurities, and be the spiritual son of all the Buddhas. He has renowned teaching abilities.

His blessing endows practitioners with great wisdom, enabling them to teach the Dharma.



Arhat Gopaka

# ABHEDA

## *Michepa*

Abheda resides on Mount Gangchen, near Shambala in the Himalayan region. He is surrounded by 1000 arhats. He holds in both hands the enlightenment stupa given to him by the Buddha Shakyamuni when he went to the northern country to convert the yakshas. This stupa was to help subdue and pacify the these native spirits. The stupa possesses magic powers to control calamities caused by malevolent yakshas. It is said that anyone who sees the stupa will be cleansed of all sins and their wisdom will increase; and wherever the rays of the stupa fall, happiness and good fortune will abound.

Those who meditate on it gain fortune and merit and the way is opened to realization.



Arhat Abhedha

# DHARMATALA

## *Genyen Dharmata*

Dharmatala is attendant and messenger to the sixteen arhats and is depicted carrying a bundle of religious texts on his back. Dharmatala was a pious Tan dynasty layman in charge of a temple where the arhat's images were displayed. Once Dharmatala was attacked by robbers while guarding the temple. He was assisted by a tiger who came from his right knee and drove away the intruders. The tiger then became Dharmatala's constant companion. He holds a vase in his left hand and has long hair, which is called *ralpa* hair.



Dharmatala

# HUASHANG

*Gyalpo Ha Shang*

Huashang is the great Chinese sponsor of the Buddha and the arhats. He is often considered a benefactor of children and is depicted with playful children around him. He holds a mala in his right hand and a conch shell in his left.



Huashang

## VAJRA VIDYA INSTITUTE

Vajra Vidya Institute is a monastic school, shedra, for the higher study of Buddhist philosophy and practice of the Dharma. It was established in October 1999 to take the monks further along the academic path and prepare them to assume roles as administrators and teachers within the monastic community. It also equips them to assume positions in Dharma centers in Asia and in the west. It is a seven-year program involving intense study of the principal Karma Kagyu texts and debate. VVI is often the site of debates among the major Karma Kagyu monasteries and plays host to visits from H.H. Dalai Lama, H.H. Karmapa and other noted Karma Kagyu teachers. The Institute currently houses about 150 faculty, students and staff. The director is the Very Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche, whose vision created this facility.

Vajra Vidya is located in Sarnath, India, an auspicious location being the same place where the Buddha gave his first teach-

## VAJRA VIDYA INSTITUTE

ing. Construction started on the building in 1993 and it is built according to the examples of the Shalu Serkang in Tsang by Buton Rinchen Drup and the Karma Yenmoche built by Chodrak Gyamtso, the 7th Karmapa. It was also influenced by Nalanda, the great Buddhist university. The Institute was inaugurated in December 1999 by H.H. Dalai Lama and has continued to flourish and grow.



Four Guardians (Lokapalas) at the Main Gate of the Vajra Vidya Institute.



# COPYRIGHTS



Vajra Vidya Institute Library  
Khajuhee, Sarnath, Varanasi, U.P. India 221007  
Email: vajravidya@yahoo.com

Text and photos by Gene Kudirka  
Buddha statue and four Guardians photographs by Ztefan Bertha  
Copyright @ 2026, 2005, 2011 VVI. All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced without permission.

First edition: 2005; Second edition: 2011; eBook edition: 2026 (dharmaebooks.org)

ISBN: 89-89017-10-1  
Title: 16 Arhats: Murals at the Vajra Vidya Institute  
Author: Gene Kudirka  
Cover and layout: Beata Tashi Drolkar



This work is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Dharma Ebooks is a project of Dharma Treasure, which operates under the editorial guidance of the Seventeenth Gyalwang Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje. The proprietary rights of Dharma Ebooks belong to Dharma Treasure Corporation.



正法寶藏  
Dharma Treasure