



# THE BUDDHA

HIS LIFE AND TEACHING

PIYADASSI THERA

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A SHORT STUDY OF HIS LIFE AND TEACHING

PIYADASSI THERA

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# THE BUDDHA

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sam-Buddhassa!*

“The ages roll by and the Buddha seems not so far away after all; his voice whispers in our ears and tells us not to run away from the struggle but, calm-eyed, to face it, and to see in life ever greater opportunities for growth and advancement. Personality counts today as ever, and a person who has impressed himself on the thought of mankind as Buddha has, so that even today there is something living and vibrant about the thought of him, must have been a wonderful man — a man who was, as Barth says, ‘the finished model of calm and sweet majesty, of infinite tenderness for all that breathes and compassion for all that suffers, of perfect moral freedom and exemption from every prejudice.’”<sup>1</sup>

“His message old and yet very new and original for those immersed in metaphysical subtleties, captured the imagination of the intellectuals; it went deep down into the hearts of the people”.<sup>2</sup>

Buddhism had its birth at Sarnath near the city of Vārānasi (Benares), India. With only five followers at the beginning, it penetrated into many a land, and is today the ‘religion’ of more than 600 millions. Buddhism made such rapid strides chiefly due to its intrinsic worth and its appeal to the reasoning mind. But there were other factors that aided its progress: never did the *dhammadūtas*, the messengers of the dhamma, the teaching, use any iniquitous methods in spreading the dhamma, the only weapon they wielded was that of universal love and compassion.

Furthermore, Buddhism penetrated to these countries peaceably, without disturbing the creeds that were already

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1. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Calcutta, p. 143.

2. Ibid, p. 137.

there. Buddhist missions to which the annals of religious history scarcely afford a parallel were carried on neither by force of arms nor by the use of any coercive or reprehensible methods. Conversion by compulsion was unknown amongst the Buddhists, and repugnant to the Buddha and his disciples. No decrying of other creeds has ever existed in Buddhism. Buddhism was thus able to diffuse itself through a great variety of cultures throughout the civilized world.

“There is no record”, says Dr. T. W. Rhys Davids, ‘known to me in the whole of the long history of Buddhism throughout the many centuries where his followers have been for such lengthened periods supreme, of any persecution by the Buddhists of the followers of any faith’.

## The Birth

The Buddha, the founder of this great religion Buddhism (the term religion is used here in the sense of a ‘Way of Life’ and not in the sense in which it is commonly understood), lived over 2500 years ago and is known as Siddhattha Gotama.<sup>1</sup> His father, Suddhodana, the Kshatriya<sup>2</sup> King, ruled over the land of the Sākyans at Kapilavatthu on the Nepalese frontier. As he came from the Gotama family he was known as Suddhodana Gotama. Mahāmāya, princess of the Koliyas, was Suddhodana’s queen.

On a full-moon day of May—Vasanta-tide, when in India the trees were laden with leaf, flower and fruit, and man, bird and beast were in joyous mood, Queen Mahamaya was travelling in state from Kapilavatthu to Devadaha, her parental home, according to the custom of the times, to give birth to her child. But that was not to be, for half way between the two cities, in the beautiful Lumbini Grove, under the shade of a flowering Sal tree, she brought forth a son.

Lumbini, or Rummindei, the name by which it is now known, is one hundred miles north of Vārānasi and within sight of the snow-capped Himālayas. At this memorable spot where Prince Siddhattha, the future Buddha, was born,

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1. In Sanskrit *Siddhartha* (personal name), *Gautama* (family name)

2. Warrior Class.

Emperor Asoka, 316 years after the event, erected a mighty stone pillar to mark the holy spot. The inscription engraved on the pillar in five lines consists of ninety three Asokan characters, amongst which occurs the following: '*hida budhe jāte sākyaṃuni*', 'Here was born the Buddha, the sage of the Sākyans'.

The mighty column is still to be seen. The pillar, 'as crisp as the day it was cut', had been struck by lightning even when Hiuen Tsiang, the Chinese pilgrim, saw it towards the middle of the seventh century after Christ. The discovery and identification of the Lumbini park in 1896 is attributed to the renowned archaeologist, General Cunningham.

On the fifth day after the birth of the prince, the king summoned eight wise men to choose a name for the child and to speak of the royal babe's future. He was named Siddhattha which means one whose purpose has been achieved. The Brahmins deliberated and seven of them held up two fingers each and declared: "O King, this prince will become a *Cakravarti*, universal monarch, should he deign to rule, but should he renounce the world, he will become a *Sammā-sam-buddha*, a Supremely Enlightened One, and deliver men from ignorance". But Kondañña, the wisest and the youngest, after watching the prince, held up only one finger and said: "O King, this prince will one day go in search of Truth and become a Supremely Enlightened Buddha."

Queen Mahamaya, the mother, passed away on the seventh day after the birth of her child, and the babe was nursed by his mother's sister Pajāpati Gotami. Though the child was nurtured till manhood in refinement amidst an abundance of material luxury, the father did not fail to give his son the education that a prince ought to receive. He became skilled in many a branch of knowledge, and in the arts of war easily excelled all others. Nevertheless from his childhood the prince was given to serious contemplation.

### **The Four Significant Visions**

When the prince grew up the father's fervent wish was that his son should marry, bring up a family, and be his worthy successor; for he often recalled to mind with dread

the prediction of the sage Kondañña, and feared that the prince would one day give up home for the homeless life of an ascetic. According to the custom of the time, at the early age of sixteen the prince was married to his cousin, the beautiful Princess Yasodharā, the only daughter of King Suppabuddha and Queen Pamita of the Koliyas. The princess was of the same age as the prince.

His father provided him with the greatest comforts. He had, so the story tells, three palaces, one for each of the Indian year's three seasons. Lacking nothing of the earthly joys of life, he lived amidst song and dance, in luxury and pleasure, knowing naught of sorrow. Yet all the efforts of the father to hold his son a prisoner to the senses and make him worldly-minded, were of no avail. King Suddhodana's endeavours to keep off life's miseries from his son's inquiring eyes only heightened Prince Siddhattha's curiosity and his resolute search for Truth and Enlightenment. With the advance of age and maturity, the prince began to glimpse the woes of the world.

On one occasion when the Prince went driving with his charioteer Channa to the Royal Gardens, he saw to his amazement what his eyes never beheld before: a man weakened with age, and in the last stage of ageing, crying out in a mournful voice:

“Help master! lift me to my feet; oh, help;  
Or I shall die before I reach my house”.<sup>1</sup>

This was the first shock the prince received. The second was the sight of a man mere skin and bones, supremely unhappy and forlorn, “smitten with some pes... the strength gone from ham and loin, and neck, and all the grace and joy of manhood fled”<sup>2</sup> On a third occasion he saw a band of lamenting kinsmen bearing on their shoulders the corpse of one beloved for cremation. These woeful signs, seen for the first time in his life, deeply moved him. From the charioteer he learned that even he, his beloved Princess Yasodhara, and his kith and kin, nay all without exception, are subject to ageing, disease and death.

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1. *The Light of Asia.*

2. *The Light of Asia.*



Soon after this the prince saw a recluse moving with measured steps and down-cast eyes, calm and serene, aloof and independent. He was struck by the serene countenance of the man. He learned from Channa that this recluse was one who had abandoned his home to live a life of purity, to seek Truth and answer the riddle of life. Thoughts of renunciation flashed through the prince's mind and in deep contemplation he turned homeward. The heart throb of an agonised and ailing humanity found a responsive echo in his own heart. The more he came in contact with the world outside his palace walls, the more convinced he became that the world was lacking in true happiness. But before reaching the palace he was met by a messenger with the news that a son had been born to Yasodhara. 'A fetter (Rāhula) is set upon me,' uttered the prince and returned to the palace.

## The Great Renunciation

In the silence of that moonlit night (it was the fullmoon day of July, Āsālha) such thoughts as these arose in him: 'Youth, the prime of life, ends in old age and man's senses fail him at a time when they are most needed. The hale and hearty lose their vigour and health when disease suddenly creeps in. Finally death comes, sudden perhaps and unexpected, and puts an end to this brief span of life. Surely there must be an escape from this unsatisfactoriness, from ageing and death'.

Thus the great intoxication of youth (*yobbana-mada*), of health (*ārogya-mada*) and of life (*jīvita-mada*) left him. Having seen the vanity and the danger of the three intoxications, he was overcome by a powerful urge to seek and win the Deathless, to strive for Deliverance from old age, illness, misery and death<sup>1</sup> to seek it for himself and for all beings (including his wife and child) that suffer. It was his deep compassion that led him to the quest ending in Enlightenment, in Buddhahood. It was compassion that now moved his heart towards the Great Renunciation and opened for him the doors of the golden cage of his home life. It was compassion that made his determination unshakable even by the last parting glance on his beloved wife asleep with the babe in her arms.

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1. *Anguttara Nikaya*, i. 146, sutta 38.



Thus at the age of twenty-nine, in the flower of youthful manhood, on the day his beautiful Yasodhara had given birth to his only son, Rahula, he tore himself away, renounced wife, child, father and a crown that held the promise of power and glory.

Now the *Bodhisatta*<sup>1</sup> (as he is known before he attained Enlightenment) in the garb of an ascetic retreated into forest solitude to seek a solution to those problems of life that had so deeply stirred his mind. His quest of the supreme security from bondage—*Nibbāna* (*nirvāna*) had begun. This was the great renunciation.

First he sought guidance from two famous sages, from *Ālāra Kālāma* and Uddaka Rāmaputta, hoping that they, being masters of meditation, would teach him all they knew, leading him to the heights of concentrative thought. He practised concentration and reached the highest meditative attainments possible thereby, but was not satisfied with anything short of Supreme Enlightenment. These teachers' range of knowledge, their ambit of mystical experience, however, was insufficient to grant him what he so earnestly sought, and he saw himself still far from his goal. Though both sages, in turn, asked him to stay and succeed them as the teacher of their following, the Ascetic Gotama, declined. Paying obeisance to them, he left them in search of the still unknown.

In his wanderings he finally reached Uruvela, by the river Neranjarā at Gayā. He was attracted by its quiet and dense groves and the clear waters of the river. Nearby was a village of simple folk where he could get his alms.

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1. A *Bodhisatta* (Skt. *Bodhisattva*) is one who adheres to or is bent on (*satta*) the ideal of enlightenment, or knowledge of the four noble Truths (*bodhi*). In this sense, the term may be applied to anyone who is bent on enlightenment. But it is specially applied to an aspirant for full enlightenment (*samma-sam-bodhi*). A *Bodhisatta* fully cultivates ten perfections or *parami* which are essential qualities of extremely high standard initiated by compassion, and ever tinged with understanding or quick wit, free from craving, pride and false views (*tanha*, *diṭṭhi* and *mana*) that qualify an aspirant for Buddhahood. They are: *dana*, *sila*, *nekkhamma*, *panna*, *virīya*, *khanti*, *sacca*, *adhiṭṭhana*, *metta* and *upekkha*—generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, effort, forbearance, truthfulness, determination, lovingkindness and equanimity.

Finding that this was a suitable place to continue his quest for Enlightenment, he decided to stay. Soon five other ascetics who admired his determined effort joined him. They were *Kondañña*, *Bhaddiya*, *Vappa*, *Mahānāma* and *Assaji*.

## Self-mortification

There was, and still is, a belief in India among many of her ascetics that purification and final deliverance can be achieved by rigorous self-mortification, and the ascetic Gotama decided to test the truth of it. And so there at Uruvela he began a determined struggle to subdue his body, in the hope that his mind, set free from the shackles of the body, might be able to soar to the heights of liberation. Most zealous was he in these practices. He lived on leaves and roots, on a steadily reduced pittance of food; he wore rags from dust heaps; he slept among corpses or on beds of thorns. The utter paucity of nourishment left him a physical wreck. Says the Master: 'Rigorous have I been in my ascetic discipline. Rigorous have I been beyond all others. Like wasted, withered reeds became all my limbs...' In such words as these, in later years, having attained to full Enlightenment, did the Buddha give his disciples an awe-inspiring description of his early penances.<sup>1</sup>

Struggling thus for six long years, he came to death's very door, but he found himself no nearer to his goal. The utter futility of self-mortification became abundantly clear to him by his own experience. Undiscouraged, his still active mind searched for new paths to the aspired for goal. He felt however, that, with a body so utterly weakened as his, he could not follow that path with any chance of success. Thus he abandoned self-torture and extreme fasting and took normal food.

His emaciated body recovered its former health and his exhausted vigour soon returned. Now his five companions left him in their disappointment; for they thought that he had given up the effort and had resumed a life of abundance.

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1. For a detailed account see *Majjhima-Nikaya*, No. 36, translation by I. B. Horner in *the Middle Length Sayings*, vol. I. (Pali Text Society). See also Bodhi Leaves No. A7 *The Master's Quest for Light* by R. Abeysekera (Buddhist Publication Society).

Nevertheless with firm determination and complete faith in his own purity and strength, unaided by any teacher, accompanied by none, the Bodhisatta resolved to make his final effort in complete solitude.

On the forenoon of the day before his Enlightenment whilst the Bodhisatta was seated in meditation, Sujātā, the daughter of a rich householder, not knowing whether the ascetic was divine or human, offered milk rice to him saying: 'Lord, may your aspirations be crowned with success!' This was his last meal prior to his Enlightenment.

### The Final Triumph

Crosslegged he sat under a tree, which later became known as the *Bodhi* tree, the 'Tree of Enlightenment' or 'Tree of Wisdom', on the bank of the river Nerañjarā, at *Gayā* (now known as *Buddhagayā*), making the final effort with the inflexible resolution: 'Though only my skin, sinews and bones remain, and my blood and flesh dry up and wither away, yet will I never stir from this seat until I have attained full Enlightenment (*sammā-sam-bodhi*)'. So indefatigable in effort, so unflagging in his devotion was he, and so resolute to realize Truth and attain full Enlightenment.

Applying himself to the 'Mindfulness on in-and-out breathing' (*ānā-pāna sati*), the Bodhisatta entered upon and dwelt in the first meditative absorption (*jhāna*, skt. *dhyāna*, a term difficult to translate). By gradual stages he entered upon and dwelt in the second, third and the fourth *jhānas*. Thus cleansing his mind of impurities, with the mind thus composed, he directed it to the knowledge of recollecting past births (*pubbenivāsānussatiñāna*). This was the *first* knowledge attained by him in the first watch of the night (6 p.m. to 10 p.m.) Then the Bodhisatta directed his mind to the knowledge of the disappearing and reappearing of beings of varied forms, in good states of experience, and in states of woe, each faring according to his deeds (*cuti-upapātañāna*). This was the *second* knowledge attained by him in the middle watch of the night (10 p.m. to 2 a.m.). Next he directed his mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the taints (*āsavakkhayañāna*)<sup>1</sup>

He understood as it really is:

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1. *Majjhima Nikaya*, No. 36: *Maha Saccaka Sutta*.



‘This is suffering (*dukkha*), this is the arising of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering. He understood as it really is: These are taints (*āsavas*); this is the arising of taints, this is the cessation of taints, this is the path leading to the cessation of taints.

Knowing thus, seeing thus, his mind was liberated from the taints: of sense pleasures (*kāmāsava*), of becoming (*bhavāsava*), and of ignorance (*avijjāsava*)<sup>1</sup>. When his mind was thus liberated, there came the knowledge: ‘liberated’ and he understood:

Destroyed is birth, the noble life (*brahma cariyam*) has been lived, done is what was to be done, there is no more of this to come (meaning, there is no more continuity of the mind and body, that is no more becoming, rebirth). This was the *third* knowledge attained by him in the last watch of the night (2 a.m. to 6 a.m.). This is known as *te-vijjā* (skt. *tri-vidyā*,) three-fold knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

Thereupon he spoke these words of victory:

‘Seeking but not finding the House Builder,  
I hurried through the round of many births:  
Painful is birth ever and again.  
O House Builder, you have been seen;  
You shall not build the house again.  
Your rafters have been broken up,  
Your ridge pole is demolished too.  
My mind has now attained the unformed Nibbana  
And reached the end of every sort of craving.’<sup>3</sup>

Thus did the Bodhisatta Gotama on another full moon of May, at the age of thirty-five, attain Supreme Enlightenment, by comprehending in all their fulness, the Four Noble Truths, the Eternal Verities, and become the Buddha, the great Healer and Consummate Master-Physician who can cure the ills of beings.

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1. Elsewhere we see the taint of false view (*ditthasava*) added to these as the fourth taint.

2. *Majjhima* 36

3. Translation by Nanamoli Thera.

One of the noteworthy characteristics that distinguish the Buddha from all other religious teachers is that he was a human being having no connection whatsoever with a God or any other 'Supernatural' Being. He was neither God nor an incarnation of God, nor any mythological figure. He was a man, but a super-man, an extraordinary man (*acchariya manussa*). All his achievements and attainments he attributed to human effort and human intelligence. Through personal experience he understood the supremacy of man.

Depending on his own unremitting energy, unaided by any teacher, human or divine, he achieved the highest mental and intellectual attainments; reached the acme of purity, and was perfect in the best qualities of human nature. He was an embodiment of compassion and wisdom, which became the two guiding principles in his Dispensation (*sāsana*).

The Buddha never claimed to be a saviour who tried to save 'souls' by means of a revealed religion. Through his own perseverance and understanding he proved that infinite potentialities are latent in man and that it must be man's endeavour to develop and unfold these possibilities. He proved by his own experience that Enlightenment and Deliverance lie fully within man's range of effort.

It was the Buddha who for the first time in the world's history taught that deliverance could be attained independently of an external agency, that deliverance from suffering must be wrought and fashioned by each one for himself upon the anvil of his own actions.

None can grant deliverance to another who merely begs for it. Others may lend us a helping hand by guidance and instruction and in other ways, but the highest freedom is attained only through self-realization and self-awakening to Truth and not through prayers and petitions to a Supreme Being, human or divine. The Buddha warns his disciples against shifting the burden to an external agency, directs them to the ways of discrimination and research, and urges them to get busy with the real task of developing their inner forces and qualities.

## Dependent Arising

For a week, immediately after the Enlightenment, the Buddha sat at the foot of the Bodhi Tree, experiencing the supreme bliss of Emancipation. At the end of the seven days he emerged from that concentration (*samādhī*) and in the first watch of that night thought over the Dependent Arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*) in direct order thus:

‘When this is, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises; namely: dependent on ignorance, volitional or karma formations; dependent on volitional formations, (rebirth) consciousness; dependent on consciousness, mentality-materiality (mental and physical combination); dependent on mentality-materiality, the six-fold base (the five physical sense organs with consciousness as the sixth); dependent on six-fold base, contact; dependent on contact, feeling; dependent on feeling, craving; dependent on craving, clinging; dependent on clinging, process of becoming; dependent on the process of becoming, there come to be ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. Thus does this whole mass of *dukkha* or suffering arise’.

In the second watch of the night, the Buddha thought over the Dependent Arising in reverse order thus: ‘When this is not, that does not come to be, with the cessation of this, that ceases; namely: with the utter cessation of ignorance, the cessation of volitional formations; with the cessation of formations, the cessation of consciousness... (and so on). Thus does this whole mass of suffering cease’.

In the third watch of the night, the Buddha thought over the Dependent Arising both in direct order and reverse order thus:

‘When this is that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises; when this is not, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases; namely: dependent on ignorance, volitional formations... (and so on). Thus does this whole mass of suffering arise. With the utter cessation of ignorance, the cessation of volitional formations... (and so on). Thus does this whole mass of suffering cease’.<sup>1</sup>

1. *Udana*, p. 1. See Wheel No. 15: *Dependent Origination* — Piyadassi Thera.



The Buddha now spent six more weeks in lonely retreat at six different spots in the vicinity of the Bodhi Tree. At the end of this period two merchants, Tapassu and Bhallika, who were passing that way, offered rice cake and honey to the Master, and said: 'We go for refuge to the Buddha and to the Dhamma.<sup>1</sup> Let the Blessed One receive us as his followers'.<sup>2</sup> They became his first lay followers(*upāsakas*).

### The First Sermon

Now while the Blessed One dwelt in solitude this thought occurred to him:

'The dhamma I have realized is deep, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, beyond mere reasoning, subtle, and intelligible to the wise. But this generation delights, revels and rejoices in sensual pleasures. It is hard for such a generation to see this Conditionality this Dependent Arising. Hard too, is it to see this calming of all conditioned things, the giving up of all substance of becoming, the extinction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbana. And if I were to teach the Dhamma and others were not to understand me, that would be a weariness, a vexation for me'.<sup>3</sup>

Pondering thus he was first reluctant to teach the dhamma, but on surveying the world, with his mental eye he saw beings with little dust on their eyes, and with much dust on their eyes, with keen faculties and dull faculties, with good qualities and bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach, some who are alive to the perils hereafter of present wrong-doings, and some who are not. The Master then declared his readiness to proclaim the Dhamma in this solemn utterance:

*'Apārutā tesam amatassa dvārā  
Ye sotavanto pamuncantu saddham.'*

'Open are the doors of the Deathless.  
Let them that have ears repose trust'.<sup>4</sup>

When considering to whom he should teach the dhamma first, he thought of Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta, his teachers of old; for he knew that they were wise and

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1. At this time, there was yet no Order (*Sangha*).

2. *Mahavagga (Vinaya)*.

3. *Majjhima-Nikaya*, No. 26.

4. *Ibid.*

discerning. But that was not to be; they had passed away. Then the Blessed One made up his mind to make known the Truth to those five ascetics, his former friends, still steeped in the fruitless rigours of extreme asceticism. Knowing that they were living at Benares in the deer Park at Isipatana, the Resort of Seers (modern Sarnath), the Blessed One left Gaya for distant Benares walking by stages, some 150 miles. On the way not far from Gaya the Buddha was met by Upaka, an ascetic who, struck by the serene appearance of the Master, inquired: 'Who is thy teacher? Whose teaching do you profess?'

The Buddha replied: 'I have no teacher, one like me does not exist in all the world. For I am the peerless teacher, the Arahāt, I alone am supremely enlightened. Quenching all cankers, Nibbana's calm have I attained. I go to the city of Kāsi (Benares) to set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma. In a world where blindness reigns I shall beat the Deathless Drum'.

'Friend, you then claim you are a universal victor', said Upaka. The Buddha replied; 'Those who have attained the cessation of cankers, they are, indeed, victors like me. All evil have I vanquished. Hence I am a victor'.

Upaka shook his head, remarking sarcastically, 'It may be so, friend', and took a by-path. The Buddha continued his journey, and in gradual stages reached the deer sanctuary at Isipatana. The five ascetics seeing the Buddha from afar discussed among themselves: 'Friends, here comes the ascetic Gotama who gave up the struggle and turned to a life of abundance and luxury. Let us make no kind of salutation to him'. But when the Buddha approached them, they were struck by his dignified presence and they failed in their resolve. One went to meet him and took his alms bowl and robe; another prepared a seat, still another brought him water. The Buddha sat on the seat prepared for him, and the five ascetics then addressed him by name and greeted him as an equal, saying, '*āvuso*' (friend).

The Buddha said, 'Address not the Perfect One (Tathāgata) by the word '*āvuso*'. The Tathāgata, monks, is an Accomplished One (*Arahāt*), a Supremely Enli-

ghtened One is he. Give ear, monks, the Deathless has been attained. I shall instruct you, I shall teach you the dhamma; following my teaching you will know and realize for yourselves even in this life time that supreme goal of purity for the sake of which clansmen retire from home to follow the homeless life'. Thereupon the five monks said: 'Friend Gotama, even with the stern austerities, penances and self-torture you practised, you failed to attain the superhuman vision and insight. Now that you are living a life of luxury, self-indulgence, and have given up the struggle, how could you have reached superhuman vision and insight?'.

Then replied the Buddha: 'The Tathāgata has not ceased from effort and reverted to a life of luxury and abundance. The Tathāgata is a Supremely Enlightened One. Give ear, monks, the Deathless has been attained. I shall instruct you. I shall teach you the dhamma.'

A second time the monks said the same thing to the Buddha who gave the same answer a second time. A third time did they repeat the same question. In spite of the assurance given by the Master, they did not change their attitude. Then the Buddha spoke to them thus: '*Confess, O monks, did ever I speak to you in this wise before?*' Touched by this appeal of the Blessed One, the five ascetics submitted and acknowledged and said: 'Nay, indeed, Lord'. Thus did the Supreme Sage, the Tamed One, tame the hearts of the five ascetics with patience and kindness, with wisdom and skill. Overcome and convinced by his utterances the monks indicated their readiness to listen to him.

## The Middle Path

Now on a full moon day of July, 528 years before Christ, in the evening, at the moment the sun was setting, and the full moon was simultaneously rising, in the shady deer park at Isipatana (modern Sarnath), the Buddha addressed them:

'Monks, these two extremes ought not to be cultivated by the recluse. What two? Sensual indulgence which is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, and conducive to harm; and self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and conducive to harm. The Middle Path, monks, understood by the Tathāgata, avoiding the extremes, gives vision and



knowledge, and leads to calm, realisation, enlightenment and Nibbana. And what, monks, is that Middle Path? It is this Noble Eightfold Path, namely:

*Right Understanding*  
*Right Thoughts*  
*Right Speech*  
*Right Action*  
*Right Livelihood*  
*Right Effort*  
*Right Mindfulness*  
*Right Concentration*

Then the Buddha explained to them the Four Noble Truths: The Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Arising of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering and the Noble Truth of the Way leading to the Cessation of Suffering.<sup>1</sup>

Thus did the Supreme Buddha proclaim the Truth and set in motion the Wheel of the Dhamma (*dhamma-cakka-pavattana*). This first discourse, this Message of the Deer Park, is the core of the Buddha's Teaching. As the foot print of every creature that walks the earth could be included in the elephant's foot print which is pre-eminent for size, so does the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths embrace the entire teaching of the Buddha.

Explaining each of the Four Noble Truths, the Master said, 'Such, monks, was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me, that I gained about things not heard before. As long as, monks, my intuitive knowledge, my vision in regard to these four Noble Truths was not absolutely clear to me, I did not claim that I had gained the incomparable supreme enlightenment. But when, monks, my intuitive knowledge, my vision, in regard to these four Noble Truths was absolutely clear to me, then only did I claim that I had gained the incomparable Supreme Enlightenment. And there arose in me insight and vision:

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1. For a very comprehensive explanation of these Truths see *The Buddha's Ancient Path* by the present writer, (Rider & Co. London); further The Wheel No. 17: *Three Cardinal Discourses* by Nanamoli Thera; Nos. 34/35, *The Four Noble Truths* by Francis Story; Nyana-tiloka, *The Word of the Buddha*.

unshakable is the deliverance of my mind (*akuppā me ceto vimutti*) this is my last birth, there is no more becoming (rebirth)' <sup>1</sup>

Thus spoke the Buddha, and the five monks, glad at heart, applauded the words of the Blessed One.

### The Sinsapa Grove

The supremacy of the four Noble Truths in the teaching of the Buddha is abundantly clear from the message of the sinsapa grove as from the message of the deer park:

Once the Blessed One was living at Kosambi (near Allahabad) in the sinsapa grove. Then gathering a few sinsapa leaves in his hand, the Blessed One addressed the monks:

— What do you think, monks, which is greater in quantity, the handful of sinsapa leaves gathered by me or what is in the forest overhead?

— Not many, trifling, Venerable Sir, are the leaves in the handful gathered by the Blessed One, many are the leaves in the forest overhead.

— Even so, monks, many are those things I have fully realized, but not declared unto you; few are the things I have declared unto you. And why, monks, have I not declared them? They, monks, are not useful, are not essential to the life of purity, they do not lead to disgust, to dispassion, to cessation, to tranquillity, to full understanding, to full enlightenment, to Nibbana. That is why, monks, they are not declared by me.

And what is it, monks, that I have declared?

This is suffering (*dukkha*) — this have I declared.

This is the arising of suffering — this have I declared.

This is the cessation of suffering — this have I declared.

This is the path leading to the cessation of suffering— this have I declared.

And why, monks, have I declared these truths?

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1. *Dhamma-cakka-pavattana Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya*, v. 420.

They are, indeed, useful, are essential to the life of purity, they lead to disgust, to dispassion, to cessation, to tranquillity, to full understanding, to enlightenment, to Nibbana. That is why, monks, they are declared by me. Therefore, monks, an effort should be made to realize: This is suffering, this is the arising of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.<sup>1</sup>

The Buddha has emphatically said: 'One thing do I make known: suffering, and the cessation of suffering (*dukkhamceva paññapemi, dukkhassa ca nirodham*)'<sup>2</sup>. To understand this unequivocal saying is to understand Buddhism; for the entire teaching of the Buddha is nothing else than the application of this one principle. It seems to me that what can be called the discovery of a Buddha, is just these Four Truths. This is the typical teaching of the Buddhas of all ages.

## The Peerless Physician

The Buddha is also known as the peerless physician (*bhisakko*), the supreme surgeon (*sallakatto anuttaro*). He, indeed, is an unrivalled healer.

The Buddha's method of exposition of the Four Truths is comparable to that of a physician. As a physician, he first diagnosed the illness, next he discovered the cause or the arising of the illness; then considered its removal, and lastly applied the remedy.

Suffering (*dukkha*) is the illness; craving (*tanhā*) is the arising or the root cause of the illness (*samudaya*), through the removal of craving, the illness is removed, and that is the cure (*nirodha*—*nibbāna*); the Noble Eightfold Path (*maggā*) is the remedy.

The Buddha's reply to a brahmin who wished to know why the Master is called a Buddha, clearly indicates that it was for no other reason than a perfect knowledge of the four Noble Truths. Here is the Buddha's reply:

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1. *Samyutta Nikaya*, v. 437  
 2. *Majjhima Nikaya*, No. 22



‘I knew what should be known, what should  
Be cultivated I have cultivated,  
What should be abandoned that have I let go,  
Hence, O brahmin, I am Buddha-the Awakened One.’<sup>1</sup>

With the proclamation of the dhamma for the first time, with the setting in motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma (*dhamma-cakka-pavattana*), and with the conversion of the five ascetics, the Deer Park at Isipatana became the birth place of the Buddha’s Dispensation (*sāsana*) and of his Community of Monks (*sangha*).<sup>2</sup>

## The Spread Of The Dhamma

Thereafter the Buddha spent the *Vassa*,<sup>3</sup> at the deer park at Isipatana, sacred this day to over six hundred millions of the human race. During these three months of ‘Rains’ fifty others headed by Yasa, a young man of wealth, joined the Order. Now the Buddha had sixty disciples, all Arahats who had realized the Dhamma and were fully competent to teach others. When the rainy season ended, the Master addressed his immediate disciples in these words:

‘Released am I, monks, from all ties whether human or divine. You also are delivered from fetters whether human or divine. Go now and wander for the welfare and happiness

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1. *Sutta-nipata*, verse 558. *Majjhima*, *Sutta* 92; *Vinaya*, i. 245; *Theragatha*, 828.

2. Emperor Asoka came on pilgrimage to this holy spot and caused a series of monuments and a commemorative pillar with the lion capital to be erected. This capital with its four magnificent lions upholding the *Dharma-cakra*, ‘the Wheel of *Dharma*’, now stands in the museum of Sarnath, Benares, and is to-day the official crest of India. The *Dharma-Cakra* festival is still kept in Ceylon.

Jawaharlal Nehru writes: ‘At Sarnath near Benares, I would almost see the Buddha preaching his first sermon, and some of his recorded words would come like a distant echo to me through two thousand five hundred years. Asoka’s pillars of stone with their inscriptions would speak to me in their magnificent language and tell me of a man who, though an emperor, was greater than any king or emperor.’ *The Discovery of India* (The Signet Press, Calcutta), p. 44.

3. The ‘Rains’ or retreat, is the three months of seclusion during the rainy season, i.e. from July to October, in India.

of many, out of compassion for the world, for the gain, welfare and happiness of gods and men. Let not two of you proceed in the same direction. Proclaim the dhamma that is excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle and excellent in the end, possessed of meaning and the letter and utterly perfect. Proclaim the life of purity, and holy life consummate and pure. There are beings with little dust in their eyes who will be lost through not hearing the dhamma, there are beings who will understand the dhamma, I also shall go to Uruvela, to Senanigama, to teach the dhamma.’<sup>1</sup>

Thus did the Buddha commence his sublime mission, which lasted to the end of his life. With his disciples he walked the highways and byways of India enfolding all within the aura of his boundless compassion and wisdom. Though the Order of Monks began its career with sixty bhikkhus, it expanded soon into thousands, and, as a result of the increasing number of monks, many monasteries came into being, and in later times monastic Indian universities like Nālandā, Vikramasilā, Jagaddalā, Vikramapuri and Odantapuri, became cultural centres which gradually influenced the whole of Asia, and through it the mental life of mankind.

After a successful ministry of forty five years the Buddha passed away at the age of eighty at the Sala Grove of the Mallas at Kusinara (in modern Uttara Pradesh about 120 miles north-east of Benares)<sup>2</sup> With a final admonition to his followers (see p. 45).

## **The Buddha's Ministry**

During his long ministry of forty-five years the Buddha walked widely throughout the Northern Districts of India. But during the vassa, he generally stayed in one place.

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1. Vinaya Mahavagga, Khandaka.

2. In a way, it is interesting to note that this greatest of Indian Rishis (seers) was born under a tree in a park, attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree (the south branch of which brought by Sanghamitta, the Arahāt Therī, daughter of Asoka the Great of India, 3rd century B.C., still flourishes at Anuradhapura, Ceylon, and is the oldest recorded tree in the world), set in motion the ‘Wheel of Dhamma’ at the deer park under trees, and finally passed away under the twin sala trees. He spent most of his time in the open in forests and in villages of India.

Here follows a brief sketch of his retreats gathered from the texts:

*1st year: Bārānasi (Benares)* — After the first proclamation of the Dhamma on the full moon day of July, the Buddha spent the first *vassa* at Isipatana.

*The 2nd, 3rd and 4th years: Rājagaha*—(in the bamboo grove, Veluvana). It was during the third year that Sudatta, a householder of Sāvattthi known for his bounty as Anāthapindika, the feeder of the forlorn, having heard that a Buddha has come into being, went in search of him, listened to him and having gained confidence (*saddhā*) in the *Teacher*, the *Teaching* and the *Taught* (*the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha*) attained the first stage of sainthood (*sotāpatti*). He was renowned as the chief supporter (*dāyaka*) of the Master. Anāthapindika caused to build the famous Jetavana monastery at Savatthi, known today as Sahet-mahet, and offered it to the Buddha and his disciples. The ruins of this monastery are still to be seen.

*5th year: Vesāli*—The Buddha kept retreat in the Pinnacled Hall (*kūtāgārasālā*). It was at this time that King Suddhodana fell ill. The Master visited him, and preached the Dhamma hearing which the king attained perfect sanctity (*arahatta*), and enjoying the bliss of emancipation for seven days, passed away. The Order of Nuns was also founded during this time (see p. 33).

*6th year: Mankula Hill*—Here the Buddha performed the 'Twin Wonder' (*yamaka pāṭihāriya*), He did the same, for the first time, at Kapilavatthu to overcome the pride of the Sakyas, his relatives.

*7th year: Tāvātimsa*—(the heaven of the thirty three). Here the Buddha preached the Abhidhamma or the Higher Doctrine to the deities (*devas*) headed by his mother deva, *Mahāmāyā*, who passed away seven days after the birth of Prince Siddhattha, and was reborn as a deva in the Tavatimsa.

*8th year: Bhesakalā forest*—(near Sumsumāragiri). It was here that Nakulupitā and his wife, a genial couple, came to see the Buddha, told him about their very happy married life and expressed the wish that they might continue to live together both here and hereafter. These two were placed by the Buddha as chief of those that win confidence.

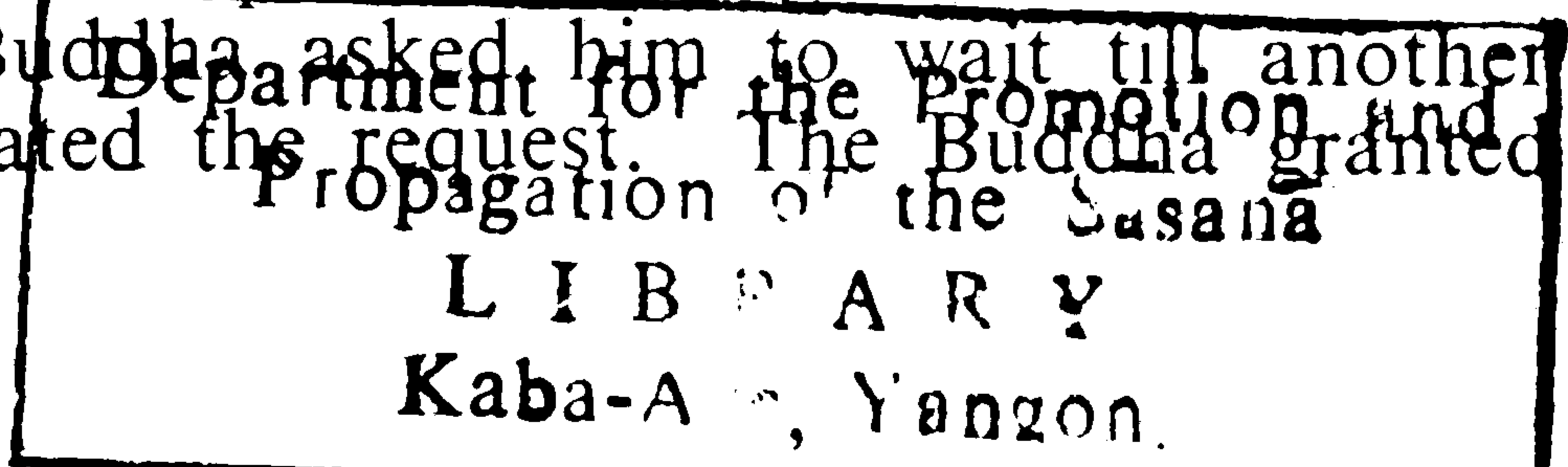
9th year: *Kosambi*—at the Ghosita Monastery.

10th year: *Pārileyyaka forest*—It was in the tenth year that, at Kosambi, a dispute arose between two parties of monks owing to a trivial offence committed by a monk. As they could not be reconciled, and did not pay heed to his exhortation, the Buddha retired to the forest. At the end of the *vassa*, their dispute settled, the monks came to *Sāvatthi* and begged pardon of the Buddha.

11th year: *Village of Ekanāla*—(in the Magadha country). It was here that the Buddha met the brahmin farmer Kasibhāradvāja who spoke to the Buddha somewhat discourteously. The Buddha, however, answered his questions with his characteristic sobriety. Bhāradvāja became an ardent follower of the Buddha. It was on this occasion that the very interesting discourse, *Kasibhāradvāja sutta* (*Sutta-nipāta*) was delivered.

12 year: *Veranjā*—The introduction of the Vinaya is attributed to the twelfth year. It was also during this retreat that the brahmin Veranja came to see the Buddha, asked a series of questions on Buddhist practices, and being satisfied with the answers, became a follower of the Blessed One, and invited him and the Sangha to spend the *vassa* at his village Veranjā. At that time there was a famine. The Buddha and his disciples had to be satisfied with very coarse food supplied by horse merchants. As it was the custom of the Buddha to take leave of the inviter before setting out on his journeying, he saw the brahmin at the end of the *vassa*. The latter admitted that though he had invited the Buddha and his disciples to spend the retreat at Veranjā, he had failed in his duties towards them during the entire season due to his being taxed with household duties. However, the next day he offered food and gifts of robes to the Buddha and the Sangha.

13th year: *Cāliya Rock*—(near the city of Cālikā). During this time the elder Meghiya was his personal attendant. The elder being attracted by a beautiful mango-grove near a river asked the Buddha for permission to go there for meditation. Though the Buddha asked him to wait till another monk came, he repeated the request. The Buddha granted





him permission. The elder went, but to his great surprise he was oppressed by thoughts of sense-pleasures, ill-will and harm, and returned disappointed. Thereon the Buddha said: 'Meghiya, for the deliverance of the mind of the immature five things are conducive to their maturing: 1. a good friend; 2. virtuous behaviour guided by the essential precepts for training; 3. good counsel tending to dispassion, calm, cessation, enlightenment and Nibbāna; 4. the effort to abandon evil thoughts and acquire wholesome thoughts; and 5. the acquiring of wisdom that discerns the rise and fall of things'.<sup>1</sup> (This preliminary training, as explained by the Master, is necessary for a monk who is bent on practising the higher stages of meditation).

14th year: *Jetavana monastery, Sāvattthi*—During this time the Venerable Rāhula who was still a novice (*sāmanera*) received higher ordination (*upasampadā*). According to Vinaya, higher ordination is not conferred before the age of twenty, Ven. Rāhula had then reached that age.

15th year: *Kapilavatthu*—(the birth place of prince Siddhattha). It was in this year that the death occurred of King Suppabuddha, the father of Yasodhara.

16th year: *City of Ālavi*—During this year Ālavaka, the demon who devoured human flesh, was tamed by the Buddha. He became a follower of the Buddha. For Ālavaka's questions and the Master's answers read *Ālavaka Sutta*, in the *Sutta-nipāta*.

17th year: *Rājagaha*, at Veluvana Monastery.

During this time a well known courtesan, Sirimā, sister of Jivaka, the physician, died. The Buddha attended the funeral, and asked the king to inform the people to buy the dead body—the body that attracted so many when she was

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1. The whole of this discourse is at *Anguttara* iv. 354; *Udana* p. 34 and in brief at *Dhammapada Commentary*, i. 287. The Elder's verse (66) in *Theragatha*. It is said that the Venerable Meghiya was of a Sakyan raja's family. 'The *Dhammapada* verses (33, 34) are as follows: 'The unsteady fickle mind, hard to guard and hard to control, the wise man straightens even as a fletcher, an arrow.'

'Like a fish jerked out of its watery abode and cast on land, this mind quakes, (therefore) the realm of Mara (passions) should be abandoned.'

alive. No one cared to have it even without paying a price. On that occasion addressing the crowd the Buddha said in verse:

‘Behold this painted image, a body full of wounds, put together, diseased, the object of thought of many, in which there is neither permanence nor stability.’ (*Dhammapada*, 147).

18th year: *Cāliya rock*—During this time a young weaver’s daughter met the Buddha and listened to his discourse on mindfulness of death (*maranānussati*). On another occasion she answered correctly all the four questions put to her by the Master, because she often pondered over the words of the Buddha. Her answers were philosophical, and the congregation who had not given a thought to the Buddha-word, could not grasp the meaning of her answers. The Buddha, however, praised her and addressed them in verse thus:

*‘Blinded is this world; Few here clearly see. Like a bird that escape from the net only a few go to a good state of existence. (Dhammapada, 174).*

She heard the Dhamma and attained the first stage of sanctity (*sotāpatti*). But unfortunately she died an untimely death. (For a detailed account of this interesting story, and the questions and answers, see the Commentary on the *Dhammapada*, vol. iii, p. 170, or Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, Part 3, p. 14.)

19th year: *Cāliya rock*:

20th year: *Rājagaha*, at Veluvana Monastery.

From the 21st year till the 43rd year: *Sāvatthi*.

Of these twenty four vassas, eighteen were spent at Jetavana Monastery. The rest at Pubbārāma. Anāthapindika and Visākhā were the chief supporters.

44th year: *Beluva*—(a small village, probably situated near Vesāli), where the Buddha suppressed, by force of will, a grave illness (see p. 42).

In the 45<sup>th</sup> year of his enlightenment, the Buddha passed away at Kusinārā in the month of May (*vesākha*) before the commencement of the rains.

During the first twenty years of the Buddha's life, the bhikkhus: Nāgasamāla, Nāgita, Upavāna, Sunakkhatta, Sāgata, Rādha and Meghiya and the novice (*sāmanera*) Cunda attended upon the Master though not regularly. However, after the twentieth year, the Buddha wished to have a regular attendant. There on all the great eighty Arahats, like Sāriputta and Moggallāna, expressed their willingness to attend upon their Master. But it did not meet with his approval. Perhaps the Buddha thought that these Arahats could be of greater service to mankind.

Then the elders requested Ananda Thera, who had kept silent all this while, to beg of the Master to be his attendant. Ananda Thera's answer is interesting: he said, 'if the Master is willing to have me as his attendant, he will speak'. Then the Buddha said: 'Ananda, let not others persuade you. You on your own may attend upon me'.

### **Buddhahood and Saintship**

Perfect Enlightenment, the discovery and realization of the Four Noble Truths (Buddhahood), is not the prerogative of a single being chosen by Divine Providence; nor is it a unique and unrepeatable event in human history. It is an achievement open to anyone who earnestly strives for perfect purity and wisdom, and with inflexible will cultivates the *pārami*,<sup>1</sup> the Perfections which are the requisites of Buddhahood, and the Noble Eightfold Path. There have been Buddhas in the dim past and there will be Buddhas in the future when necessity arises and conditions are favourable. But we need not think of that distant future; now, in our present days, the "doors to the Deathless" are still wide open. Those who enter through them, reaching perfect sanctity (*Arahatta*), the final liberation from suffering (*Nibbāna*), have been solemnly declared by the Buddha to be his equals as far as the emancipation from defilements and ultimate deliverance is concerned:

‘Victors like me are they, indeed,  
They who have won defilements’ end.<sup>2</sup>

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1. for *parami* see above p. 6, n. 1

2. *Ariya-pariyesana sutta* (*Majjhima*, 26).

The Buddha, however, also made clear to his disciples the difference between a fully Enlightened One and the Arahats, <sup>1</sup> the Accomplished Saints:

‘The Tathāgata, O disciples, while being an Arahata, is fully Enlightened. It is he who proclaims a path not proclaimed before; he is the knower of a path, who understands a path, who is skilled in a Path. And now his disciples are wayfarers who follow in his footsteps. That, disciples, is the distinction, the specific feature which distinguishes the Tathāgata, who being an Arahata, is fully Enlightened, from the disciple who is freed by insight.’<sup>2</sup>

### **Salient Features of the Dhamma**

The Master disapproved of those who professed to have ‘secret doctrines,’ saying, ‘Secrecy is the hall-mark of false doctrines.’ Addressing the Thera Ananda, the Master said: ‘I have taught the dhamma, Ananda, without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrine; for in respect of the truths, Ananda, the Tathāgata has no such thing as the closed fist of a teacher, who hides some essential knowledge from the pupil.’<sup>3</sup>

Driven by universal love and compassion, the Buddha expounded his teaching without keeping back aught that was essential for man’s deliverance from the shackles of samsāra, repeated wandering.

The Buddha’s teaching from beginning to end is open to all those who have eyes to see, and a mind to understand, and Buddhism was never forced upon anyone at the point of the gun or the bayonet. Conversion by compulsion was unknown amongst Buddhists and repugnant to the Buddha.

Of the Buddha’s creed of compassion, H. Fielding Hall writes in *‘The Soul of a People’*, ‘There can never be a war of Buddhism. No ravished country has ever borne witness to the prowess of the followers of the Buddha; no murdered

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1. The word is applied only to those who have fully destroyed the taints. In this sense the Buddha was the first Arahata in the world as he himself revealed to Upaka (see above, p. 13).

2. *Samyutta III.* 66.

3. *Maha-parinibbana Sutta* (*Dīgha nikaya*, 16).



men have poured out their blood on their hearth-stones, killed in his name; no ruined women have cursed his name to high heaven. He and his faith are clean of the stain of blood. He was the preacher of the Great Peace, of love, of charity, of compassion, and so clear is his teaching that it can never be misunderstood.'

'Buddhism,' observes Rev. Joseph Wain, 'taught a life not by rule, but by principle, a life of beauty; and as a consequence, it was a religion of tolerance. It was the most charitable system under the sun. Never and nowhere had blood been shed for its propagation. It had never persecuted or maltreated those whose beliefs were different—a lesson that Christianity has yet to learn. The Buddha taught men to beautify today, and to sanctify the now.'

When communicating the dhamma to his disciples, the Master made no distinctions whatsoever amongst them; for there were no specially chosen favourite disciples. Amongst his disciples, all those who were Arahats, who were passion-free and had shed the fetters binding to renewed existence, had equally perfected themselves in purity. But there were some outstanding ones who were skilled in different branches of knowledge and practice, and because of their mental endowments, they gained positions of distinction; but special favours were never granted to anyone by the Master. Upāli, for instance, who came from a barber's family was made the chief in matters of discipline (*vinaya*) in preference to many Arahats who belonged to the class of the nobles and warriors (*kshatriya*). Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna, brahmins by birth, because of their long-standing aspirations in former lives, became the chief disciples of the Buddha. The former excelled in wisdom (*paññā*) and the latter in supernormal powers (*iddhi*).

The Buddha never wished to extract from his disciples blind and submissive faith in him or his teachings. He always insisted on discriminative examination and intelligent inquiry. In no uncertain terms did he urge critical investigation when he addressed the inquiring Kālāmas in a discourse that has been rightly called the first charter of free thought:

'Yes, Kālāmas, right it is for you to doubt. Come, O Kālāmas, be ye not led by reports or tradition, or hearsay,

nor by what is in a religious text, nor by mere logic or inference, nor by considering appearance, nor after reflecting on an approval of some theory, not by seeming possibilities, nor upon the consideration “this recluse is our teacher”. But, O Kālāmas, when you know for yourselves: “these things are unwholesome, these things are blamable and unprofitable,” then, indeed, do ye reject them...

‘And when you know for yourselves: “these things are wholesome, blameless and profitable”, then do you, having undertaken them, abide therein.

Then the Buddha questioned them thus:

‘Now, what think ye Kālāmas, when greed, hate and delusion arise in a man do they arise to his profit or to his loss? Are they blameable or not?’

- To his loss, Venerable Sir, they are blameable.
- Now what think ye, Kālāmas, when freedom from greed, hate and delusion arise in a man, do they arise to his profit or loss? Are they blameable or not?
- To his profit, Lord. They are blameless.
- So then, Kālāmas, as to my words to you just now: “Be ye not led by reports... abide therein”, such was my reason for saying them’.<sup>1</sup>

To take anything on trust is not in the spirit of Buddhism so we find this dialogue between the Master and the disciples: ‘If now, knowing this and preserving this, would you say: “We honour our Master and through respect for him we respect what he teaches?” “No, Lord.” “That which you affirm, O disciples, is it not only that which you yourselves have recognised, seen and grasped?” Yes, Lord.’<sup>2</sup>

The Buddha faced facts and refused to acknowledge or yield to anything that did not accord with truth. He does

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1. *Anguttara*, Nikaya, vol I. p. 188, *sutta* 65. Cf. *Anguttara* I. *sutta* 66 and *Anguttara* II *Bhaddiya sutta* 193. For a full translation of this important discourse read Wheel, No. 8. *Kalama sutta* by Soma Thera.

2. *Majjhima Nikaya* 47.

not want us to recognize anything indiscriminately and without reason. He wants us to comprehend things as they really are; to put forth the necessary effort and work out our own deliverance with heedfulness.

‘You should make the effort  
The Tāthagatas point out the way’<sup>1</sup>

‘Be ye islands unto yourselves. Be ye your own refuge, have recourse to none else for refuge. Hold fast to the Dhamma as<sup>2</sup> an island. Hold fast to the Dhamma as a refuge. Resort yourselves to no other refuge,’<sup>2</sup> so says the Buddha who, for the first time in the world’s history, taught that deliverance should be sought independent of a saviour, be he human, or divine.

The idea that another raises a man from lower to higher levels of life, and ultimately rescues him, tends to make man indolent and weak, supine and foolish. This kind of belief degrades a man and smothers every spark of dignity from his moral being.

The Enlightened One exhorts his followers to acquire self-reliance. Others may lend us a helping hand indirectly, but deliverance from suffering must be wrought out and fashioned by each one for himself upon the anvil of his own actions.

## **True Purification**

In the understanding of things, belief and fear do not play any role in Buddhist thought. The truth of the Dhamma can be grasped only through insight, never through blind faith, or through fear of some known or unknown being.

Not only did the Buddha discourage blind belief, and fear of the omnipotent God as unsuitable approaches for understanding the Truth, but he also denounced adherence to unprofitable rites and rituals, because the mere abandoning of outward things, such as fasting, bathing in rivers, animal sacrifice and similar acts, do not tend to purify a man, do not make a man holy and noble.

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1. *Dhammapada*, v. 276.

2. *Digha Nikaya*, 16.

We find this dialogue between the Buddha and the brahmin Sundarika Bhāradvāja: Once the Buddha addressing the monks explained in details how a seeker after deliverance should train himself, and further added that a man whose mind is free from taints, whose life of purity is perfected, and the task done, could be called one who bathes inwardly.

Then Bhāradvāja seated near the Buddha, heard these words and asked him:

- Does the Venerable Gotama go to bathe in the river Bāhuka?
- Brahmin, what good is the river Bāhuka?
- Indeed, Venerable Gotama, the river Bāhuka is believed by many to be holy. Many people have their evil deeds (*pāpa*) washed away in the river Bāhuka.

Then the Buddha made him understand that bathing in rivers would not cleanse a man of his dirt of evil, and instructed him thus:

‘Bathe just here (in this Doctrine and Discipline, *Dhamma-vinaya*), Brahmin, give security to all beings. If you do not speak falsehood, or kill or steal, if you are confident, and are not mean, what does it avail you to go to Gayā (the name of a river in India during the time of the Buddha)? Your well at home is also a Gayā.’<sup>1</sup>

Says the Dhammapada: (165)

“By oneself is evil done,  
By oneself is one defiled;  
By oneself is evil left undone,  
By oneself is one purified;  
Purity and impurity depend on oneself;  
No one can purify another.

### Caste Problem

Caste, which was a matter of vital importance to the brahmins of India, was one of utter indifference to the Buddha, who strongly condemned the debasing caste system. In his Order of Monks all castes unite as do the rivers in the sea.

1. *Majjhima Nikaya, Vatthupama sutta.* (Translation in Wheel No. 61/62)



They lose their former names, castes, and clans, and become known as members of one community—the *Sangha*.

To Sundarika bhāradvāja, the brahmin who inquired about his lineage, the Buddha answered:

‘No Brahmin I, no prince,  
No farmer, or aught else.  
All worldly ranks I know,  
But knowing go my ways  
as simply nobody:  
Homeless, in pilgrim garb, —  
With shaven crown, I go  
my way alone, serene.  
To ask my birth is vain.’<sup>1</sup>

On one occasion a caste-ridden brahmin insulted the Buddha saying, ‘Stop, thou shaveling! Stop, thou outcaste!’

The Master without any feeling of indignation, gently replied:

‘Birth maketh not man an outcast,  
Birth maketh not man a brahmin;  
Action maketh man an outcast,  
Action maketh man a brahmin’<sup>2</sup>

and delivered a whole sermon, the *Vasala sutta*, (*Sutta-nipāta*) explaining to the brahmin in detail the characteristics of one who is really an outcast (*vasala*). Convinced, the haughty brahmin took refuge in the Buddha.

The Buddha freely admitted into the Order people from all castes, and classes when he knew that they were fit to live the holy life, and some of them later distinguished themselves in the Order. The Buddha was the only contemporary teacher who endeavoured to blend in mutual tolerance and concord those who hitherto had been rent asunder by differences of caste and class.

Upāli, who was the chief authority on the Vinaya—the disciplinary ‘rules’ of the Order—was a barber, regarded as

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1. *Sutta-nipata*, 455, 456 — Chalmer’s Transl. (Harvard Or. Ser.)  
2. Ibid. *Vasala Sutta*, 142.

one of the basest occupations of the lower classes. Sunīta who later won Arahatsip, was a scavenger, another base occupation. In the Order of Nuns were Punṇā and Punṇikā, both slave girls. According to Mrs. C. A. F. Rhys Davids, 8½% of the number of those nuns who were able to realize the fruits of their training, were drawn from the despised castes, which were mostly illiterate.<sup>1</sup>

## Chief Disciples

Rājagaha, the capital of the Kingdom of Magadha, was one of the first places visited by the Buddha soon after his Enlightenment. As a wandering ascetic, in the early days of his renunciation, he had promised King Seniya Bimbisāra that he would visit Rājagaha when he achieves the object of his search. King Bimbisāra was overjoyed at the sight of the Buddha, and having listened to his teaching, became a lay follower. His devotion to the Buddha became so ardent that within a few days, he offered him his pleasure park, Veluvana, for residence.

Rājagaha during that time was a centre of great learning where many a school of philosophy flourished. One such school of thought had as its head Sanjaya; and among his retinue of two hundred and fifty followers were Upatissa and Kolita who were later to become Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna, the two chief disciples of the Buddha.

One day when Upatissa was walking through the streets of Rājagaha, he was greatly struck by the serene countenance and the quiet, dignified deportment of one of the first disciples of the Buddha, the Arahats Assaji, who was on his almsround.

All the strenuous endeavours that Upatissa had made through many a birth to achieve perfection, were now on the verge of being rewarded. Without going back to his teacher, he followed Arahats Assaji to his resting place eager to know whom he followed and what teaching he had accepted.

‘Friend’, said Upatissa, ‘serene is your countenance, clear and radiant is your glance. Who persuaded you to renounce the world? Who is your teacher? What Dhamma

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1. See *Buddhism and the Race Question*, by Professor G. P. Malalasekera and K. N. Jayatilleke, Unesco 1959.

(teaching) do you follow?' The Venerable Assaji, rather reluctant to speak much, humbly said: 'I cannot expound the Doctrine and Discipline at length, but I can tell you the meaning briefly'. Upatissa's reply is interesting: 'Well, friend, tell little or much; what I want is just the meaning. Why speak many words?' Then the Arahāt Assaji uttered a single verse which embraces the Buddha's entire doctrine of causality:

*'Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā — tesam hetum tathāgato āha  
Tesāṃ ca yo nirodho — Evam vādi mahā samano'.*

*'Whatever from a cause proceeds, thereof  
The Tathāgata has explained the cause,  
Its cessation too he has explained.  
This is the teaching of the Supreme Sage'.*

Upatissa instantly grasped the meaning and attained the first stage of realization, comprehending 'whatever is of the nature of arising, all that is of the nature of ceasing' (*yamkiñci samudaya dhammam sabbam tam nirodha dhammam*).

With a heart full of joy, he quickly went back to his friend Kolita, told him of his meeting with the Arahāt and of the teaching he had received. Kolita, too, like Upatissa, instantly gained the first stage of realization having heard the Dhamma from his friend. Thereon both of them approached Sanjaya and asked him to follow the Buddha. But he, being afraid of losing his reputation as a religious teacher, refused to do so. Upatissa and Kolita then left Sanjaya much against his protestations, for Veluvana monastery and expressed their wish to become followers of the Buddha. The Buddha gladly welcomed them saying, 'Come, monks, well proclaimed is the dhamma. Live the holy life for the complete ending of suffering (*dukkha*)' and took them into the Order. They attained Deliverance and became the two chief disciples.

Another great one who joined the Order during the Buddha's stay at Veluvana, was the brahmin sage Mahā Kassapa who had renounced great wealth to find out the way to Deliverance. It was the Venerable Mahā Kassapa, three months after the Buddha's passing away (*Parinibbāna*),

who called up the convocation of Arahats (the First Council), at the Sattapanni Cave near Rājagaha under the patronage of King Ajātasattu, to collect and codify the Dhamma-vinaya.

## The Order of Nuns

In the early days of the Order, only men were admitted to the Sangha since the Buddha was reluctant to admit women. But there were many devout ladies among the lay followers who had a keen desire for a life of renunciation as nuns. Urged by their keenness, Pajāpati Gotami, the foster-mother of the Buddha, in the company of many ladies of rank, approached the Buddha beseeching him to grant them ordination. But the Buddha still hesitated to accept them. Seeing their discomfiture, and urged by their zeal, the Venerable Ananda took up their cause and pleaded with the Buddha on their behalf. The Buddha finally yielded to this appeal, placing however eight restrictions on the ordination of women. Thus was established in the fifth year of his Enlightenment, the Order of the Nuns, the *Bhikkhunī Sāsana*, for the first time in history, for never before this had there been an Order where women could lead a celibate life of renunciation. Women from all walks of life joined the Order. Foremost in the Order stood the Theris Khemā and Uppalavannā. The lives of quite a number of these noble nuns, their strenuous endeavours to win the goal of freedom, and their paeons of joy at deliverance of mind are graphically described in the *Therī Gāthā*, the Psalms of the Sisters.<sup>1</sup>

## At Kapilavatthu

While at Rajagaha, the Blessed One heard that his father wished to see him, and he set out for Kapilavatthu. He did not, however, go straight to the palace, but, according to custom, stopped in a grove outside the town. The next day the Buddha with his bowl, begged for his alms from house to house in the streets of Kapilavatthu. King Suddhodana, startled at the news, rushed to the Buddha and said: 'Why, Master, why do you put us to shame? Why do you go begging for your food? Not one of our race has ever done so'. Replied the Buddha: 'You and your family may claim descent from kings; my descent is from the Buddhas of old; and they, begging their food, always lived on alms.'

1. *Psalms of the Early Buddhists—The Sisters*. Translated by C. F. Rhys Davids, Pali Text Society Translation Series.



Then explaining the Dhamma the Master said, 'Be alert, be mindful, lead a righteous life. The righteous live happily both in this world and the next.' And so the king became established in the Path, he realized the Dhamma. The Buddha was then conducted into the palace where all came to pay their respects to him, but not Princess Yasodharā. The Buddha went to her, and the Princess knowing the impassable gulf between them, fell on the ground at his feet and saluted him. Then relating a Jātaka story, a story of his previous birth,<sup>1</sup> revealing how great her virtue had been in that former life, he made her an adherent to the Doctrine. Later when the Buddha was induced to establish an Order for female mendicants, Yasodharā became one of the first nuns.

When the Buddha was in the palace, Princess Yasodharā arrayed her son Rāhula in all the best attire and sent him to the Blessed One, saying, 'That is thy father, Rāhula, go and ask for your inheritance.'

Prince Rāhula went to the Buddha, stood before him, and said: 'Pleasant is thy shadow, sage'.

And when the Blessed one had finished his meal and left the palace, Prince Rāhula followed him saying, 'Give me my inheritance!' At that the Blessed One spoke to Sāriputta Arahāt: 'Well then, Sāriputta, take him into the Order'. Instructing Sāriputta in the manner of ordination, the Master said: 'The hair and beard must be shaved first, Sariputta, and then the saffron robe put on. Adjusting his robe on one shoulder the seeker for ordination should pay homage to the monks and squatting (if this is inconvenient one can kneel) before them with hands raised and palms together, he should say:

*'Buddham saranam gacchāmi  
Dhammam saranam gacchāmi  
Sangham saranam gacchāmi*

*Dutiyampi Buddham saranam gacchāmi  
Dutiyampi Dhammam saranam gacchāmi  
Dutiyampi Sangham saranam gacchāmi*

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1. Candakinnara Jataka, 485.

*Tatīyampi Buddham saranam gacchāmi*  
*Tatīyampi Dhammam saranam gacchāmi*  
*Tatīyampi Saṅgham saranam gacchāmi*

I go for refuge to the Buddha (the Teacher)  
 I go for refuge to the Dhamma (the Teaching)  
 I go for refuge to the Saṅgha (the Taught)

For the second time I go for refuge to the Buddha  
 For the second time I go for refuge to the Dhamma  
 For the second time I go for refuge to the Saṅgha

For the third time I go for refuge to the Buddha  
 For the third time I go for refuge to the Dhamma  
 For the third time I go for refuge to the Saṅgha<sup>1</sup>

In the *Majjhima Nikāya*, one of the five original Collections in Pali containing the Buddha's discourses, there are three discourses (Nos. 61, 62, 147) entitled *Rāhulovāda* or exhortations to Rāhula, delivered by the Blessed One to teach the Dhamma to little Rāhula. The discourses are entirely devoted to advice on discipline and meditation. Here is an extract from the Master's exhortation in the Mahā Rahulovāda Sutta<sup>2</sup>:

“Cultivate the meditation on lovingkindness (*mettā*), Rāhula; for by cultivating lovingkindness, ill-will is banished. Cultivate the meditation on compassion (*karuṇā*), Rāhula, for by cultivating compassion, cruelty is banished. Cultivate the meditation on sympathetic joy (*muditā*), Rāhula, for by cultivating sympathetic joy, aversion is banished. Cultivate the meditation on equanimity (*upekkhā*), Rāhula, for by cultivating equanimity, hatred is banished.<sup>3</sup> Cultivate the meditation on impurity (*asubha*), Rāhula, for by meditating on impurity, lust is banished. Cultivate the meditation on the concept of impermanence (*anicca-saññā*), Rāhula, for by meditating on the concept of impermanence pride of self (*asmi-māna*), is banished. Cultivate the meditation on mindfulness on in-and-out-breathing (*ānāpāna sati*), Rāhula,

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1. *Vinaya Mahavagga*, Read Ordination in Theravada Buddhism, Piyadassi Thera, J. F. Dickson, The Wheel No. 56.
  2. Discourse No. 62. For a full translation see The Wheel No. 33
  3. See *The Four Sublime States*, The Wheel No. 6.

in-and-out breathing with mindfulness, Rāhula, cultivated and frequently practised, bears much fruit, is of great advantage.”

## Women in Buddhism

Generally speaking during the time of the Buddha, owing to brahminical influence women were not given much recognition. Sometimes they were held in contempt and in servility to man. It was the Buddha who raised the status of women although there were solitary cases of their showing erudition in matters of philosophy, and so on. In his large-heartedness and magnanimity he always treated women with consideration and civility, and pointed out to them, too, the path to peace, purity and sanctity.

Said the Blessed One: “Mother is the friend at one’s home. Wife is the highest friend of the husband.”<sup>1</sup>

The Buddha did not reject the invitation for a meal though Ambapāli was of little repute. Whatever food she offered he accepted, and in return, gave her the Dhamma-dāna, the gift of Truth. She was immediately convinced by the teaching and leaving aside her frivolous lay life she entered the Order of Nuns. Ardent and strenuous in her religious practices she then became a saint.

Kisāgotami was another lady to whom the Buddha gave the assistance of his great compassion. Her story is one of the most touching tales recorded in our books.

She belonged to the Gotama clan, and was therefore, a kinswoman of the Buddha Gotama. Sāvatti was her birth place. On account of her tender, fragile body she was called Kisā (lean) Gotami. She married a son of a wealthy merchant and had a child. But before it had started to walk, the babe suddenly fell ill and died thus causing untold grief to the mother. In her boundless love, however, towards her only son, she could not believe that the child had breathed its last. With mind confused, and unaware of her actions, she rushed hither and thither, frantically seeking medicine for her child. But of course, no physician in Sāvatti could

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1. *Samyutta-Nikaya*.

impart life to the dead. At last she met the Supreme Buddha and placing the dead child at the Master's feet implored him to give back life to her babe.

The Lord of Compassion softly said: 'Sister, there is an infallible medicine. I will heal thy affliction, only fetch me a little mustard, but mark, Gotami, that thou receiveth the mustard from a house where no one has died.' She rushed back to the town and the townfolk taking pity upon her readily gave her the mustard that she so desperately sought. But, alas, she could not find anywhere a house where death has not called. Gotami at last became aware of the universality of death. She realized that all the sweetest and cherished things of earth are fleeting; that any meeting ends in a parting and that ultimately life fades out in death. With sorrow banished, she placed her dead child in the charnel-field and retraced her steps to the monastery saying:

'No village law is this, no city law,  
No law for this clan, or for that alone;  
For the whole world—ay, and the gods in heav'n—  
This is the law: All is *impermanent!*'<sup>1</sup>

With the Buddha's guidance Kisagotami realized that impermanency is the fundamental characteristic of all conditioned existence and attained the first stage of sainthood.

Many more are the instances where the Buddha helped and consoled women who suffered from the vicissitudes of life.

### Ministering to the Sick

Great, indeed, was the Master's compassion for the sick. On one occasion the Blessed One found an ailing monk, Pūtigatta Tissa, with festering ulcers lying on his soiled bed. Immediately the Master prepared hot water, and with the help of the Venerable Ananda washed him, tenderly nursed the sick brother with his own hands, and taught the Dhamma, thus enabling him to win Arahatsip ere he died. On another occasion, too, the Master tended a sick monk, and admonished his disciples thus:

"Whosoever, monks, would wait upon me, he should wait upon the sick."<sup>2</sup>

1. *Theri Gatha*, Commentary. (See Psalms of the Sisters. p. 107)

2. *Vinaya Mahavagga*. Also see Book of Discipline, Part 4, P. 431



When the Arahāt Tissa passed away the funeral rites were duly performed and the Buddha caused the relics to be enshrined in a stupa. <sup>1</sup>

The Buddha's Mettā or loving-kindness was all-pervading and immeasurable. His earnest exhortation to his disciples was:

‘Just as with her own life  
a mother shields from hurt  
her own, her only child—  
let all-embracing thoughts  
for all that lives be thine.’ <sup>2</sup>

Being one who always acted in constant uniformity with what he preached, loving-kindness and compassion dominated his actions always.

While journeying from village to village, from town to town, instructing, enlightening and gladdening the many, the Buddha saw how superstitious folk, steeped in ignorance, slaughtered animals in worship of their gods. He spoke to them:

‘Of life, which all can take but none can give,  
Life which all creatures love and strive to keep,  
Wonderful, dear, and pleasant unto each,  
Even to the meanest...’ <sup>3</sup>

Thus when people who prayed to the gods for mercy, were merciless, and India was blood-stained with the morbid sacrifices of innocent animals at the desecrated altars of

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1. ‘To the north-east of the monastery of Jetavana’, wrote General Alexander Cunningham in his *Archaeological Report*, 1862—63, ‘there was a stupa built on the spot where the Buddha had washed the hands and feet of a sick monk.....The remains of the *stupa* still exist in a mass of solid brick-work, at a distance of 550 feet from the Jetavana monastery’

In General Cunningham's map of Savatthi (modern Sahet-Mahet), the site of this stupa is marked H. in the plan. See *Archaeological Survey of India* (Simla 1871), p. 341.

2. *Metta Sutta, Sutta-nipata*, verse 149, Chalmer's Transl. (Harvard oriental series).

3. *The Light of Asia*.

imaginary deities, and the harmful rites and rituals of ascetics and brahmins brought disaster and brutal agony, the Buddha, the Compassionate One, pointed out the Ancient Path of the Enlightened ones, of righteousness, love and understanding.

## Equanimity and Self-composure

Amidst all the vicissitudes of life—gain and loss, repute and ill-repute, praise and censure, pain and happiness<sup>1</sup>—the Buddha never wavered. He was firm as a solid rock. Touched by happiness or by pain he showed neither elation nor depression. He never encouraged wrangling and animosity. Addressing the monks he once said: ‘I quarrel not with the world, monks, it is the world that quarrels with me, An exponent of the Dhamma quarrels not with anyone in the world.’<sup>2</sup>

He admonished His disciples in these words:

“Monks, if others were to speak ill of me or ill of the *Dhamma* or ill of the *Sangha* (the Order) you should not on that account entertain thoughts of enmity and spite, and be worrid. If, monks, you are angry and displeased with them it will not only impede your mental development but you will also fail to judge how far that speech is right or wrong. You should unravel what is untrue and make it all clear. Also, monks, if others speak highly of me, highly of the Dhamma and the Sangha, you need not on that account be elated; for that too will mar your inner development. You should acknowledge what is right and show the truth of what has been said”.<sup>3</sup>

There never was an occasion when the Buddha manifested unfriendliness towards anyone—even to his opponents and enemies. There were those who were against him and his doctrine, yet the Buddha never regarded them as enemies. When others reproached him in strong terms, the Buddha neither manifested anger nor aversion nor uttered an unkind word.

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1. These are the *attha loka-dhamma*, the eight vicissitudes of life

2. *Samyutta*, iii. 138.

3. *Digha-Nikaya* (*Brahmajala Sutta*).

Said the Buddha:

“As an elephant in battle-field endures the arrows shot from a bow, even so will I endure abuse and unfriendly expression of others.”<sup>1</sup>

### Devadatta

A striking example of this mental attitude is seen in his relation with Devadatta.

Devadatta was a cousin of the Buddha, who entered the Order and gained supernormal powers of the mundane plane (*puthujjana-iddhi*). Later, however, he began to harbour thoughts of jealousy and ill-will toward his kinsman, the Buddha, and his two chief disciples, Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna, with the ambition of becoming the leader of the Sangha, the Order of Monks.

Devadatta wormed himself into the heart of Ajātasattu, the young prince, the son of King Bimbisāra, and one day when the Blessed One was addressing a gathering at Veluvana monastery, where the king, too, was present, Devadatta came unto the Buddha, saluted him and said: “Venerable Sir, you are now enfeebled with age. May the Master lead a life of solitude free from worry and care. I will direct the Order”

The Buddha rejected this overture and Devadatta departed irritated and disconcerted, nursing hatred and malice toward the Blessed One. Then with the malicious purpose of causing mischief, he went to prince Ajātasattu, kindled in him the deadly embers of ambition, and said:

“Young man, you had better kill your father and assume kingship lest you die without becoming the ruler. I shall kill the Blessed One and become the Buddha”.

So when Ajātasattu murdered his father and ascended the throne, Devadatta suborned ruffians to murder the Buddha, but failing in that endeavour, he himself hurled down a rock as the Buddha was climbing up Gijjhakūṭa hill in Rājagaha. The rock precipitated down, broke in twain and a splinter

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1. *Dhammapada*, 310.

slightly wounded the Buddha. Later Devadatta made an intoxicated elephant to charge on the Buddha; but the animal prostrated himself at the Master's feet, overpowered by his loving-kindness. Devadatta now proceeded to cause a schism in the Sangha, but this discord did not last long. Having failed in all his intrigues, Devadatta retired a disappointed and broken man. Soon afterwards he fell ill, and on his sick-bed repenting his follies, he desired to see the Buddha. But that was not to be; for he died on the litter while being carried to the Buddha. Before death, however, he uttered repentance and sought refuge in the Buddha.<sup>1</sup>

## The Last Days

The Mahā Prinibbāna Sutta,<sup>2</sup> the discourse on the passing away of the Blessed One, records in moving detail all the events that occurred during the last months and days of the Buddha's life.

The Blessed One had now reached the ripe age of eighty, his two chief disciples, Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna, had passed away three months earlier. Pajāpati Gotami, Yasodharā and Rāhula were also no more.

The Buddha was now at Vesāli, and the rainy season having come, he went, together with a great company of monks, to Beluva to spend there the period of the "rains." There a severe sickness fell upon him, causing him much pain and agony; but the Blessed One mindful and self-possessed, bore it patiently. He was on the verge of death; but he felt he should not pass away without taking leave of the Order. So with a great effort of will he suppressed that illness, and kept his hold on life. His sickness gradually abated, and when quite recovered he called the Venerable Ananda, His personal attendant, and addressing him said:

"Ananda, I am now grown old and full of years, my journeying is drawing to a close. I have reached my sum of days, I am turning eighty years of age; and just as a worn-out cart, Ananda, can only with much additional care be made to move along, so the body of the Tathāgata can only be kept

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1. Comy. on the Dhammapada, Vol: 1, P. 147.

2. *Digha Nik.*, 16. — Translated in The Wheel No. 67—69, "Last Days of the Buddha".



going with much infusion of will-power. It is only when the Tathāgata, ceasing to attend on any outward thing and to experience any worldly sensation, attains to the signless (*animitta*) concentration of mind, and dwells in it—it is only then that the body of the Tathāgata is at ease.

“Therefore, Ananda, be ye islands unto yourselves. Be ye your own refuge. Have recourse to none else for refuge. Hold fast to the Dhamma as an island. Hold fast to the Dhamma as a refuge. Resort yourselves to no other refuge.. Whosoever, Ananda, either now or after I am dead, shall be islands unto themselves, and refuge unto themselves, shall betake themselves to no external refuge—it is they, Ananda, among my disciples who shall reach the very top-most height! But they must be keen to progress.”

From Beluva the Buddha journeyed to the Mahāvana, and there, calling up an assembly of all the monks residing in the neighbourhood of Vesāli, addressed them saying: “Disciples, the Dhamma realised by me, I have made known to you. Make yourselves masters of the Dhamma, practise it, meditate upon it and spread it abroad; out of pity for the world, for the good and the gain and weal of gods and men.”

The Buddha concluded his exhortation by saying:

“My age is now full ripe, my life drawn to its close;  
I leave you, I depart, relying on myself alone!  
Be earnest then, O disciples, holy, full of thought!  
Be steadfast in resolve! Keep watch o’er your own hearts!  
Who wearies not but holds fast to this Truth and Law,  
Shall cross this sea of life, shall make an end of grief.”

Worn out with sickness, with feeble limbs, the Blessed One now journeyed on with much difficulty, followed by the Venerable Ananda and a great company of monks. Even in this last, long, wearisome journey of his, the Buddha never failed in his attention to others. He instructed Cunda, the smith, who offered him his last meal. Then on the way, he stopped for Pukkusa, a disciple of Alāra Kālāma, replied to all his questions, and so instructed him that Pukkusa offered himself as a follower of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

The Blessed One now reached the Sāla Grove of the Mallas at Kusināra—the journey's end. Knowing that here would be his last resting place, he told the Venerable Ananda: "I am weary, Ananda, and would lie down. Spread over for me the couch with its head to the north between the twin sāla trees". He then laid himself on his right side, composed and mindful, with one leg resting on the other. Speaking now to the Venerable Ananda the Blessed One said:

"They who fulfil the greater and the lesser duties, they who are correct in life, walking according to the precepts—it is they who rightly honour, reverence and venerate the Perfect One with the worthiest homage. Therefore, Ananda, be ye steady in the fulfilment of the greater and the lesser duties, and be ye correct in life, walking according to the precepts. Thus, Ananda, should you train yourselves."

## The Last Convert

At that time, a wandering ascetic named Subhadda, who was at Kusināra, heard the news of the Blessed One's approaching death; and in order to clear up certain doubts that troubled his mind, hurried to the sāla Grove to speak to the Buddha. The Venerable Ananda, however, did not wish the Buddha to be disturbed in his last moments; and though Subhadda made several appeals, access to the Master was refused. The Blessed One overheard the conversation. He knew at once that Subhadda was making his investigations with a genuine desire for knowledge; and knowing that Subhadda was capable of quickly grasping the answers, he desired that Subhadda be allowed to see him.

Subhadda's uncertainty was whether the leaders of the other schools of thought such as Pūrana Kassapa, Nigantha Nātaputta and others, had attained a true understanding. The Blessed One then spoke:

"In whatsoever Doctrine and Discipline (*Dhamma-vinaya*), Subhadda, the Noble Eightfold Path is not found, neither in it is there found a man of true saintliness of the first, or of the second, or of the third, or of the fourth degree. And in whatsoever Doctrine and Discipline, Subhadda, the Noble

Eightfold Path is found, in it is found the man of true saintliness of the first, and the second, and the third, and the fourth degree.<sup>1</sup> Now, in this doctrine and discipline, Subhadda, is found the Noble Eightfold Path, and in it, too, are found the men of true saintliness of all the four degree. Void are the systems of other teachers—void of true saints. And in this one, Subhadda, may the brethren live the life that is right, so that the world be not bereft of Arahats”.<sup>2</sup>

Hearing the words of the Blessed One, Subhadda gained confidence, and took refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. Furthermore he desired to be admitted into the Order, and the Buddha requested the Venerable Ananda to receive him. Subhadda thus became the last convert and the last disciple of the Blessed One; and ere long by his strenuous effort he attained the final stage of sainthood (*Arahatta*).

## The Last Scene

Now the Blessed One addressing the Venerable Ananda, said:

“It may be, Ananda, that in some of you the thought may arise, ‘The word of the Master is ended. We have no teacher any more?’ But it is not thus, Ananda, that you should regard.

“The Doctrine and the Discipline (*Dhamma-vinaya*) which I have set forth and laid down for you, let them, after I am gone, be your teacher.

“It may be, monks, that there may be doubts in the minds of some brethren as to the Buddha, or the Dhamma, or the Path (*magga*), or Method (*paṭipadā*). Inquire, monks, freely. Do not have to reproach yourselves afterwards with

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1. These four stages are: *sotapatti*, (Stream-Entry); *sakadagami*, (Once-Return); *anagami*, Non-Return; and *arahatta*, the final stage of sainthood. Arahatsip is the stage at which fetters are severed and taints rooted out.
  2. Referring to the Noble Eightfold Path, Dr. T. W. Rhys Davids writes: “Buddhist or not Buddhist, I have examined everyone of the great religious systems of the world, and in none of them have I found anything to surpass in beauty and comprehensiveness, the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha. I am content to shape my life according to that Path.”

the thought: 'Our teacher was face to face with us, and we could not bring ourselves to inquire of the Exalted One when we were face to face with him'."

When the Buddha had thus spoken the monks were silent.

A second and a third time the Blessed One repeated the words to the monks, and yet the monks were silent.

And the Venerable Ananda said to the Blessed One: "How wonderful a thing is it, Lord, how marvellous! Verily, I believe that in this whole assembly of the monks there is not one who has any doubt or misgivings as to the Buddha or the Dhamma, or the Path or the Method."

The Blessed One confirmed the words of the Venerable Ananda, adding that in the whole assembly, even the most backward one was assured of final deliverance. And after a short while the Master made his final exhortation to those who wished to follow his Teaching now and in the future:

*"Behold now, O monks, I exhort you: impermanent are all compounded things strive on with heedfulness."*

These were the last words of the Buddha.

Then the Master entered into those nine successive stages of meditative absorption (*jhāna*) which are of increasing sublimity: first the four fine-material absorptions (*rūpa-jhāna*), then the four immaterial absorptions (*arūpa-jhāna*), and finally the state where ideas and sensations entirely cease (*saññā-vedayita-nirodha*). Then he returned through all these stages to the first fine-material absorption and rose again to the fourth one. Immediately after having re-entered this stage (which has been described as having 'purity of mindfulness due to equanimity') the Blessed One passed away (*parinibbāyi*). He realized Nibbāna that is free from any substratum of further becoming (*pari-nibbāna*.)

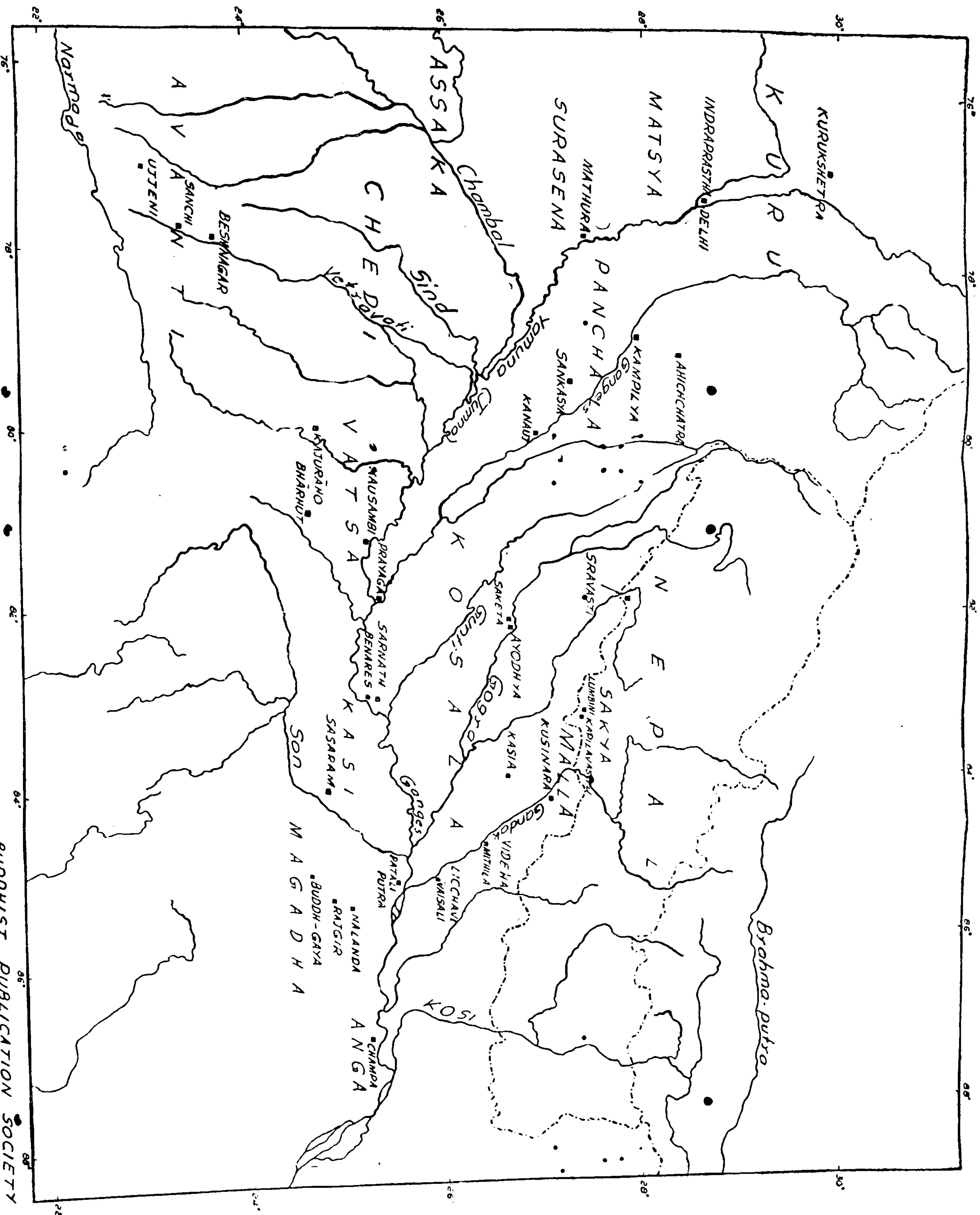
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1. The passages in quotation marks are taken, with slight alterations, from the "Book of the Great Decease" in *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Part II, (*Digha Nikaya*).



In the annals of history, no man is recorded as having so consecrated himself to the welfare of all beings, irrespective of caste, class or creed, as the Supreme Buddha. From the hour of his enlightenment to the end of his life, he strove tirelessly to elevate mankind. He never relaxed in his exertion for the common weal and was never subjected to moral or spiritual fatigue. Though physically he was not always fit, mentally he was ever vigilant and energetic.

Though twenty-five centuries have gone since the passing away of the Buddha, His message of love and wisdom still exists in its purity, decisively influencing the destinies of humanity. Forests of flowers are daily offered at his shrines and countless millions of lips daily repeat the formula *Buddham saranam gacchāmi*, "I take refuge in the Buddha." His greatness yet glows today like a sun that blots out lesser lights, and his Dhāmma yet beckons the weary pilgrim to Nibbāna's Security and Peace.



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