

# **BASIC BUDDHISM COURSE**



PHRA SUNTHORN PLAMINTR, PH.D.





#### **The Author**

##### **Phra Sunthorn Plamintr**

Born on July 6, 1952, in Nakhonpathom, Thailand, and brought up in an atmosphere of religious devotion, Ajahn Sunthorn developed a taste for meditation and Buddhist practices since his early childhood. He entered the robes in 1962, before he was even 10 and continued to receive training from various renowned masters of the days. In 1968, he went to Sri Lanka for further studies and to India in 1975, where he worked for his B. Ed., M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at the Banaras Hindu University.

He taught at Mahachula Buddhist University in Bangkok for several years before he was invited to the U.S.A. in 1983. In 1986, the Buddhadharma Meditation Center was founded and he became its president/abbot.

Ven. Ajahn Sunthorn also served as the first president of the Buddhist Council of the Midwest which he helped to establish in 1987.

# Basic Buddhism Course

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Phra Sunthorn Plamintr, Ph.D.

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ISBN 974-8358-83-6

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8910 S. Kingery Hwy., Hinsdale, IL 60521  
U.S.A. Tel.: (708) 789-8866

Fourth Impression : June 1991—5,000 copies

Cover's Picture : *Panya Vijnthanasarn*

Cover's Design : *Panya Vijnthanasarn*

Reprinted for free distribution by  
**The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation**  
11F., 55 Hang Chow South Road Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C.  
1999 September, 37500 Copies



## Note On The Fourth Edition

This Basic Buddhism Course, which grew out of my Sunday school lessons over the years, has been well received by the reading public in the United States as well as in Thailand and some other countries in Asia and Europe. This is simply beyond our hope and expectation. Not only has the book been found useful to young readers, for whom it was originally designed to serve, even older readers and advanced students have taken kindly to it as well. For all the interest and cooperation we have received, the author would like to record here his sincere appreciation and gratitude.

*Khun Panita Angchandrpen* introduced the work to *Khun Vanee Lamsam*, who immediately decided to sponsor the present edition for free distribution. The responsibility to do the layout, the artwork, and to oversee the whole process of printing fell into Miss Angchandrpen's experienced hands. To both of them go our special thanks and appreciation. The Sunyata Network team has also volunteered their assistance in many ways, and to them too we wish to express our profound appreciation.

*Phra Sunthorn Plaminti*



# P r e f a c e

This ***Basic Buddhism Course*** is a result of the author's involvement with the Buddhist Sunday school over a period of two years. It consists mostly of those brief lessons prepared for, and repeatedly tested in, the classes; their usefulness and practicality have been established to our satisfaction. It is hoped, therefore, that teachers of basic Buddhism will find this volume a dependable companion in their efforts to fulfill the teaching role in their Sunday schools. In the absence of a better alternative, those interested in Buddhism may also use it as an introduction to the religion or as a common ground on which they may base their discussion.

Materials included in this text are based on Thai Buddhism, which may be seemingly at variance with what one may find in other denominations or countries, although the basic doctrines and the goals in all schools are the same. A true Buddhist is broad-minded, always willing to appreciate the apparent differences in other systems and the necessity of such differences thereof. While attempting to present a faithful version of Thai Buddhism (part of it, of course), we have not neglected to emphasize the universality of the Buddhadharma as a whole. Thai Buddhism is not portrayed here as the only authentic system of orthodox Buddhist beliefs and practices, but rather as an integral part of the valid whole. No matter in what perspective one views the Buddhadharma, with right understanding (*sammaditthi*) one cannot fail to appreciate the beauty of compatibility that is all too apparent in all the schools of Buddhist thoughts. Such is the strength and the power of the Buddhadharma.



The author is grateful for the opportunity to teach Buddhism to the Sunday school children. The time spent with those lovely young ones, who are our hope and future, has been a source of great happiness and joy. The author would like also to express his thanks to all parents of the Sunday school students for their unreserved support and encouragement that had made all our joint efforts a great success, and to the BMC members in general for their interest and contributions that had made the school a vital part of the center.

*Phra Sunthorn Plamintr*

**Buddhadharma Meditation Center**

January, 1991



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PALI READING GUIDE

The transliteration system adopted in this book accords with the standard system recognized by the Pali Text Society and other internationally accepted academic establishments. Variations, however, exist and these are given immediately after the Thai counterparts. Not all Roman and Thai letters bear exact Pali phonetic equivalents and they are therefore best learned from a teacher well-versed in all three systems.

Only passages and quotations are given with diacritics; proper nouns and common terms are given without them. For instance, *Sangha*, *Kalyanamittata*, *Savatthi*, etc.

VOWELS

a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	e	o
อะ(ะ)	อา	อิ	อี	อุ	ู	เอ	โ

CONSONANTS

Gutturals:	k	ก	kh	ข	g	ง	gh	ฦ	กั ฆ ฦ,m
Palatals:	c	จ	ch	ฉ	j	ช	jh	ฦ	กั ญ
Cerebrals:	t	ฏ	th	ฐ	ḍ	ฦ	ḍh	ฦ	น ฦ
Dentals:	t	ต	th	ถ	d	ด	dh	ต	น ฦ
Labials:	p	ป	ph	ผ	b	พ	bh	ภ	m ฦ
Non-groups:	y	ย	r	ร	l	ล	v	ว-ว	s ส
	h	ห	ḷ	ฬ	m	ม (มั้ง) -m			

EXAMPLES

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

(แปล) นมัสส ภควตัส อรหตัส สัมม-สัมพุทธสส

(ไทย) นมัสส ภคะวตัส อรรหตัส สัมม-สัมพุทธัสสะ

Surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadam samādiyamī.

(แปล) สุราเมรยัมจฺจปมฺอดตฺถานา เวรมณี สิกฺขาปะทัง สมฺมาดิยามิ

(ไทย) สุราเมรยัมจจปมอดตถานา เวรมณี สิกขาปะทัง สมมาดิยามิ



# PART ONE





# 1. Our Religion

Buddhism is a religion - a very great religion. People who follow this religion are called Buddhists. We are Buddhist because we practice Buddhism.

Buddhism is a very old religion, more than 2,500 years old, founded by the Buddha who lived in India in the sixth century B.C. India is known as the birthplace of Buddhism because it was there that Buddhism arose and from there it spread to other parts of the world. This country is very far from the United States - just on the opposite side of the globe. It is the land of many great religions and strange beliefs.

Buddhism is a religion of self-help. It teaches man to depend on himself, to be courageous and confident in his own ability. Buddhist philosophy places man at the center of all things; it advises man to strive and work hard to achieve his goals, material or spiritual, through his own efforts, not through prayer or mere wishful thinking.

Buddhism is a religion of free thought. It discourages blind faith and urges man to think freely. It believes in man's potentials and teaches that all men are capable of attaining the highest state of spiritual liberation. Buddhism also teaches that all men are born equal and are free to choose whatever is best for themselves.

Buddhist teachings are logical and scientific. Many Buddhist principles can be understood through logical reasoning, others can be realized through a proper process of experimentation. The teaching of the Buddha, though very old

is still valid and practical and can be followed with advantage by all people of the world.

Buddhism teaches man to be kind and gentle. Buddhists are peace-loving people and have never made war in the name of the religion. Today there is violence everywhere in our society because many people are selfish and lack kindness. Unlike Buddhism, some other religions have a bloody history and their followers still believe that it is right to make war in the name of their religions. The world is therefore never truly happy or peaceful, and mankind continues to suffer.

Because Buddhism is a religion of self-help, it is suitable for the strong-minded. Because it encourages free thinking, it enjoys a special place in the hearts of modern free thinkers. Because its teachings are scientific, it is highly respected by the intellectual. The Buddhist emphasis on peace and loving-kindness makes the religion appealing to peace-loving men the world over.

## *Questions*

- 1. What is Buddhism? Why are we called Buddhists?*
- 2. How old is Buddhism? Where was it founded, and by whom?*
- 3. Which country is known as the birthplace of Buddhism? Why?*
- 4. Why is Buddhism respected by the intellectual?*
- 5. Why do peace-loving people like Buddhist teachings?*



## 2. The Triple Gem (Ratanattaya)

There are three objects of the highest veneration in the Buddhist religion : they are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. These three are called the Holy Three Gems (*ratanattaya*) or the Holy Triple Gem, which implies that they are very precious and invaluable. Buddhists always regard them with profound love and respect.

The Buddha is the founder of our religion. He was the greatest figure in human history, who lived more than twenty-five centuries ago and whose teaching has become one of the greatest civilizing forces ever known to man. The Buddha possessed the noblest virtues and the highest wisdom, and was worshipped alike by men and deities. Briefly speaking, his virtues are three:

1. Infinite Wisdom
2. Perfect Purity
3. Universal Compassion

We are Buddhists and are, therefore, the Buddha's followers. He is our Spiritual Father, for he gave us spiritual life. Because of this we should always love him, respect him, and be grateful to him.

The Dharma is the teaching of the Buddha. It is the Universal Law which the Buddha discovered and taught to the world. It is the Truth itself. And because the Dharma is Truth, it must be true, valid, and universal at all time and in all places.

The Dharma should be studied, followed and practiced.

It should be treated with the utmost respect, as it is very essential for world peace and spiritual progress of individuals. In fact, the Dharma can be practiced by all, whether they are Buddhist or not. We should respect the Dharma, try to study it and put it into practice.

The Sangha is the Holy Order of Monk disciples of the Buddha as a whole, who have attained a high degree of spiritual discipline. These disciples study and practice the Dharma and teach it to lay people. They set good examples in moral conduct and inspire us to do good. We pay respect to the Sangha because they are highly spiritual and always try to do good for others.

The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha are closely interrelated. All the three are essential for the rise and the spread of the religion.

If there were no Dharma, there would not have been a Buddha. But if the Buddha were not there, the Dharma would not have been discovered and taught. If the Sangha were not there, there would be no one to preserve and spread it and the religion would have come to an end with the passing away of the Buddha. The Sangha, however, would not have come into existence without the Buddha and the Dharma. In this way are the three "Gems" inter-related and interdependent.

The following lines in the Pali language are used to recite in the worship of the Holy Triple Gem (in respective order):

1. *Araham sammāsambuddho bhagavā buddham bhagavantam abhivādemi.*

2. *Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo dhammam namasāmi.*



*3. Supatipanno bhagavato sāvakaśaṅgho saṅgham  
namāmi.*

## Questions

- 1. What are the objects of the highest veneration for Buddhists? What are they called collectively?*
- 2. What are the three virtues of the Buddha? Explain.*
- 3. What is the Dharma? How should we treat the Dharma?*
- 4. What is the Sangha? Why do we respect them?*
- 5. Explain how the Holy Three Gems are interrelated?*





Queen Maya dreamed a wonderful dream, While she was being attended upon by four celestial ladies, white elephant in all its majesty descended from the heavens, made obeisance to her, and entered her womb. It was predicted that a great son would be born to her.



### 3. The Birth Of The Buddha

The birth of a Buddha is a very rare occasion and, whenever it occurs, it brings great happiness to the world. The birth of our Lord Buddha has been the greatest blessing in the whole history of mankind.

Buddha is a Pali word. It is not a name, but a title meaning the "Enlightened One" or the "Awakened One." The Buddha's personal name was *Siddhattha* and his clan name was *Gotama*. Thus he was also referred to as *Siddhattha Gotama* (*Skt. Siddhartha Gautama*). Few, however, use these names; people usually call him the Buddha.

Long, long ago, in the sixth century B.C., near the *Himalayas* was a city called *Kapilavatthu*. It was the capital of the Sakyans, a tribe of the Aryan race that lived chiefly in the North of India. *Suddhodana* was then their king (*raja*). His chief consort was *Maha Maya* (or simply *Maya*). They both belonged, by general existing convention, to the warrior or ruling caste, the highest in the caste hierarchy of the days. This fine royal couple was eventually destined to become the parents of the greatest man ever born - the Buddha.

On the fullmoon day of the month *Visakha* (April - May) in the year 623 B.C., a son was born to them in *Lumbini Park* near *Kapilavatthu*. Five days later, amid much rejoicing and celebration, a grand ceremony took place in the palace and the infant was given the name *Siddhattha*, signifying thereby the fulfillment of his parents' long-cherished dreams and aspirations.

In accordance with the custom of the time, many learned Brahmins were invited to the palace for the naming ceremony. Among them were eight men of distinguished erudition. Examining the physical signs of the child, seven of them predicted that he would become either a Universal Monarch or a Buddha. But *Kondañña*, the youngest, who excelled all the others in knowledge, declared that he would definitely renounce the world and become the Buddha.

India in the sixth century B.C. was divided into sixteen states (*janapada*), each with its own ruler and government. The subcontinent was rich and prosperous, and rivalry among the more powerful states for economic and political supremacy was common, which at times erupted into military struggle and war. It was generally characterized by advanced civilization and spiritual unrest. Brahmanism was the dominant force, but non-Brahmanic philosophical systems were also being developed. Men were engaged in spiritual pursuit, practicing and teaching what they held to be of the highest values. It was into such a situation that our Lord Buddha was born and it was amongst such people that he later preached during his mission years.

## Questions

1. *What does the word Buddha mean?*
2. *What are the Buddha's personal and clan names? By which name is he generally referred to?*
3. *Who were his parents? Where did they live?*
4. *When was Siddhattha born (give day, month, and year), and where?*
5. *What prediction did the eight Brahmins give for the young prince?*

## 4. Siddhattha's Youth

Seven days after the birth of *Siddhattha*, his mother passed away. Buddhist tradition reports that she was reborn as *Mayadevaputta* in the *Dusita* heaven. From that day Prince *Siddhattha* was looked after by his kind aunt *Pajapati*, *Maya's* younger sister, who was also his foster mother, and who would one day become the first woman in the Buddhist dispensation to be admitted into the Holy Order of Nuns.

From his early years, Prince *Siddhattha* showed signs of being an extremely gifted and extraordinary child. He was exceptionally intelligent and in a short time mastered all the subjects taught to him. Being the son of a royal family, he was specially trained in the arts of warfare and government administration. Yet he was profoundly compassionate; his love for all beings, great or small, knew no bounds. There were many incidents which took place during his youth that indicate he was, indeed, destined to be someone great. The prophecies were not, after all, given in vain.

There is a story that illustrates the young prince's great compassion and profound wisdom.

One day there was an argument over the possession of an injured bird, shot down by *Devadatta* but saved and nursed by *Siddhattha*. They were cousins, but very much different. *Siddhattha* was kind and generous; *Devadatta* was cruel and mean. The argument was serious and neither was prepared to give in.





The first three sights convinced him of the inexorable nature of life and the universal sickness of humanity. The fourth one hinted to him a way out.



*Devadatta* argued that he should have the bird since it was he who had brought it down and he meant to have it. *Siddhattha*, on the other hand, argued that the bird should belong to him because it was he who saved it and thus gave back its life. At the royal court the verdict was passed in favor of *Siddhattha*. At the time the kind prince was still in his tender age.

At the age of sixteen, he married *Yasodhara*, also known as *Bimba*, a beautiful princess of the same age from a neighboring state. King *Suddhodana* wanted his son to succeed him to the throne and become a Universal Monarch, as had been predicted. So he made every effort to ensure that his son would be attached to the household life. *Siddhattha* was, therefore, provided with everything he ever wanted and his youth life was a luxurious one befitting a popular crown prince.

Thus, blissfully lived the young couple unperturbed by the vicissitudes of life outside the palace gates.

## Questions

1. When did Queen Maya die? Who took care of young Siddhattha after that?
2. Describe Siddhattha's character in his early year.
3. What argument did Siddhattha present to win the injured bird from Devadatta?
4. At what age and to whom was Siddhattha married?
5. What did Siddhattha's father want him to become?





At the age of 29, Prince Siddhattha renounced the world, leaving the palaces, the throne, the kingdom, and everything behind. The Great Renunciation was a momentous sacrifice, an act of ultimate altruism.



## 5. The Great Renunciation

By nature, *Siddhattha* was both inquisitive and contemplative. Thus, although he was constantly surrounded by all kinds of luxury and attention, the young prince was never really happy. He knew that all the sensual pleasures in the world were superficial and impermanent. Such pleasures were, for him, unsatisfactory and therefore undesirable. He wanted to find out real happiness for himself as well as for all mankind. He wanted the world to be truly happy.

As time passed on, *Siddhattha's* mind turned toward the problems and mysteries of life. His boundless compassion did not permit him to enjoy the pleasures of a royal household. He knew no sorrow, but he felt deep pity for sorrowing humanity. Amidst comfort and luxury he realized the universality of suffering.

Thus, despite all the comfort and luxury he enjoyed, *Prince Siddhattha* was never really happy. Through his years of happiness the prince felt an urge, deep down his heart, to do something that would solve the problems of mankind and free people from miseries.

One day, on his visit to the royal pleasure grove, he came across four sights: an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and an ascetic. The first three sights convinced him of the inexorable nature of life and the universal sickness of humanity. The fourth one, on the other hand, hinted to him a way out. From that moment *Siddhattha* was more resolved than ever to renounce the world and find true peace and happiness in his own way.

About the same time a son was born to him, who was named *Rahula*. But then the time was also ripe for him to depart. With firm determination to discover the Truth and Peace that would benefit mankind at large and knowing that his wife and child would, in his absence, be well provided and protected, he left the palace to take on the holy life and became a wandering ascetic, homeless and penniless, with only a few pieces of garments to cover himself.

He was then twenty-nine years old, still very much in the prime of youth. It was a momentous sacrifice. He did all this for the sake of mankind and the event came to be known as the Great Renunciation.

Because of this venture undertaken by *Siddhattha* almost 2,600 years ago, the world today is still endowed with the greatest and richest spiritual heritage known to mankind.

## *Questions*

- 1. What Siddhattha really satisfied with the condition of the world as he saw it? Why?*
- 2. What did he see one day on his visit to the grove?*
- 3. What effect did the sights have on Siddhattha?*
- 4. What is the Great Renunciation?*
- 5. How did the Great Renunciation benefit the world?*

## 6. The Search And The Enlightenment

Prince *Siddhattha*, now an ascetic, roamed from place to place, sleeping mostly in forests or thick jungles and eating only what was offered him by the common people. He visited several spiritual teachers for instruction and discussion, but soon found their knowledge to be either imperfect or wrong. He knew that such knowledge could never lead him to the Ultimate Truth. Notable among these teachers, however, were *Alara Kalama* and *Uddaka Ramaputta* who taught Siddhattha the first seven and the eighth Absorptions, respectively. Such were considered great achievements in those days, but even these were not the right way to enlightenment that *Siddhattha* was searching for.

He therefore began to make experiments on his own. Self-mortification was a popular practice in those days, generally believed to help man to attain salvation. He tried the most difficult practices of self-mortification and almost died in the process, yet the result was not better than the past experiences. But he did not give in. Instead, he began to re-examine his past efforts to find a new and better method that would finally overcome the spiritual ills of the world. All these experiments and practices took six long years.

During this period of austerities and hardships, Siddhattha was attended to by a group of five ascetics, headed by *Kondañña* who had, in the former's infancy, singularly predicted that he would definitely become a Buddha. They all believed that through severe self-mortification the prince ascetic would certainly achieve the goal of enlightenment. They also hoped that if *Siddhattha* attained enlightenment, they would then be the first to learn the right way from him.





The Buddha's enlightenment was the most important and the highest spiritual achievement in the history of mankind.



Seeing, however, that he had finally given up the practice of self-mortification and turned instead to the experimentation of pure meditation practice, they lost faith in him and decided to part company, leaving the determined *Bodhisatta* all alone by himself in the midst of wilderness and jungle beasts.

Then, one *Visakha* night, as he was seated under a Bodhi tree on the bank of River *Nerañjara* in Bodh-Gaya (*Buddha-Gaya*) meditating with his mind concentrated and purified, he finally developed the supranormal knowledge that ultimately destroyed all kinds of passions and mental defilements in him and gave him penetrative insight into all phenomena in their true state. The *Bodhisatta* at last became fully enlightened. He had become the Supreme Lord Buddha.

To attain enlightenment means to destroy all mental impurities so one's mind becomes perfectly pure and free from all traces of evil and to gain the special intuitive insight into all realities.

With enlightenment, *Siddhattha* became the Buddha, the Enlightened One (or the Awakened One), a man far superior to all other beings in wisdom and spiritual attainments. The day of enlightenment was the *Visakha* fullmoon. He was then exactly thirty-five years old.

## Questions

1. Describe the kind of life *Siddhattha* led after the Great Renunciation.
2. Why was *Siddhattha* dissatisfied with the teachers he met?
3. What did he practice after he left those teachers?
4. How long did his search for the Truth take him? Who looked after him during that period?
5. On what day and at what age did *Siddhattha* attain enlightenment? How was he referred to after that?





Two months after his enlightenment, the Buddha proclaimed the Truth he had discovered. The Wheel of Dharma was set in motion and the Buddhist religion was established. This event took place on the full moon of the eighth month (Asalha) in the year 588 B.C.



## 7. The First Sermon

The Truth that the Buddha realized is universal. In Buddhist terminology it is known as *Dharma*, or *Dhamma* in Pali. The realization of the Dharma was the result of a long and arduous spiritual quest. The Buddha attained enlightenment through his own efforts, without any help from a teacher. His knowledge was full and complete, ultimate and perfect, in all respects.

After enlightenment, the Buddha continued to remain for seven weeks in the vicinity of the *Bodhi* tree, reflecting on the Truth he had discovered. It became clear to him that what he had realized could not be easily understood by ordinary people, shrouded in ignorance (*avijja*) and overcome by hate and lust.

The Buddha therefore hesitated for a moment if it would not be futile to teach the Dharma to the world. His boundless compassion, however, gave him a second thought and he saw that people were of different levels of intellect and perfection. Those who had "less dust in their eyes", i.e., not too ignorant or spiritually blind, would be able to "see" the Dharma and benefit from it. He therefore decided to begin his noble mission to lead the world out of ignorance and suffering.

The Buddha then started for Benares (*Varanasi*) in search of the five ascetics. There, at the Deer Park near the city, on the fullmoon of the month *Asalha* (June-July), he delivered to them the first sermon which came to be

known as *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* or “Setting into Motion the Wheel of Dharma.” The name of the sermon symbolizes the beginning of a spiritual movement that would permanently affect the religious history of the world.

The five ascetics who listened to the first sermon were *Kondañña*, *Vappa*, *Bhaddiya*, *Mahanama*, and *Assaji*. Of these, *Kondañña* was the first to realize the Truth after the Buddha. He is thus considered the Buddha’s first disciple.

The Wheel of Dharma, set into motion for the benefit and well-being of mankind, cannot be stopped, and the following centuries witnessed its advance into many lands and nations. Buddhism has since been qualified as one of the major world religions and is still a spiritual power to reckon with.

The first sermon begins with the Buddha’s advice against the two extremes which, according to him, should not be practiced by monks. These two extremes are sensual indulgence and self-mortification. The Buddha, having had experience in both, knew that they would not in any way lead to spiritual perfection and enlightenment, and were thus inappropriate for holy life.

The path that the Buddha advises us to follow is called the Middle Path or the Noble Eightfold Path, which avoids the two extremes. It consists of eight factors, namely:

1. Right Understanding
2. Right Thought
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

Briefly, the first sermon states the following:

1. Existence is *dukkha* (Suffering);
2. *Dukha* is caused by Craving (*Tanha*);
3. There is the end of *dukkha* (Nirvana);
4. The Noble Eightfold Path is the way leading to the extinction of *dukkha*.

The Pali word *dukkha* has no exact English equivalent. It combines together many meanings and connotations, such as suffering, unsatisfactoriness, emptiness, pains, etc. It is, nonetheless the word that precisely describes the real nature of existence

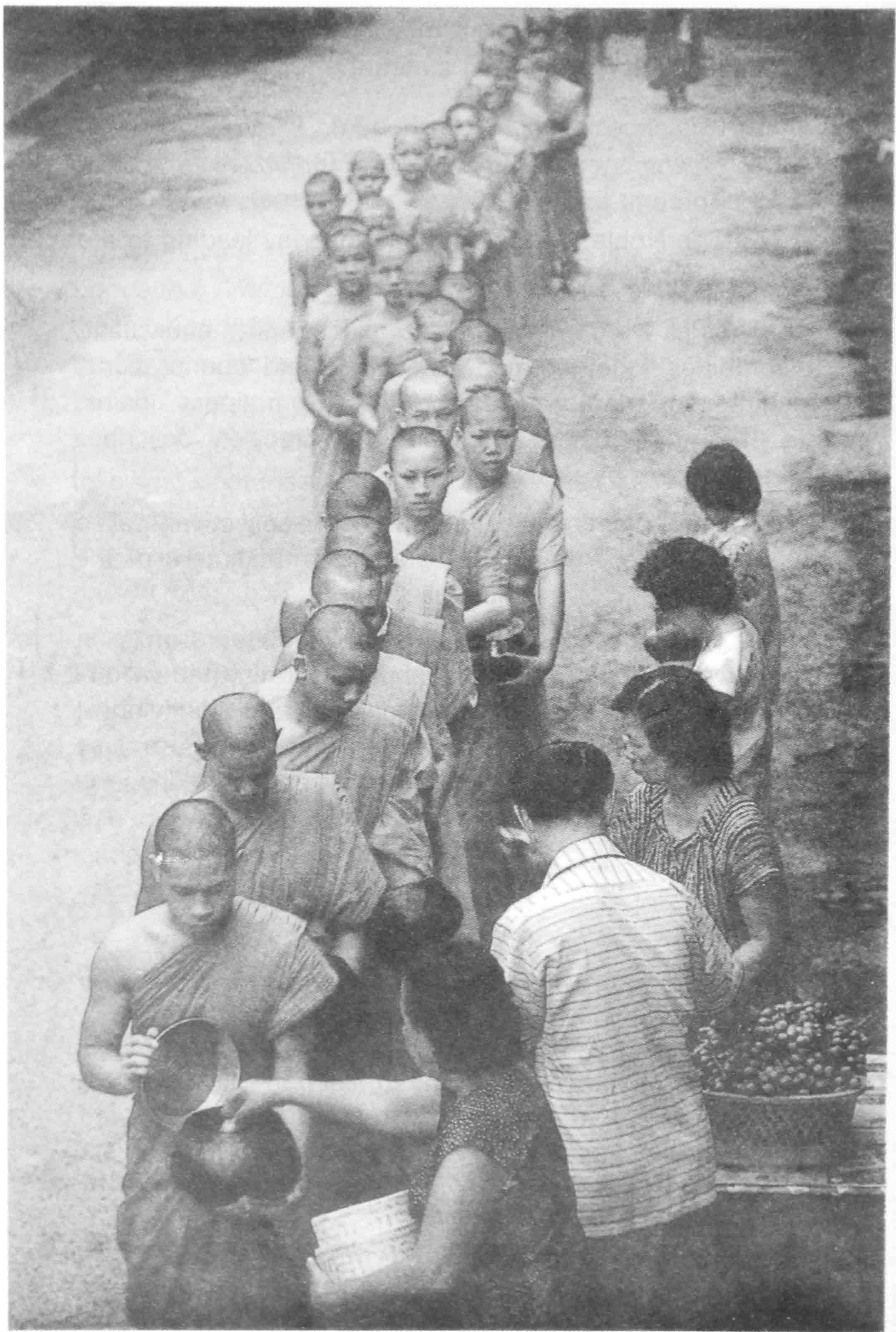
The four points in the first sermon are collectively called the Four Noble Truths. They are the embodiment of the whole teachings of the Buddha.

At the conclusion of the first sermon, there arose in *Kondañña* the "Eye of Truth," thus confirming the validity of the Buddha's claim of enlightenment and signifying at the same time the completion of the Holy Triple Gem, also known as the Buddhist Trinity, namely, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

## Questions

1. *How did the Buddha discover the Truth (Dharma)? Who was his teacher?*
2. *Why did the Buddha at first hesitate to teach the Dharma? Why did he decide afterward to teach it?*
3. *When, where, and to whom did the Buddha deliver the first sermon?*
4. *What is the name of the first sermon? What does it symbolize? Explain in detail.*
5. *What does the first sermon explain?*





Walking for alms is the tradition of the Sangha in Theravadan countries.



## 8. The Mission

*“Go forth, monks, for the benefit of many, for the happiness of many, out of compassion for the world. Preach to them the Dharma, which is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, and beautiful at the end...”*

Such was the command of the Compassionate Buddha given to the first batch of his sixty noble disciples when he sent them out on their Dharma mission.

Since enlightenment until the last moment of his life, a period of forty-five years, the Buddha tirelessly devoted his time and energy for the benefit of mankind, without ever thinking of his personal comfort or leisure. With universal love and infinite compassion characteristic of a religious founder of the highest stature, he endeavored to enlighten all those who could be guided and lead them on to the right path.

The Buddha travelled far and wide. Though born of a royal family and highly venerated by people from all walks of life, yet his life was very simple and free from all kinds of pretensions. He dressed simply, ate simple food, and lived in simple residences, sometimes under a tree in the jungle. That kind of life was also practiced by his noble monk disciples. It was the life of self-negation and altruism.

Before the Lord Buddha, all men are equal. No one was so low the Lord would neglect, no one so high he could not reach. So perfect was his impartiality and so infinite was his love that he did not discriminate even between his only son *Rahula*, and *Devadatta*, his wicked cousin who had made several attempts on his life, although unsuccessfully.



As a result of his efforts, the Order of Sangha grew quickly into a large body of devoted spiritual volunteers. They all helped him to spread his teaching among the masses, recruiting more and more members in the process.

Indian society at the time was, thanks to Brahmanism, under the tyranny of a caste system. According to this system, a person is considered high or low on the basis of the caste in which he is born. The Buddha felt that this was wrong and unfair. Instead, he preached that a person was high or low, noble or ignoble, not because of his birth, nor his wealth, or social status, but solely because of his own actions. This means, for instance, that a low-born person who leads a wholesome life, doing only good and dignified deeds, should, from the Buddhist point of view, deserve people's respect and admiration. Such a noble teaching, indeed, represented a revolutionary idea at the time and has since left a deep impression on Indian social thoughts that still rings true to this day.

The Buddha was the perfect model of all the virtues he preached. He was the holiest of the holy, the wisest of the wise. The most notable characteristic of the Buddha was the absolute purity of his heart. He was omniscient, but he urged his followers to think freely for themselves, without blindly believing in him. He was omnipotent, all-powerful, but rarely did he resort to miracles for he believed that the best and greatest miracle was that of the Dharma. He was, in brief, the greatest man who ever lived.

The Buddha reformed existing social norms, fought superstition and social injustice, initiated an era of free thinking, revolutionized the spiritual world, and founded the greatest religion ever known to man. He did all this and more without ever having to claim himself to be God, or related to God in any way. Other teachers before and after him taught about God or Gods (as in Hinduism), but

the Buddha simply taught the Truth or Dharma. Understanding the Truth is the essence of enlightenment and the ultimate freedom.

Unlike other religious founders who did not allow their followers to question their teachings and authority and discouraged them to think freely, the Buddha invited all skeptics to examine his doctrine and encouraged them to question and requestion him to their satisfaction. He did not have to refer to the so-called God or anyone else as the highest authority; there was none greater or more authoritative than he. His teaching is perfect and stands the test of all times.

The cycle of birth and death (*Samsara*) is compared to an ocean, and *Nirvana* to the "other shore" where there is always bliss. The Dharma of the Buddha is compared to the ship by which man crosses the ocean of *Samsara*.

## Questions

*(For students of Grade 7 or above)*

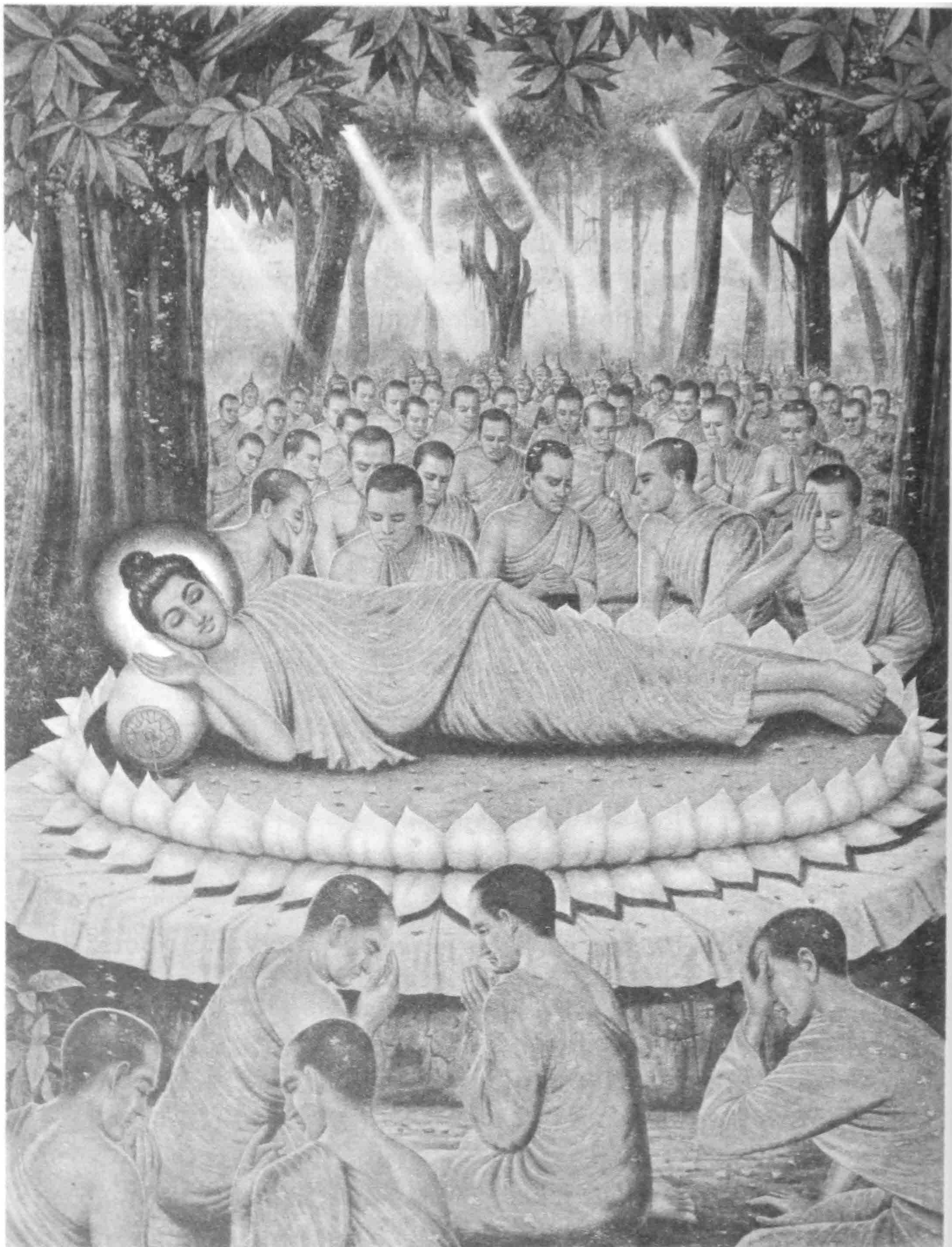
*Read the lesson carefully noting all important points.*

*Then attempt a precis on it.*

*(For students of Grade 6 or below)*

- 1. How long did the Buddha's mission last? Describe briefly how hard the Buddha worked.*
- 2. Write two sentences to show that the Buddha's life was a simple one.*
- 3. What were Rahula and Devadatta? How did the Buddha feel toward both of them?*
- 4. In what way did the Buddha disagree with the caste system?*
- 5. List a few achievements of the Buddha.*





*"Bhikkh us, now I address you. Verily, do I say unto you: Perishable are all conditioned things. Work out your way with diligence."*

With these words, the voice that had aroused mankind from ignorance, delivering to them the message of Universal Love, Truth, and Purity, and ushering in an era of spirit revolution, became silent.



## 9. The Great Demise

The Buddha worked hard to enlighten people, made them understand the Truth, corrected the many wrongs in society, and established a religion that was to become a worldwide spiritual force attracting the attention of people in all spheres of life. Many were the problems and obstacles he had to encounter, but he met them all, undaunted, and came out victorious.

Throughout the mission years the Buddha was constantly on the move, visiting all the places he was needed or wherever he felt his presence would be of any benefit. *Savatthi* was, however, the city where he spent the most rains, twenty-five years to be precise, and it was here that most of his sermons were given.

Forty-five long years of hard work and sacrifice passed by and the Buddha was approaching the final chapter of his life. He was now eighty years old. By that time, the religion had already been firmly established and was complete with the "four assemblies of devotees," namely, monks (*bhikkhu*), nuns (*bhikkhuni*), male lay devotees (*upasaka*), and female lay devotees (*upasika*), who would, in the event of his death, be able to carry on the mission he had initiated.

Thus on the fullmoon of the month *Magha* (February-March) he informed *Ananda*, his personal attendant, at *Pavala* near *Vesali*, that he would pass away in three months from that day! *Magha* is the third lunar month, according to ancient Indian system. The Buddha was to pass away in the sixth lunar month.



The prediction of his own death was an important event and came to be known as the Buddha's Rejection of the Aggregates of Life. The news spread like wild fire. People were shocked and filled with sorrow; they knew that the Buddha's decision was irrevocable and what he prophesied always came true.

Despite his failing health, the Buddha never ceased to dedicate himself to the noble task he had been doing since enlightenment. From *Vesali* he went to *Kusinara*, a small state to the north, doing all he could to teach people along the way. The journey was long and painful, but he calmly bore up under all the hardships and sufferings. Finally, on the full-moon of *Visakha*, he made it to the Sala Grove, where he was to lay down his wornout frame for eternal rest.

Between two tall Sala trees in the grove, *Ananda* spread a sheet of cloth for the Buddha. There the Master lay down, physically exhausted, but as enthusiastic as ever to teach his followers who were flocking on all sides in order to have the last glimpse, and hear the last words, of the Lord. All trees in the grove, though not in season, brought forth lovely flowers to venerate him, while the assembly sat in respectful silence, shedding tears of sorrow.

The Buddha then gave those present the last opportunity to ask him any question that might be on their minds. Out of respect no one did. In fact, they were too sad to say anything at all. On this occasion the Buddha also granted ordination to Subhadda, an ascetic of another faith, who sought his audience and who thus became his last disciple.

Then, when the last moment arrived, he preached his last sermon exhorting his followers to strive ceaselessly for their own salvation (*vimutti*). His last words were:

*"Bhikkhus, now I address you. Verily, do I say unto you: Perishable are all conditioned things. Work out your way with diligence."*

With these words, the voice that had aroused mankind from Ignorance, delivering to them the message of Universal Love, Truth, and Purity, and ushering in an era of spiritual revolution, became silent. Gone was the guiding light of the world. But all was not lost. The Torch of Dharma that he had lit was passed on to his dedicated disciples who have continued, down the centuries, to carry on the task of the Master.

The passing away of the Buddha is known as the Great Demise or, in Pali, *(Maha) Parinibbana*. He was then eighty years old. The day was *Visakha* fullmoon in the year 543 B.C.

## Questions

1. *How many are the Buddhist Assemblies? What are they?*
2. *What is the Buddha's Rejection of the Aggregates of Life? When and where did it take place?*
3. *Describe how the Buddha endeavored to work until the last moments of his life.*
4. *What were the Buddha's last words? Explain.*
5. *What is the Great Demise? When and where did it take place? (Be exact.)*





Makutabandhanacetiya in Kusinara, the place where the dead body of the Buddha was cremated.

## 10. The Cremation

It was toward the end of the third watch of the *Visakha* fullmoon night, 543 B.C., that the Blessed One passed away. At the moment, the earth is said to have trembled, gods and men were deeply shocked, sad and grief-stricken. There were general sorrow, despair, and lamentation everywhere, except among the *Arahants*, who were free from all mental defilements (*kilesa*) and had realized *Nirvana*.

At last the first mournful night at the grove came to a close. When it was light, Venerable *Ananda*, himself greatly grieved and sorrowful, went into the city of *Kusinara* to inform the people that the Master had passed away. People who heard the news became very sad and unhappy. They rushed to the Sala Grove and joined the mourning assembly of the Buddha's followers there.

The body of the Buddha was kept at the grove for seven days so his followers could pay their last homage and respect. They decorated the place with flowers, garlands, and fragrant materials, made all kinds of offerings, with music, lights, and other things. The grove was full of people, who came from all directions and places, all of whom felt a sense of irreplaceable loss and great despair.

On the last day, the body of the Buddha was taken out of the grove in a large procession and brought into the city by the northern gate. The procession paraded through the center of the city and left it by the eastern gate. Then it headed for *Makutabandhana Chetiya* where the Buddha's body would be cremated. The cremation ground is now considered a sacred site by Buddhists, who visit it in large number every year, for it is here that the physical form of the Buddha rested for the last time before it was consumed by fire.



The news of the Great Demise and the subsequent cremation swept beyond the country to her neighbors. Many kings and rulers wanted to have the Buddha's relics enshrined in their lands so they and their subjects could pay respect to the Master even if he had gone from them. So delegations of envoys were sent to the *Kusinara* court in order to ask for a share of the relics. The rulers of *Kusinara*, however, wishing to keep all relics of the Buddha in their land, turned down all those requests.

Displeased by *Kusinara* and determined to have their request fulfilled, seven rulers threatened to go to war with *Kusinara*. These were *Ajatasattu* from *Rajagaha* (*Rajgir*), *Licchavi* from *Vesali*, the *Sakyans* from *Kapilavatthu*, *Thuli* from *Allakappa*, *Koliya* from *Ramagama*, *Mahabrahmana* from *Vetthadipaka*, and the *Mallas* from *Pava*. They all marched their mighty armies to *Kusinara*, surrounded it, and prepared for an attack.

At that time, there lived in *Kusinara* a Brahmin by the name of *Dona*, who was known for his discretion and fairness. Sensing the probability of destruction and calamity that might result from war, the wise man addressed the *Kusinara* rulers as follows:

*"Listen, noble friends! The Lord Buddha, that Supreme Enlightened One, whom we love and respect, had all his life preached love and peace to the world. We are his followers, having accepted him, his teaching, and noble disciples as our guides. Those who have come for his relics are also his followers, having full faith and devotion in him, his teaching and his noble disciples. Let us not go against the Lord's words by quarreling over his sacred relics. Share them in good faith. Let the Lord's glory shine and spread in many lands. That is the least we could do as a gesture of our love and respect for him!"*

When the *Kusinara* rulers heard *Dona*'s words, they became glad at heart and unanimously conferred on him the responsibility of distributing the Buddha's relics. *Dona*

divided them into eight equal parts, one for *Kusinara* and the rest for seven others. All of them built pagodas in their lands to enshrine the relics. The container used to measure the relics was also enshrined in a pagoda constructed for the purpose.

There was another king who came late; he was *Moriya* of *Pipphalivana*. He also did not return empty-handed, but received the sacred ashes from the *Mallas* of *Kusinara*. These they enshrined in a pagoda, which came to be known as *Angarasathupa* or the Pagoda of Holy Ashes.

In this way, the relics of the Buddha were distributed and enshrined. It should, nevertheless, be remembered that these simply serve as the reminder of the Buddha's virtues and services to mankind and we do not worship them in the same way as that practiced in some animistic cults.

## Questions

1. *Who brought the news of the Buddha's death to the people? How did they react to it?*
2. *Describe how the people treated the Buddha's body after he had passed away.*
3. *Describe the Buddha's cremation.*
4. *What was the request of the seven kings–rulers? What did they do when it was turned down?*
5. *Who arranged for the distribution of the relics? How did he do it? Explain in detail.*







## 11. The Two Chief Disciples

The Buddha had many able and devoted monk disciples, collectively called the *Sangha*, to help him spread his noble teachings. These disciples came from different social backgrounds, but were, as a result of training, equally endowed with spiritual achievements. There were kings and princes, peasants and laborers, Brahmins and outcastes, teachers, traders, ascetics, actors, sinners, and even notorious bandits - all of them, having been inspired by the Buddha's teachings, had consequently abandoned their earlier ways of life and took upon themselves the holy vows, pure and sublime in all respects, and attained the ultimate realization of Truth as did the Buddha.

Chief among these disciples were *Sariputta* and *Moggallana*, who excelled all the others in wisdom and psychic powers respectively. They were close friends from rich Brahmin families, who lived near the city of *Rajagaha*, having good education and character and a promising future as householders.

One day, however, they went together for the annual festival in *Rajagaha*, where various kinds of entertainments were shown. While watching the shows, a thought struck both of them that all these things were only of superficial value and the pleasure they gave was short-lived. Both the performers and the audience would ultimately come to the end of life.

*Sariputta* and *Moggallana*, therefore, decided to renounce the world and became ascetics, homeless and



constantly in search of Truth. They made a mutual promise to inform one another in case one happened to discover the Truth before the other.

One day *Sariputta* came across *Assaji*, one of the first five disciples who attended on *Siddhattha* while practicing self-mortification and to whom the Buddha preached the first sermon. *Assaji* instructed *Sariputta* in the fundamentals of the Buddhist philosophy, which he summarized in one single stanza (*gāthā*) as follows:

*Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā  
tesam hetum tathāgato (āha)  
tesaṅca yo nirodho  
evam vādi mahāsamano.*

(Whatever things arise from causes, the *Tathagata* [Buddha] has declared their causes as well as their extinction through the extinction of causes. Thus spake the Great Samana.)

This stanza, when simplified, means: All things come into existence depending upon certain conditions and cease to exist when those conditions disappear.

With the mere utterance of this brief stanza, *Sariputta* attained the Eye of Truth. Gladdened and overjoyed, he went straight to see his friend *Moggallana* and repeated the stanza he had heard from *Assaji*. *Moggallana*, too, attained the Eye of Truth.

Then they both went to see the Buddha, received ordination from him and were soon established in the state of *Arahantship*. Later they were appointed by the Buddha to the status of the Chief Disciples and they proved to be of great assistance in the propagation of the Dharma as well as in the administration of the Sangha. Both, however, passed away before the Buddha.

## *Questions*

- 1. What kinds of people entered the Order of Sangha?*
- 2. Who were the Buddha's chief disciples? Where did they live?*
- 3. What thoughts occurred to them while watching the shows? What did they decide to do after that?*
- 4. Who was Assaji? What instruction did he give to Sariputta? Write the meaning in English.*
- 5. What did the two friends do after attaining the Eye of Truth?*



## 12. Venerable Moggallana (I)

The Buddha had two chief disciples, *Sariputta* and *Moggallana*. The first was pre-eminent in wisdom and the second was renowned for his psychic power. The two were close friends since childhood. They were even born on the same day.

*Moggallana* was born in a village called *Kolitagama* near *Rajagaha* (*Rajgir*). So he was also called *Kolita* after the name of the village. His father was a rich man and the chief of *Kolitagama*. His mother was known as *Moggali* (or *Moggallani*), from which the name *Moggallana* was derived.

*Moggallana* grew up to be a strong, intelligent and dutiful young man. He had everything that he wanted and was enjoying life like anybody else. But one day he went with his friend *Sariputta* and their followers to see an annual celebration in *Rajagaha*, and certain thoughts occurred to the two friends that made them sad and unhappy. This was how they thought:

*“Life is impermanent. Sooner or later man must die. There is no distinction between the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, the high and the low. All must die. This is the fact of life although many tend to forget it. They are afraid of death and hate to think about it. Because of their selfishness they forget the fact that when they came into the world, they brought nothing with them, neither can they take anything with them when they die. If people understand this simple truth, they will not be attached to sensual pleasure, but will try to work for higher spiritual bliss.”*

When the two friends thought in this manner, they immediately realized the unsatisfactoriness of life. They also saw that in order to make this life truly meaningful man should not be content merely with worldly pleasure, eating, drinking, and making merriments, but should try instead to discover the Truth that would end what was bad or evil in man.

The two friends therefore decided to renounce the world. They became disciples of *Sanjaya*, a renowned religious teacher of the days. However, they soon became dissatisfied with his teaching because it did not help them to realize their goals. So they left *Sanjaya* and started to roam about, separately, to meet and learn from other teachers. Each promised the other to bring the good news if he found the true doctrine first. A period of intense search went by.

Both *Sariputta* and *Moggallana* were wise and thoughtful. They did not simply take what they learned for granted. They always tried to see things deeply so they could understand them better. We should also learn to use our intelligence and reasoning power in everything we do or experience. For example, if mother tells you not to do certain things, say, watching TV when you should be doing homework, you should not get angry with her, but should instead reason with yourself carefully and try to understand why she gives you the advice. If you think hard enough and without prejudice, you will eventually realize the wisdom of her words and be happy to follow her advice without a grudge.

Finally, the two arrived in *Rajagaha* after an extensive journey. One morning *Sariputta* met Venerable *Assaji*, one of the Buddha's early disciples, who preached to him the essence of the Buddha's teaching. When he heard that, he immediately saw the Truth that he had been looking for and, although he did not reach the highest stage of spiritual attainments then and there, he was convinced that the Buddha's teaching was the best and the most perfect one.



## Questions

1. *Describe Moggallana's early life. How was the name derived?*
2. *What did Moggallana and Sariputta think while watching the entertainments in Rajagaha?*
3. *Why did the two friends renounce the world?*
4. *Why were they dissatisfied with Sanjaya? What did they do after leaving him?*
5. *How did Sariputta realize the Truth? Whose teaching was the best and the most perfect one for him?*

### 13. Venerable Moggallana (II)

Having realized the Truth, *Sariputta* hastened to find out *Moggallana* and repeated to him what he had heard from *Assaji*. *Moggallana*, too, at once attained the Eye of Truth. The message that the two friends had learned was as follows:

*Whatever things arise from causes, the Tathagata (Buddha) has declared their causes as well as their extinction through the extinction of causes. Thus spake the Great Recluse (Buddha).*

This statement constitutes an important law. It says that everything that exists depends on certain causes. Nothing can originate or take place without a cause or causes. When these causes are removed, it will cease to exist. Moreover, those things that are causes themselves may be caused yet by some other causes, and so on and so forth. All things in the world are thus interrelated and interdependent. This is the truth that no one can deny or disprove.

This profound teaching of the Buddha is, indeed, a very valuable lesson for us. We know now that everything good or bad must have causes and that when these causes are removed or destroyed, they (the effects) will also disappear. This means that if we want good things to happen, we must try to do good (causes), and if we want to destroy bad things, we must remove those things that cause them to take place. For instance, if we want to succeed, we must



work hard; if we want our friends to love us, we must be nice to them and must not be selfish.

Because of their conviction in the Buddha's teachings *Sariputta* and *Moggallana* decided to receive ordination from the Great Master who later appointed them as his Chief Disciples. They both were of great help to the Buddha in spreading his noble doctrine among the masses and were held in high esteem by the people.

Before attaining Arahantship, *Moggallana* received special instruction from the Buddha. Among other things, the Master said: "*Moggallana, you should avoid any speech that may lead to quarrel or fault-finding because it may lead to much talk and argument. Much talk and argument leads to the abandonment of self-restraint...*" This advice is, indeed, good for all of us.

*Moggallana* was in the habit of visiting various worlds; sometimes he went to heaven and, sometimes, to hell. He talked to beings in those places and, having returned to this world, reported it to his followers here. This encouraged the people to do good and to avoid evil because they heard from *Moggallana* that good people would be reborn in happy places and evil-doers would suffer in hell.

The heretical teachers, however, did not like *Moggallana* because he attracted many people, including their disciples, to him. So they bribed a gang of brigands to kill the great monk. *Moggallana* at that time was living in *Kalasila*. The murderers surrounded his residence and tried to kill him, but *Moggallana* used his psychic powers and escaped unharmed. This happened six times. On the seventh, seeing that he had committed a grave sin in past life and would have to bear its consequences, *Moggallana* allowed the hired gangsters to get at him. They fell on him like a pack of wolves, smashed his bones to a thousand pieces, and then left the scene, thinking that he was already dead.

*Moggallana*, somehow, survived. With his great powers, he cured himself and became well again. Then he went to see the Buddha, paid the last homage, and took his leave to die, much to the sorrow of his many followers.

What was *Moggallana's* sin in the past life?

It is said that in that particular birth, which was so long, long ago, he was married to an evil-minded woman who hated his old and blind parents. She wanted to get rid of them and commanded him to kill them. At first the husband was so strongly against the idea he would not listen to it, but later he gave in. He then plotted up an evil plan.

One morning the ungrateful son took his parents in a cart and drove them to the forest. There, unseen by anyone he left them in the cart. After a while, he returned pretending to be a gang of robbers, shouting and making a good deal of noises. Then he began to beat his blind parents, threatening all the time in a feigned voice. His parents, not seeing the attacker and believing themselves being attacked by some cruel rubbers, shouted out for their son to run away.

*"Flee, my son, flee,"* they cried. *"Some robbers are attacking us. Don't you come to us. Run for your life!"*

The old couple loved their son so dearly they did not care for their own life. They were afraid that he would be killed if he tried to save them. All parents are like that. They always love and are concerned with their children. There is nothing that can be compared to the love of parents!

*Moggallana* committed a grave sin in one of his previous lives beating his poor parents, and he had to suffer the evil consequences.



## Questions

1. *What did Sariputta learn from Assaji? Give detail.*
2. *What kind of speech that we should avoid? Why?*
3. *How did Moggallana encourage his followers to do good and avoid evil.*
4. *Describe how Moggallana was attacked and how he died.*
5. *What grave "sin" did Moggallana do in one of his past lives?*

## 14. Angulimala (I)

*Angulimala* was one of the best known disciples of the Buddha. His life was unusual and full of adventures. It was a violent one, too.

*Angulimala* was known in his boyhood as *Ahimsaka* or the "Harmless one." His father, *Bhaggava*, was the court astrologer and chaplain to King *Pasenadi* of *Kosala* and his mother was *Mantani*. He was born in the dead of night under the bandits' constellation.

It is said that at the time of *Angulimala's* birth, all the weapons in the city glowed as if on fire, including those which belonged to the king. It was unmistakably an evil omen: the child was destined to become a notorious bloody bandit who would bring destruction and untold terror to his own countrymen.

When he came of age, he was sent to *Takkasila* for an education befitting the young son of a respectable family. He soon proved to be an excellent student, loved and trusted by his teacher; but he was also an object of envy for his fellow-students, who consistently poisoned his teacher's mind against him.

*Ahimsaka's* teacher, thereupon, plotted a vile scheme to destroy him. He demanded of *Ahimsaka* an honorarium of a thousand human lives, each represented by a right-hand finger the latter was supposed to bring him. This, the teacher hoped, would make *Ahimsaka* a murderer with a price on his head, who would consequently be hunted down and destroyed.



At first *Ahimsaka* was reluctant to carry out such a bloody mission. He was taught from his boyhood to be kind and gentle. He also knew that it was a sin to kill people. But his teacher assured him that once his mission was completed, he would be instructed in a special knowledge that would free himself from all sins and would then be endowed with great supernatural powers.

*Ahimsaka* thought hard. He did not realize that his involvement with evil people would eventually lead him to the evil path. With great reluctance, he accepted his teacher's demand. He was determined to complete his mission as soon as possible.

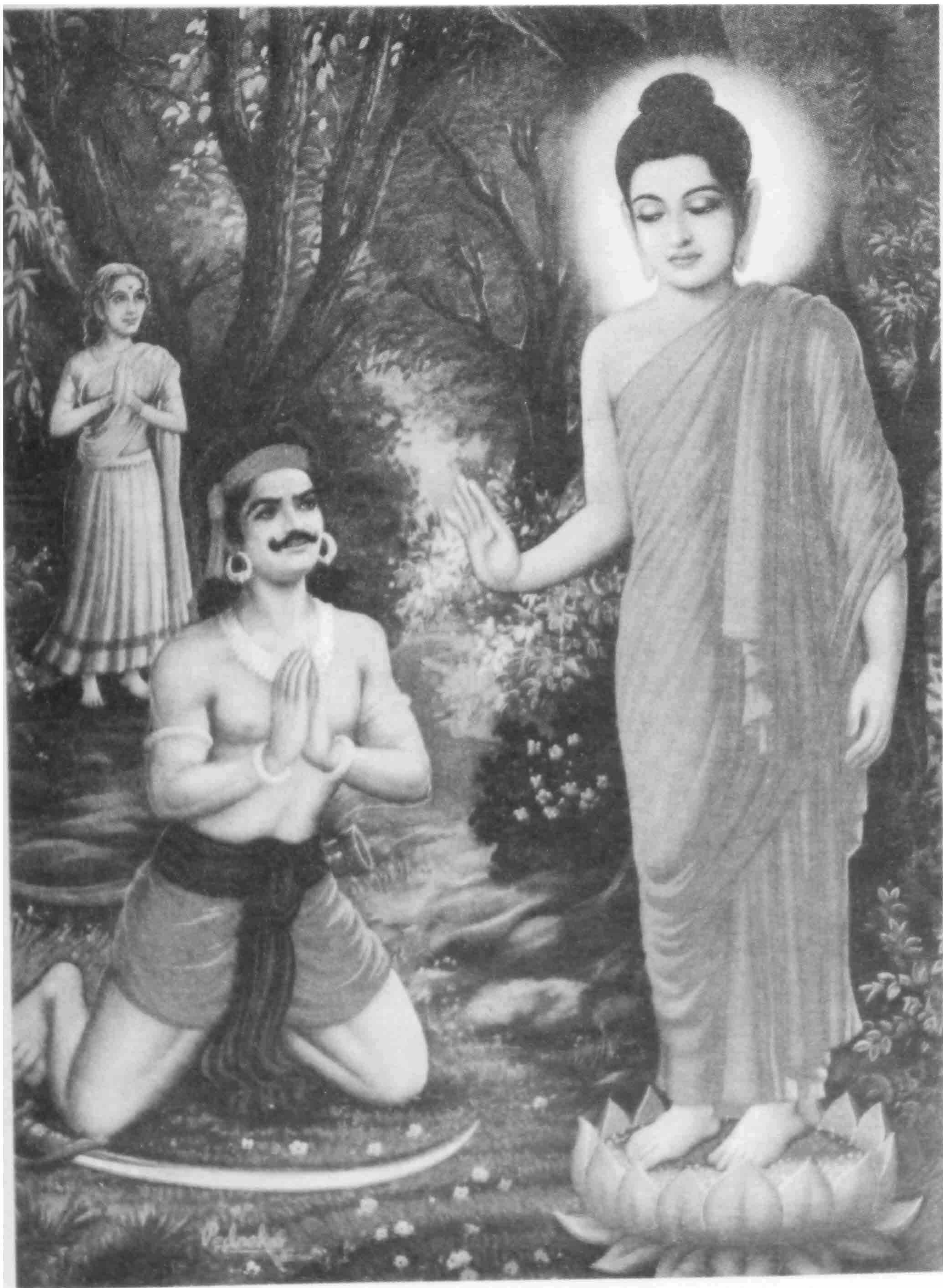
The gentle *Ahimsaka* thus became the cruelest bandit, merciless and ever bent on killing. He spared none that happened to cross his path, men, women, the aged, and even infants. From each of his victim he cut a finger and tied it with a long string, which he wore around his neck.

Altogether he killed 999 people and the garland he wore had 999 fingers on it. Thus he became known as *Angulimala* or the "Finger-Garlanded One"

## Questions

1. What was *Angulimala*'s early name? What does it mean?
2. What took place at the time *Angulimala* was born? What did it indicate?
3. Where did *Angulimala* go for education? How was his study?
4. Why did *Angulimala* take to the bandit's life?
5. What did *Angulimala* do with his victims? How many people did he kill?





After listening to the Buddha's Teachings, Angulimala decided to enter the Holy Order.



## 15. Angulimala (II)

For years *Angulimala* terrorized the countryside and townships. Because of his intelligence and daring expertise, he was never caught. Villages were deserted and the jungle tracks fell into disuse for fear of him. King *Pasenadi* finally ordered a detachment of soldiers to capture him. Dead or alive, *Angulimala* had to be caught at all costs.

However, *Angulimala's* mother came to know just in time what was going to happen to her son. Determined to save her only son, whom she loved so dearly, she hastily made for the jungle where she knew he was hiding in order to warn him. *Angulimala* saw his mother coming and, gladdened that the last finger he required would soon be his, rushed forward with a raised sword to strike the poor lady who had given him birth and who had raised him up with great love and care.

Before the act of ultimate crime was committed, however, the Compassionate Buddha, who also had come to know what was going on, appeared before *Angulimala* and intercepted him just in the last moment.

Like a mad elephant, the bandit turned toward the Buddha, who was then walking away in the other direction. He ran after him, determined to finish his task. But however hard he tried, he could not come close enough to strike the Buddha with his sword that had drunk the blood of so many human lives.

This was a miracle. *Angulimala* only exhausted himself while the Buddha was walking at a leisurely pace.





A scene from the story of King Vessantara, one of the most popular themes in Thai Buddhism.



At last *Angulimala* stopped. It was the first time he ever had to admit defeat. Still trying to catch his breath, the stone-hearted bandit cried out, "*Stop ! You there, hold it !*".

"*I have stopped.*" said the Buddha still walking, "*but you have not.*"

*Angulimala* was puzzled.

"*You're lying!*" he shouted even louder. "*You're walking, but you said you had stopped. I have stopped but you said I had not.*"

Came the Buddha's reply: "*Angulimala, I have stopped doing evil. I have also given up running after pleasure. I have stopped from doing bad deeds, from speaking evil speech, and from thinking unwholesome thoughts! Come, Angulimala! Listen to the noble doctrine!*"

The Buddha then proceeded to deliver a sermon to *Angulimala*. His words so completely changed *Angulimala* that the latter decided then and there to seek permission to enter the Holy Order. He was later ordained by the Buddha at Jeta Grove, while the angry populace were yelling at the king's palace for his blood. Little did they know of what was going on at the monastery.

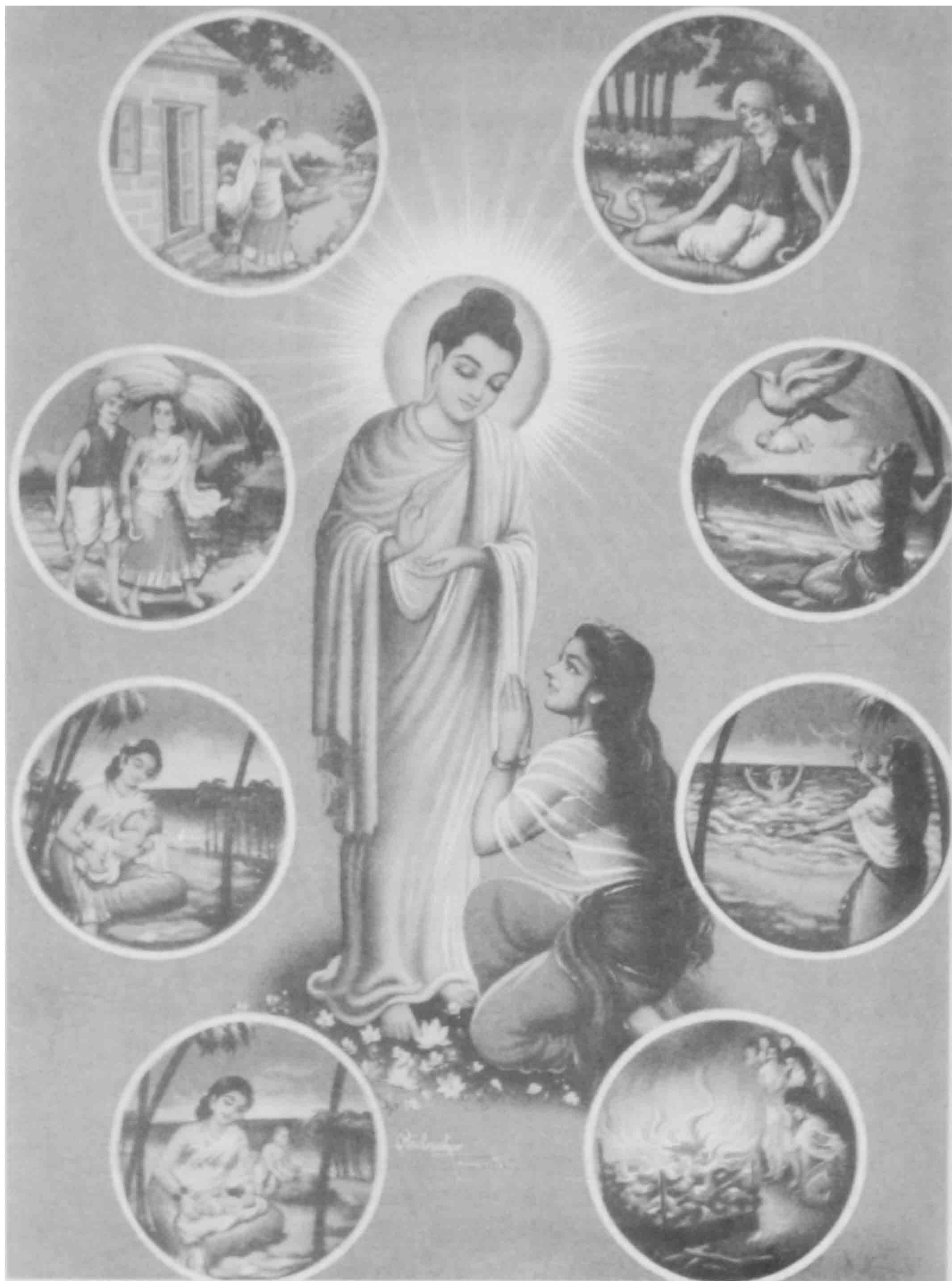
*Angulimala's* holy life was by no means an easy one. Although he was pardoned by King *Pasenadi*, who was himself a staunch supporter of the Buddha, the people did not forget his past misdeeds. When he went outside the monastery, they fell on him with a vengeance, but on the advice of the Buddha he silently endured their wrath and radiated the thought of love and kindness to them. Gradually, he was able to win their love and respect and, eventually, became one of their most trusted spiritual preceptors.

*Angulimala* trained himself with great diligence and patience and finally attained Arahantship. His life demonstrates that it is never too late to change yourself for the better.

## Questions

1. *Why did people desert their villages and avoid the jungle tracks?*
2. *Why did Angulimala's mother go to the jungle? What did Angulimala do when he saw his mother?*
3. *What prevented Angulimala from the ultimate sin? How did this happen?*
4. *How did the Buddha's words effect Angulimala?*
5. *How did Angulimala, as a monk, win people's love and trust?*





Life was cruel to Patachara, but she finally found true refuge in the Compassionate Buddha.

## 16. Bhikkhuni Patachara (I)

*Patachara* was a *Bhikkhuni* disciple of the Buddha. She is one of the best known figures in Pali literature. Her life story is a very moving and interesting one. It demonstrates how the Buddha's teaching (*Dharma*) could help people in distress and provide them with true happiness.

In the city of *Savatthi*, there lived a millionaire who had one (older) son and one daughter. His daughter's name was *Patachara*. She was very beautiful and kind-hearted. Her parents took great care of her and, when she was sixteen, built her a special mansion for comfort and protection and found her a young man of good family and background to whom they expected to give her in marriage.

But *Patachara* fell in love with a servant and, in order to avoid being married to the man of her parents' choice, decided to elope with her lover.

They ran away to a very remote village and lived there, where they believed her parents would not be able to locate them. After some time *Patachara* got pregnant and she became worried about her safety and that of her baby. So she decided to tell her husband to take her back to her parents, where she would feel secure and would get the best available medical attention.

"It is quite some time since we left my parents. I'm sure they have forgiven us and would be happy to see both of us and our baby," said *Patachara* one evening.

"What!" exclaimed her husband. "They would tear me to pieces. After what we had done how could they



*ever forgive me? I wouldn't dare to face them. Never!"*

*"But our child and I could be in serious trouble if I have the baby here,"* the poor wife pleaded, almost in tears.

In order to pacify his wife, the husband therefore pretended to agree to her proposal. However, he kept postponing time after time until her pregnancy became quite advanced. Finally, *Patachara* could wait no longer, and so one day while her husband was away from home, she set off for *Savatthi*, alone by herself.

When the husband returned home in the evening, he discovered what had happened. He rushed after his wife and overtook her in the jungle only to find her in labor. With great difficulty *Patachara* gave birth to a boy. The husband then persuaded his wife to return to their cottage in the village. For some time they lived happily together, forgetting all the hardships and discomforts of life in the jungle village there.

When the first boy could barely walk, *Patachara* had the second pregnancy. Again she requested her husband to take her to her parents and again he kept postponing on one pretext or another until it became plain to *Patachara* that her pregnancy was too far advanced to wait any longer. So she stole away with the first son. Again her husband caught her up while in the jungle and this time, too, the poor wife experienced labor pains just as her husband overtook her.

It was night when this happened, and in the jungle it is darker at night than in the open. The sky threatened to rain and before long it poured down in torrents. There was darkness all around and the storm was raging fiercely.

*"Make us a shelter," Patachara* cried. *"The baby is about to come by!"*

The husband hastily went about cutting branches to

make a shelter for his beloved wife and child. But, alas, he was bitten by a poisonous snake and was killed instantly, leaving his wife to deliver the second son by herself.

It was very hard and painful for *Patachara*. She spent the night on all fours sheltering her frightened children all night long, who were crying all the time in constant fear and discomfort. As soon as it was dawn, she set off to look for her husband, leading the first child with one hand and holding the newborn with another.

What the poor woman discovered filled her with horror and untold sorrow. Great was her grief, and heavy was the burden of responsibility she would have to shoulder. Now there was no turning back. Physically exhausted and emotionally drained, she continued the journey with her two sons until they arrived at river *Achiravati*, which was then overflowed with water due to heavy rain the previous night.

*"It would be dangerous to cross the river with both boys all at once,"* she thought.

So, leaving the older boy on the bank, *Patachara* carried the newborn, still red with the stains of labor, to the other side of the river, where she left him on a piece of cloth, and started back to get the older boy. Unfortunately, while she was still in mid-river, a flying eagle spotted the tiny baby and, mistaking it for a piece of meat, swooped down on the poor boy and lifted him up into the air with its powerful claws.

*Patachara* was horrified. She waved her hands frantically, shouting at the top of her voice against the din of the rushing torrents of the river, but to no avail. Her first son, seeing his mother waving hands and thinking in his innocent way that she was signaling him to come to her, jumped into the river and was immediately swept away by the fast and relentless current.



*Patachara* was stunned. Before her very eyes one child disappeared into the empty sky to be killed and devoured up by a voracious eagle, while the other was drowned in the river. She stood there, helpless, totally lost and heart-broken.

## *Questions*

1. *Where did Patachara and her family live? How did her parents treat her?*
2. *Why did Patachara run away from her family? Where did she go, and with whom?*
3. *What did Patachara tell her husband to do when she became pregnant? Did he agree with her idea?*
4. *Where did Patachara have her first baby? Explain why and how she had it there.*
5. *Describe how Patachara lost her husband and sons.*

## 17. Bhikkhuni Patachara (II)

Great were *Patachara's* loss and sorrow. She continued her solitary journey, forlorn and desolate. Her only hope now was with her parents. They were the only people left in the whole world to whom she could turn. On and on she walked. There was no one to talk to; no beloved husband to give her comfort and encouragement, no little children who would delight her, and no food to fill her empty stomach. It was quiet all around, frightful and utterly depressing.

As she neared the city, she began to see people. No one recognized her, though. Everything seemed so strange and unfamiliar. Then she saw a kindly-looking man coming her way from the opposite direction and decided to inquire about her parents.

*"Please don't ask me about those people,"* the stranger said, his face suddenly turned sad and uncomfortable.

*"But they are the only people I want to see,"* insisted *Patachara*.

*"Young lady, don't you know anybody else whom you want to contact?"* asked the stranger, looking straight at her face.

Poor *Patachara* shook her head.

*"Well, then, I'll tell you,"* said the kind man after a moment's hesitation. *"You know there was a heavy stormy rain last night?"*



*"Yes, the worst in my life," Patachara's voice was ironical and bitter. For some reasons, she could not help feeling apprehensive.*

*"The rain was so heavy and the storm so ferocious the millionaire's mansion collapsed, killing the whole family instantly. Look over there. The smoke is rising high and the fire must still be raging. That is where they are being cremated; the millionaire, his wife, and the son-all the three of them!"*

*Patachara* looked at the black smoke. Whatever hope she had had previously seemed to evaporate completely with the smoke. The last blow was so severe she did not know what to do. The poor lady broke into tears, crying and sobbing convulsively.

In one single night *Patachara* lost her husband, two sons, parents and the only brother. Her tender heart could not take it any more. She had lost everything, including her senses, and went insane.

Demented *Patachara*, once beautiful and aspired by many wealthy youths, roamed the city streets, naked and emaciated. People made fun of her and the street urchins threw stones and dirts at her. She suffered a great deal. No one could help her. No one ever wanted to. And the time passed by.

One day she happened to walk into the *Jeta* Grove, where the Buddha was preaching to the congregation of his followers. Not knowing where she was going, she walked aimlessly into the preaching hall. People were shocked to see a naked young lady walking toward the Buddha and tried to drive her away. But the Compassionate Buddha stopped them. With unbounded kindness he spoke to *Patachara*, radiating to her the power of his infinite love.

*"Sister Patachara, wake up to your senses!"* the Lord commanded.

With that *Patachara* recovered; she felt ashamed to be there in that unbecoming condition. Someone in the assembly threw a piece of cloth for her. Then the Buddha preached to her about the nature of life, the cycle of birth and death, and how to end it to attain *Nirvana*. At the end of the sermon she realized the Eye of Truth and requested the Lord Buddha to grant her ordination as a *Bhikkhuni*. She worked hard to bring herself further to spiritual perfection and was a great help to the *Bhikkhuni* community in which she lived.

One day *Patachara* was washing her feet; she poured some water on her feet and the water fell to the ground, flowed down a little distance and went into the ground. She poured the second time and it went yet a little further. On the third time, the water went even further before it was absorbed into the sand.

*"How like human life it is!"* she thought. *"Some people die early, some at middle age, some in old age. It is just like water seeping into the ground."*

As she meditated, the Buddha appeared before her and uttered the following stanza:

*"It is better to live even for one day with a judicious understanding of the changeful nature of things than to live a hundred years without such an understanding."*

At the end of the Buddha's instruction *Patachara* attained Arahantship. Never before did she feel so happy and free. The Buddha later proclaimed her pre-eminent in the *Vinaya* (Discipline) among the *Bhikkhuni* members. For many years she helped the Lord spread his noble teaching and passed away at a ripe age.



## Questions

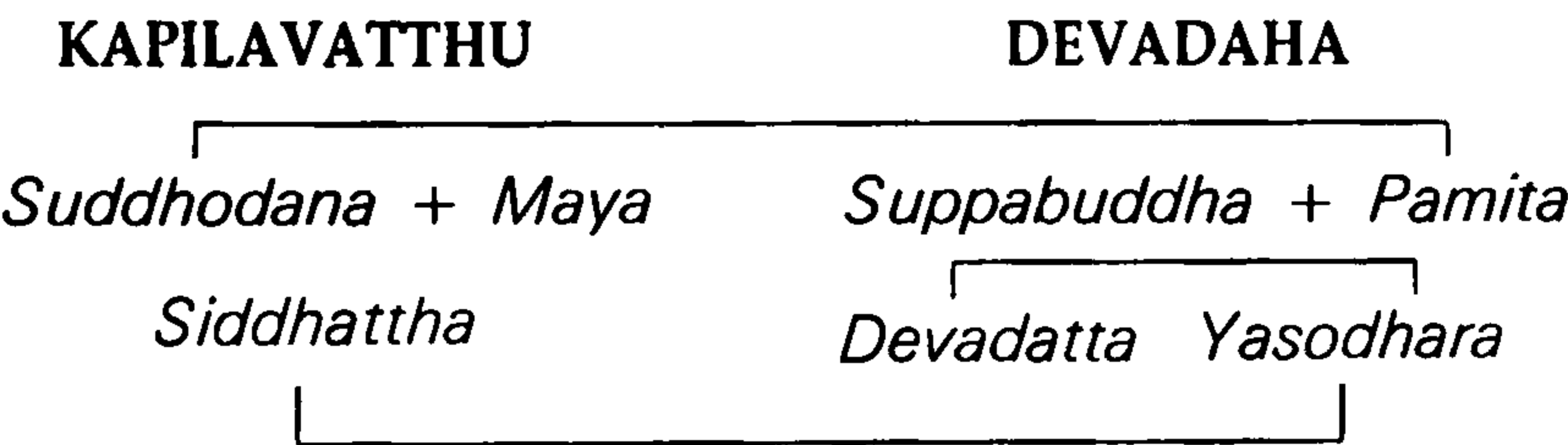
1. *What happened to Patachara's parents and brother on that fateful night? How did she learn of the news?*
2. *Why did Patachara go mad? Describe her sufferings.*
3. *How did she recover from insanity? Explain fully.*
4. *How did she attain Arahantship? Explain the analogy of water and life as seen by Patachara.*
5. *Explain the Buddha's instruction to Patachara in your own words.*

# 18. Devadatta (I)

*Devadatta* was the son of King *Suppabuddha* and Queen *Pamita*, who ruled in *Devadaha* in the North of India. He had a younger sister, called *Yasodhara*, who was married to *Siddhattha*. *Devadatta* was, therefore, *Siddhattha*'s brother-in-law.

*Devadatta* was also related to *Siddhattha* in another way. His mother (Queen *Pamita*) was, in fact, a younger sister of *Suddhodana*. King *Suddhodana* of *Kapilavatthu* was *Siddhattha*'s father. So *Devadatta* and *Siddhattha* were cousins.

For easy understanding, please see the following diagram:



Although *Siddhattha* and *Devadatta* were related by birth and marriage, they were quite different from one another. *Siddhattha* was kind, gentle and intelligent. *Devadatta* was cruel, rough and aggressive. *Siddhattha* liked to study and meditate. *Devadatta* was very fond of hunting and games. *Siddhattha* loved all beings, men or animals, and did not want to hurt or injure any living beings. *Devadatta* never cared about them; he just wanted to have fun and make himself happy, sometimes even at the cost of others. He was very inconsiderate.





*"Life belongs to the one who saves it, not the one who tries to destroy it," said the compassionate Siddhata to his wicked cousin, Devadatta.. Later, as a Buddha he declared, "Making oneself a comparison, let one neither killed, nor cause to be killed."*



One day, in their early teenage, *Devadatta* shot down a bird with an arrow. The poor bird fell to the ground and was picked up by *Siddhattha*, who found that it had been very badly wounded but had not died yet. The kind prince immediately proceeded to remove the arrow, dressed the wound, and succeeded in saving the poor bird's life.

Now both princes wanted to have the bird. *Devadatta* said that he should have it because he was the one who shot it down. *Siddhattha* said that he should be the one to have it because he had saved its life. When this matter was brought to the royal council of the elders, they all decided in favor of the kind *Siddhattha*.

*Siddhattha* left his palace and all worldly possessions to become a monk at the age of twenty-nine. Six years later he became enlightened and was known as Buddha or the Enlightened One. As the Buddha he began to teach and preach to the people, made them understand the Truth, brought justice and freedom of thought and speech to man's society, and established a religion which is known to us now as Buddhism.

The Buddha's teaching spread far and wide and in a short time he gained many followers. People from all social classes flocked around him to hear him teach. They practiced his teaching and were benefited. They greatly loved and respected the Buddha for he had shown them the right way of living and enlightenment. Many men even left home to become monks after him and they helped him to spread his teaching even further.

*Devadatta*, too, became a monk. At first he was a fairly good monk. He studied the Buddha's teaching and practiced some meditation. As a result he was able to acquire certain psychic powers that enabled him to perform some miracles. But by nature *Devadatta* was self-seeking, conceited and overambitious. So he did not advance very far in his spiritual training.

*Devadatta* became very jealous of the Buddha's fame and influence. He also wanted to be in command of the Sangha Order which belonged to the Buddha. So he requested the Buddha to resign and appoint him as the head of the Sangha, but the Buddha, knowing his misdirected ambition and greed, refused to comply. *Devadatta* was very frustrated and decided to kill the Buddha. He knew that as long as the Buddha lived he would never become the head of the Sangha.

## Questions

1. *Explain clearly how Siddhattha and Devadatta were related.*
2. *Describe the differences in Siddhattha's and Devadatta's character.*
3. *What argument won Siddhattha the wounded bird?*
4. *Why did people love and respect the Buddha? Write as much as you can about his service to mankind.*
5. *What request did the Buddha turn down? What did Devadatta plan to do next?*



## 19. Devadatta (II)

In order to destroy the Buddha, *Devadatta* first befriended *Ajatasattu*, the young prince of *Magadha*. He wanted to use *Ajatasattu* in his evil plans. But *Ajatasattu* was not yet the king of the country, so *Devadatta* urged him to kill his father, King *Bimbisara*, who was also a staunch supporter of the Lord Buddha, and seize the throne. This *Devadatta* believed would allow *Ajatasattu* to use all his influence to annihilate the Buddha. With the Buddha gone, all powers would then fall into his hand.

*Ajatasattu* was an inexperienced young prince. He believed *Devadatta* and proceeded to carry out his instruction. King *Bimbisara* suffered a great deal before he died at the hand of his own beloved son.

*Devadatta's* next step was to involve *Ajatasattu* in the assassination of the Buddha. An evil action usually leads to another and so does a bad habit. We should not, therefore, do anything wrong or evil. If we discover any bad habit within ourselves, we must give up that habit immediately before it takes a firm root. *Devadatta* did not realize this. So he went ahead with his evil intention to put the Buddha out of his way.

First he and King *Ajatasattu* hired a gang of murderers to kill the Buddha, who was then residing on the mountain called the Vulture Peak. Despite the planning and preparation, the effort failed. All the hired murderers changed their minds and became the Buddha's followers.

*Devadatta* then planned to have the Buddha killed by a killer elephant called *Nalagiri*. He told *Ajatasattu* to intoxicate the animal so it became furiously mad. In the morning when the Buddha and his monk disciples came into the city, the beast was let loose into the same street, drunk and very fierce. When the people saw the mad elephant running amuck, they ran helter-skelter to safety - as fast as they could - and the Buddha and his monks were left to face the danger by themselves.

The Buddha was not, however, afraid of the mad elephant. With the power of love and purity of mind he was able to calm down the animal and make it as tame as a cat. He did not run away, nor did he use weapons of any kind. The power of mind was the only weapon that he had. He simply radiated the thought of love and compassion toward the animal. His power was so great that the elephant was brought to its knees to worship him.

Pure love is a good quality that everyone should develop. In Pali it is called "*Metta*." We should have *Metta* toward all living beings and always wish them happiness and joy. *Metta* is the opposite of hatred, anger, or resentment. The mind which is filled with *Metta* is a happy mind, a society filled with *Metta* is a happy society. A good Buddhist should therefore always practice *Metta* by acting, speaking, and thinking with love and compassion.

*Devadatta* became very frustrated because all his attempts to kill the Buddha had failed. *Ajatasattu*, on the other hand, had become very unpopular among his subjects. They were angry that he had associated with the evil *Devadatta*, had killed his own father, and helped *Devadatta* to destroy the Buddha.

One day *Devadatta* climbed up the Vulture Peak looking for a good chance to kill the Buddha. Then he saw the



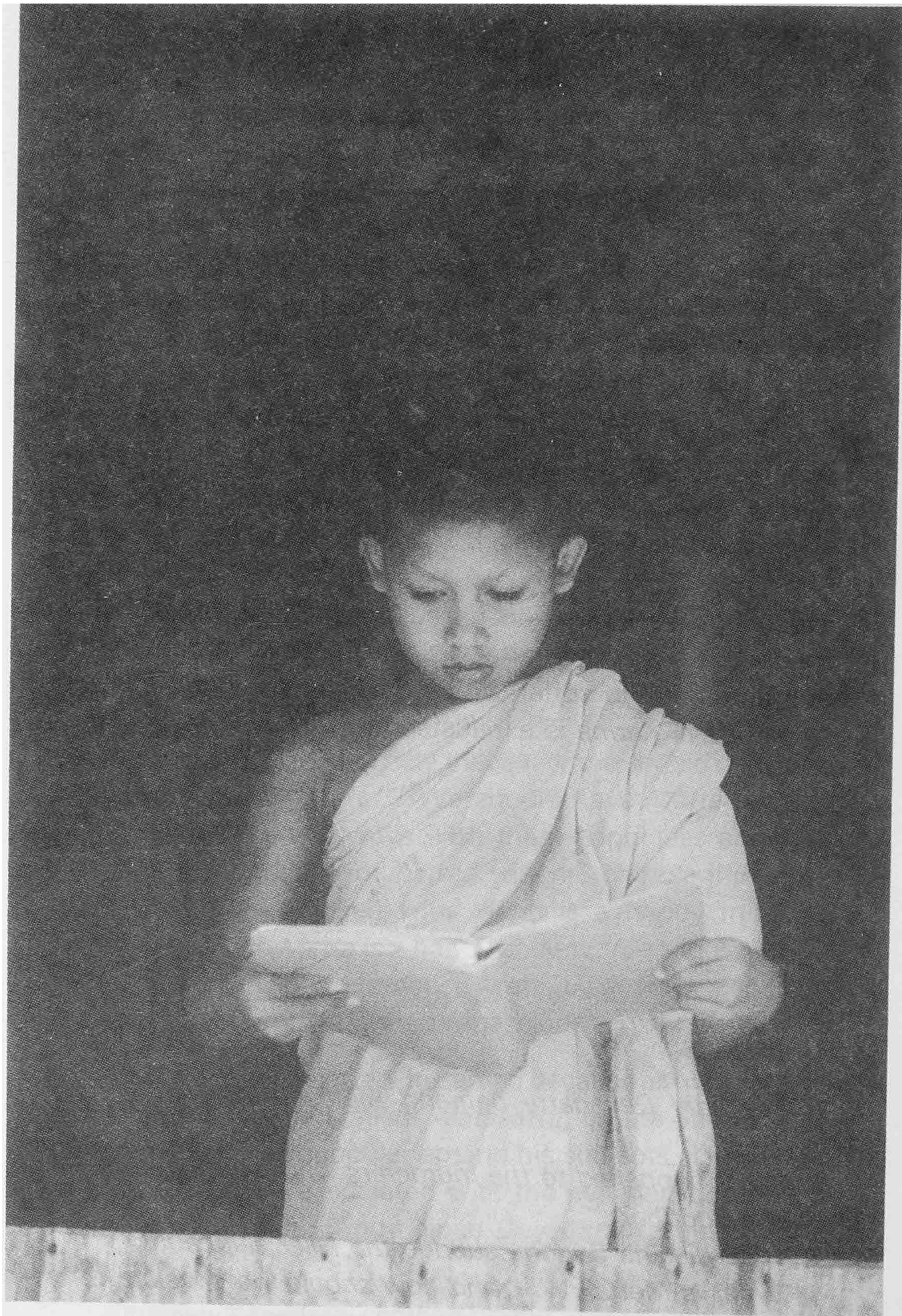
Enlightened One meditating on the walkway below. Seeing that no one was around, *Devadatta* moved fast to execute his plan - this time all by himself. He selected a huge loose rock directly above the Lord Buddha and, with the help of a lever, gave it a strong push. The big rock hurled down from the cliff with a mighty force, but the power of the Lord was so great that he was not even touched by it. With majestic calm and serenity, he continued to dwell in the bliss of meditation.

A person who does bad things will get bad results. A person who does good actions will, likewise, get good results. This is what we call the law of *Kamma* (Sanskrit: *Karma*) in Buddhism. This law applies equally to everyone, rich or poor, high or low, young or old. *Devadatta* did many evil things in his life, so he suffered a great deal before he died. It is said that after his death he was reborn in hell and continued to suffer, and would remain there until the force of evil *Karma* is exhausted.

## Questions

1. *Why did Devadatta befriend Ajatasattu? What did he want?*
2. *What happened to the murderers who were hired to kill the Buddha?*
3. *How did the Buddha subdue the killer elephant?*
4. *What is Metta? Why and how should we develop it?*
5. *What is the law of Karma in Buddhism? Explain.*







## 20. The Tripitaka (I)

The teachings of the Buddha are classified into three major parts, viz., the *Vinaya*, the *Sutta* (also *Suttanta*) and the *Abhidhamma*. They are collectively called the *Tripitaka* or the "Three Baskets."

Tripitaka is a Sanskrit term, and in Pali it is *Tipitaka*. *Tri* means three and *pitaka* means a basket. Just as a basket is used to contain articles for use when needed, even so each of the three *Pitakas* contains various discourses of the Buddha delivered during the forty-five years of his mission plus a few authored by his prominent disciples and endorsed by him. The work thus has its beginning in the first sermon the Lord gave at the Deer Park two months after his enlightenment.

When the Buddha was living, he was the ultimate authority who gave the last words for all problems in the Church and to whom all controversies were referred for final verdict.

Before the Great Demise, however, he did not appoint anyone to succeed him, but indicated, instead, to his followers that the Doctrine (Dharma) and the Discipline (*Vinaya*) he had propounded continue to be their "Teacher"

The Doctrine and the Discipline are all there in the *Tripitaka*, and as such the *Tripitaka* should be regarded as the highest authority for reference. We pay respect to the *Tripitaka* because it contains the words of our great Teacher and is itself the most reliable guide in religious matters available to us now.

As Buddhists, we should therefore try to acquaint ourselves with the *Tripitaka* and consider it our guide in religious understanding and spiritual endeavor. We should read it, try to understand it, and put its wisdoms into practice in our daily life.

A person can benefit from the teaching of the Buddha only when he practices it. The Buddha had discovered the way and had shown it to us, but it is up to us whether to walk the path or not. If we are wise and good, we would choose to believe and follow him. It would be a great loss if we ignore his words of wisdom and choose to go the wrong way, as do some unwise people who do not know what is good for themselves.

If someone has shown the right direction, but you refuse to go, how can you arrive at your destination? If you are hungry and someone gives you food, but you refuse to eat, how can your hunger be satisfied? If you are sick but refuse to take medicine given by a physician, how can you get well and become healthy?

The Buddha is an experienced wayfarer who shows us the way. He is a loving father who gives us food. He is a kind physician who gives us medicines. He is everything to us as far as our spiritual needs are concerned. Those who believe in him and follow his teaching will be free from suffering and attain true happiness.

The Dharma is timeless, i.e., always relevant to our day-to-day life. It teaches us to avoid evil, to do good, and to purify our minds. It shows us the way to individual and world peace. Everything we should know about spiritual matters is contained in the *Tripitaka* and, if we are wise enough, we should be able to benefit from it. As Buddhists, we should have a proper insight into this most important and richest treasure of spiritual knowledge and practical wisdoms.



## **Questions**

- 1. How are the Buddha's teachings classified? Give a complete answer.*
- 2. What is the meaning of "Tripitaka"? Why is it so called?*
- 3. Who succeeded the Buddha? What should be regarded as our guide now?*
- 4. In what way can we benefit from the Dharma? Give examples.*
- 5. Why is the Dharma timeless? Explain.*

## 21. The Tripitaka (II)

The *Vinaya Pitaka* or the Basket of Discipline deals with those rules and regulations formulated by the Buddha for the Orders of *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunis*. They are divided into five major sections and provide a detailed outline for monastic conduct, rites and ceremonies. Broadly speaking, this can be compared to the laws and social norms in secular society.

The *Sutta Pitaka* contains those discourses concerning various subjects of wide-ranged significance, social, moral, philosophical, and spiritual, and is divided into five major sections. This is, perhaps, the most popular *Pitaka*, since it does not deal in particular with any specific types of human concerns or confine to any social groups, but extends into all social layers and all spheres of human activities.

All that we find in the *Vinaya* or the *Sutta* are those rules or discourses that the Buddha made in response to certain problems, questions, or situations that presented themselves to him. As such, they are not something detached from life, but concern us in a very positive and direct way.

The *Adhidhamma* deals mostly with the psychological and philosophical aspects of the doctrine. It is the most difficult of the three, but is also very important for intellectual discipline and better understanding of the *Sutta Pitaka*. The subjects taken for deliberation in this *Pitaka* are what *Theravada Buddhism* considers the absolute truths, which are four in number, namely, Mind, Mental Concomitants, Matter, and Nibbāna (*Skt:Nirvana*).



Originally in the Pali language and sometimes rendered as the Three Canons, the *Tripitaka* has been transliterated into many forms of script and translated into all major languages of the world. Volumes upon volumes of commentaries and subcommentaries were written on the *Tripitaka* and they, too, have been rendered into many languages.

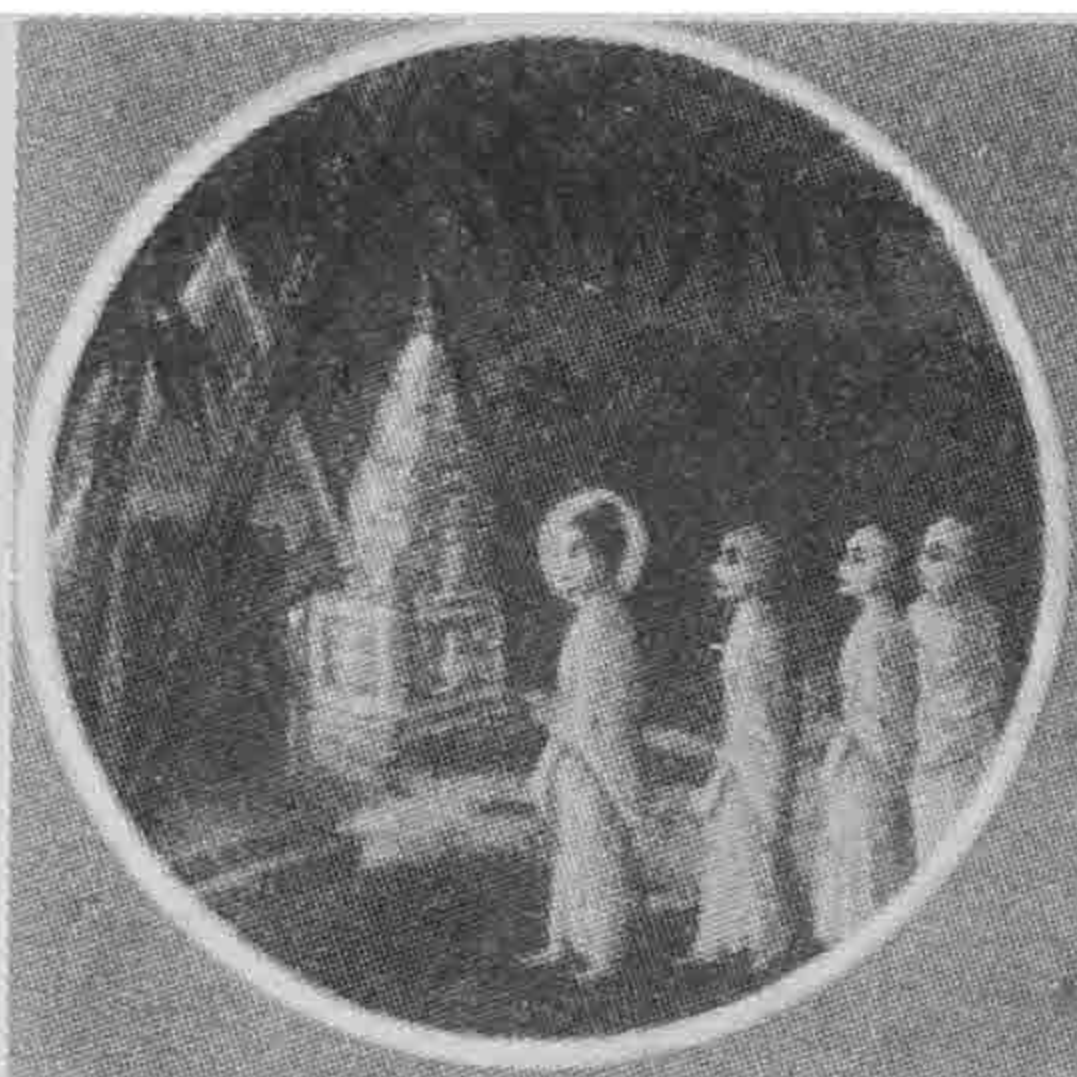
Buddhism was earlier looked down upon by some people as an outdated cult with strange beliefs and practices followed by some barbarian tribes in the East. But when the *Tripitaka* and some other important works of Buddhism were translated into English, they were surprised to find that there were so many things in the religion that were so much relevant to the modern world. Some prominent men in the West have openly admitted the superiority of Buddhist teachings and practices. The great historian *H.G. Wells* even asserts that the religion “*has done more for the advance of world civilization than any other influence in the chronicle of mankind*”

Thus, true to its own reputation, Buddhism continues to win admirers and followers by its sound logic, superior teachings, and practical philosophy. With the publication of Buddhist literature in English and other Western languages, an earnest interest in the religion was aroused, leading to the study and the practice of the religion.

## Questions

1. What is the meaning of “*Vinaya Pitaka*”? What does it deal with?
2. Of the three Pitakas, which is the most popular? Why?
3. Which is the most difficult Pitaka? What does it contain?
4. What were the early Western views on Buddhism? Explain.
5. How did the West come to appreciate Buddhism? Give detail.





Podnaker  
BANGKOK

BUDDHA PUJA,  
BANGKOK-I.



## 22. Mangala Sutta (I)

*Mangala Sutta* is one of the most oft-quoted discourses in Pali scriptures. It contains many practical hints for those who desire a blessed life and spiritual progress.

The word “*mangala*” holds a special appeal to the masses because it signifies blessing, prosperity, or auspiciousness. That is why in almost all auspicious ceremonies monks are requested to recite this particular discourse in order to bring about the favorable effects suggested by its name. But it should be noted here that, according to Buddhism, blessings in life are more the creations of our own action rather than a result of external factors. This means that if we want to prosper, materially or spiritually, we have to work things out for ourselves, and the *Mangala Sutta* explains those things that we ought to do in order to achieve this end.

It is said that when the Buddha was residing at *Jeta* Grove in *Savatthi*, there arose a question among the general public as to what constituted the blessings of life. Different people held different views and, as such, no agreement of opinions could be reached by them.

According to some, a *mangala* was any of such sights as a pregnant woman, little boys, white bulls, etc. Others argued that a *mangala* was any of such sounds as the words “full”, “luck”, or the sound of music, etc. Yet there were those who asserted that such favorable experiences as the fragrance of flowers, the touching of the earth, etc., were a blessing. And so the argument raged on.

From this it is clear that those who engaged in the argument formed their ideas on the basis of what they could experience with their senses. They thought, for example, that if a person heard someone else say the word “luck”, “fortune”, or “success” then he would eventually be blessed with luck or success. The sight of a pregnant woman suggested to them the idea of fullness or satisfaction, so they thought it would bring them happiness. Such people merely speculated on external factors, and did not understand the importance of man’s inner quality. So they missed the whole point.

It is further said that the debate on “*mangala*” was not confined only to man, but was also taken up even by deities, who again found themselves unable to decide the issue. One night a certain deity, therefore, visited the Buddha at his abode in *Jeta* Grove and put forward this question to him. Thereupon, the Blessed One delivered to him what came to be known as *Mangala Sutta* or the Discourse on Blessings.

## Questions

1. What does the word “*mangala*” mean? Explain briefly.
2. Why are monks invited to recite *Mangala Sutta*?
3. According to Buddhism, how can a blessed life be achieved?
4. What were the blessings as understood by some people in ancient India? Why could they not agree?
5. Where was *Mangala Sutta* delivered, by whom and why?



## 23. Mangala Sutta (II)

The “blessings” that the Buddha enunciated in *Mangala Sutta* are thirty-eight in number. They are sometimes referred to as the “thirty-eight blessings” and are graded in such a way that, starting from the most fundamental, they virtually culminate in the highest spiritual attainment, namely, the realization of *Nirvana*.

If we carefully examine the thirty-eight blessings, we shall find that each is useful in itself and is directly relevant to our life. The first blessing, for example, tells us not to get involved with evil people and allow ourselves to be influenced by their evil ways. The second one advises us to associate with good people, for such an association would bring us no harm but happiness and prosperity.

*Mangala Sutta* thus gives us a positive guideline for our life. If we consistently follow it, we shall progress both materially and spiritually and shall be able to enjoy a truly happy life. Each *mangala* makes us more perfect and brings us closer to the final religious goal. Those *mangalas* which are described at the end of the *Sutta* are closer to the holy life and are less concerned with the life of ordinary people. Yet they can be practiced, though in lesser degree, even by the lay followers.

The following is the translation of the Buddha’s words from *Mangala Sutta*:

Not to associate with fools (evil ones), to associate with

the wise, and to honor those who are worthy of honor - this is the highest blessing.

To reside in a good locality (favorable environments), to have done meritorious actions in the past, and to set oneself in the right course - this is the highest blessing.

Vast learning, (skill in) handicraft, highly trained discipline, and pleasant speech - this is the highest blessing.

Supporting one's parents, cherishing wife and children, and peaceful occupations - this is the highest blessing.

Generosity, righteous conduct, the helping of relatives, and blameless actions - this is the highest blessing.

Reverence (to the Triple Gem, parents, elders, etc.), humility, contentment, gratitude and the opportune hearing of the Dharma - this is the highest blessing.

Forbearance, obedience, seeing the *Samanas* (holy men) and the discussion of Dharma at proper time - this is the highest blessing.

Self-control, holy life, the "seeing" of the Noble Truths, and the realization of *Nirvana* - this is the highest blessing.

If a man's mind is sorrowless, stainless, and secure, and does not shake when touched by worldly vicissitudes—this is the highest blessing.

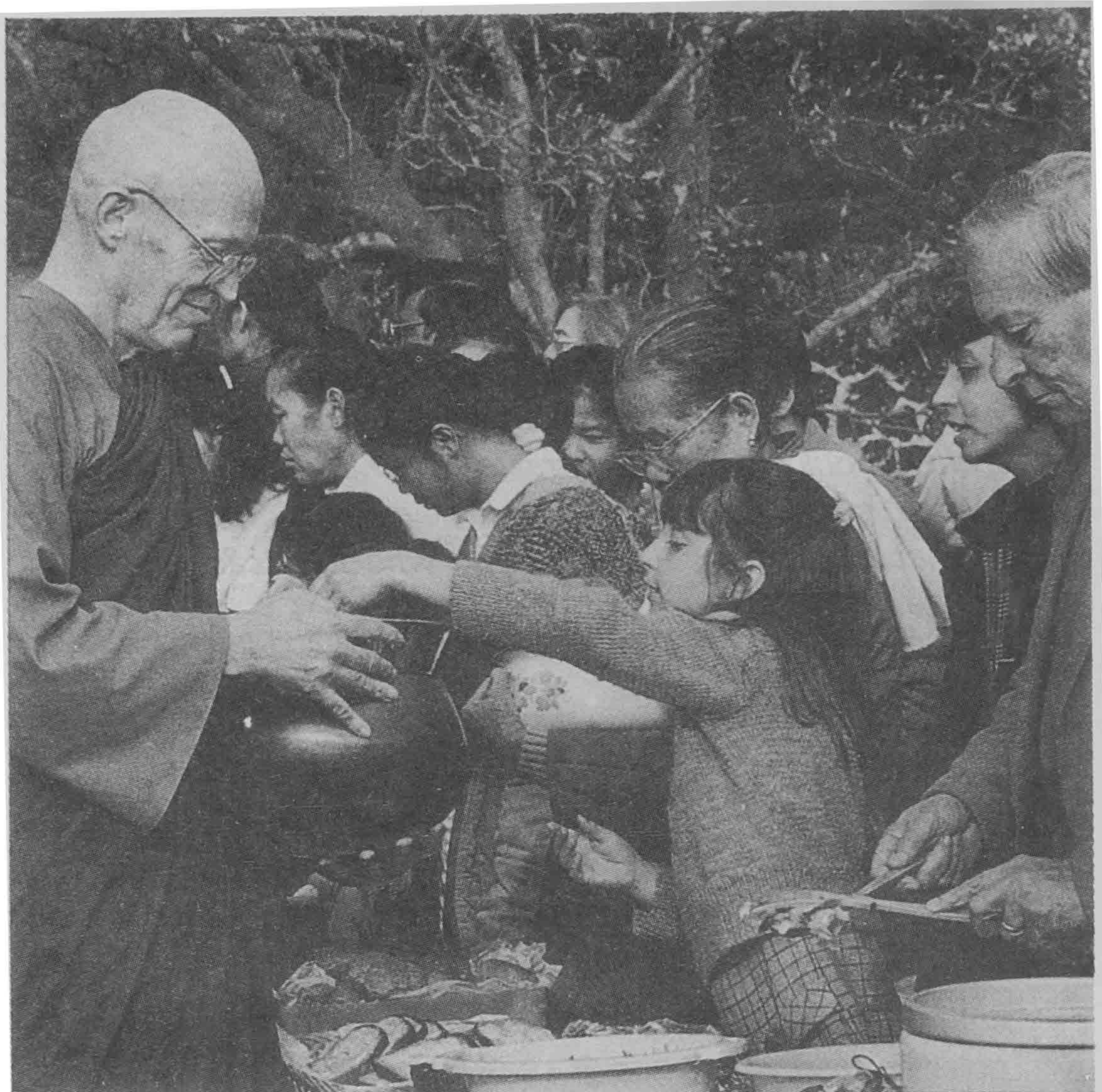
Those who thus acting are everywhere undefeated, attain happiness everywhere—to them these are the highest blessings.



## *Questions*

- 1. How many “blessings” are mentioned in Mangala Sutta?  
How are they graded?*
- 2. Whom should we associate with, whom should we avoid?  
Why?*
- 3. What is the main concern of the ending part of Mangala Sutta? Can lay people practice those “blessings”?*
- 4. Why should we love and respect our parents? Explain.*
- 5. What is the highest spiritual achievement in Buddhism?  
What is the nature of a person who has reached that state?*





*Mātāpitu upatṭhānaṃ  
puttadārassa saṅgaho  
anākulā ca kammantā  
etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ*

To cherish and support mother and father,  
and children, husband or wife;  
to engage in work that is not harmful –  
this is the greatest blessing.



## 24. The Four Keys to Success

Everyone wants to be successful in life, but not all meet with success. Successful people are recognized and respected: the stories of their lives are recorded and studied by both their contemporaries and later generations. They are therefore immortalized and looked upon as a source of creative inspiration for those who desire to succeed likewise.

The Buddha has taught us the way to success in many of his discourses. According to one of these discourses, there are four virtues that, when developed, lead to success and enable man to achieve his goals in life. They are Will, Effort, Active Thought, and Wisdom (Pali : *Chanda, Viriya, Citta, and Vimamsa*).

The first key to success is the will to work or to fulfill one's duties to the best of one's ability. This means that one should have desire, interest, and determination to work. There should be the right attitude toward what one is expected to do. Will is, in fact, a primary requirement in the execution of one's responsibilities, without which nothing much can be accomplished.

The second is effort or perseverance in one's undertakings. This implies the ceaseless application of energy to the work one is supposed to do. When we undertake to do something, we should exert ourselves, fully and continually, until the task is completed. If students are merely interested in the subjects they study, but do not want to actively commit themselves, the chance for success would be very slim indeed. Effort is therefore a very important

factor for success. We should try to cultivate this virtue in us.

Active thought means the thought about one's work which is well-directed and constantly applied. Whatever we do, be it great or small, we have to apply our active thought to it, again and again, until it is finished. If we do not succeed at the first attempt, we should not feel discouraged, but should think about it carefully and work even harder. We should be positive in our thinking and firm in our goals.

The last virtue is also very important. Wisdom is necessary in all kinds of activities. When we work, we should always examine the work we do; we should have good planning and a proper understanding of the work. It is not enough to work hard; we should also work wisely, using our intelligence and common sense. Only those who work in this way will attain a high degree of success. The use of wisdom will prevent us from doing wrong things and ensure our success. It is therefore very important that we learn how to cultivate wisdom and how to use it in all our activities.

## *Questions*

1. *What are the virtues leading to success, according to the Buddha? Name them with the Pali terms.*
2. *What is the first key to success? Explain why it is called the primary requirement.*
3. *How is the second virtue related to the first?*
4. *Explain how the third virtue is important for our success.*
5. *Describe the role of wisdom in the execution of one's work.*



## 25. Two Virtues That Protect The World

Men are social animals, so it is said. When we live together in the form of society, we need a body of laws to keep peace and ensure justice for all members, without which it would be impossible for the society to function. We can say, therefore, that all of us are under the protection of law. But the Buddha speaks about a different kind of protection, a far superior one. It is the moral protection that he so often stresses.

There are two virtues, according to the Buddha, that provide us with the best protection - if we earnestly practice them. They are:

1. *Hiri* - Shame at doing evil (Moral Shame)
2. *Ottappa* - Fear of the results of doing evil (Moral Dread)

*Hiri* is moral shame or conscience. It arises out of an understanding of what is right or wrong, good or bad, and is developed through a constant application of moral vigilance.

A person who practices *Hiri* does not do anything rashly or without proper forethought, but will always exercise precaution in all actions. Before doing anything, he wisely asks himself, "Is it right or wrong? Is it good or bad?" If he finds it to be wrong or bad, he will not do it, no matter what the temptation. If, however, he realizes after an unprejudiced consideration that what he intends to do is right and good, he will make an effort to finish the task and will not give it up.

*Hiri* can be compared to the aversive feeling a person who loves cleanliness may experience when he sees something loathsome or disgusting. He may not, for instance, put his hand into a trashbag full of stinking garbage if he can avoid it. When he comes across a puddle of mud and dirt, he would step aside to avoid getting himself and his clothes smudged.

Likewise, an individual who practices *Hiri* feels disgusted with all bad actions, physical, verbal, and mental, and would endeavor to avoid them as far as possible. He does not do such things as stamping his feet before his parents, talking impolitely back at them, or having an unkind and unrespectful thought toward them, for he knows that such are bad and unbecoming of a good Buddhist and would make their parents very unhappy indeed.

*Ottappa* is moral dread or fear to do something wrong or immoral. It is the result of a firm belief in the doctrine of *Karma* which states that a willful action brings about an appropriate consequence, sooner or later.

An individual who has *Ottappa* is afraid to do evil deeds because he knows that they will bring evil results and unhappiness to himself and others; he will not, on the other hand, hesitate to do the right things, firmly believing that the consequences thereof will be pleasant and beneficial. Unfortunately, people tend to do just the opposite of what they should - they are brave to do evil, but afraid to do good.

*Ottappa* can be compared to fear of a poisonous snake. Just as an individual avoids the snakebite, knowing that such is fatal, even so an *Ottappa* person tries to avoid evil because he knows that its consequences are painful. He does not do wrong things even when he is sure that he will not be caught, for he understands that the law of *Karma* operates at all time and all places. For this reason also



he is encouraged to do good even if no one else notices it or acknowledges his good deeds.

If people practice these two virtues, the world will, indeed, be well protected and there would be less need for law. No evil deeds will be committed even in secrecy. The world will thus be a very happy place for us all.

## *Questions*

- 1. What are the Virtues that Protect the World? Why are they so called?*
- 2. How does an individual practice Hiri?*
- 3. Explain the nature of Hiri with examples.*
- 4. How is Ottappa developed; what belief gives rise to it? Explain in detail.*
- 5. Explain the nature of Ottappa with examples. How does it effect one's character?*

## 26. Four Virtues Leading To Temporal Welfare

Buddhism deals not only with man's spirituality or his next birth, but is strongly concerned with his material needs and immediate problems in this very life. In fact, the emphasis is on this life - the here and now - rather than on the next. Do good now, exhorts the Buddha, for no one knows if death will come tomorrow.

There is a discourse in *Anguttara Nikaya* in which Lord Buddha talks about the virtues that are conducive to material benefits in the present. When practiced constantly, these virtues, which are four in number, enable one to succeed in life bringing in happiness and prosperity. They are called in the Pali term *Dittha-dhammikattha-samvattanika-dhamma* and are as follows:

1. *Utthana-sampada* - Being endowed with energy
2. *Arakkha-sampada* - Being endowed with vigilance for protection
3. *Kalyanamittata* - Association with good people
4. *Samajivita* - Leading a balanced life



The first virtue, *Utthana-sampada*, is the most important thing to begin with. *Utthana* literally means *to go up* or *to rise*. To succeed in life man must be filled with enthusiasm and energy; he must be fired with ambition and a strong desire to succeed. He must strive to be the best. If he is a student, he makes sure that he always obtains good grades, not being satisfied with merely passing the tests. He knows that education is the foundation of life, upon which rests his future. He is, therefore, determined to make the foundation strong by studying hard, ever eager to learn more and more and to the best of his ability.

Only those who work hard will succeed. Greater success requires greater will power. Sometimes in the process of gaining success, we have to suffer doing things that we do not want to, or being deprived of the pleasures and enjoyments that we want to have. But the result of such an effort will be a good one. So, if we are good Buddhists, we must be energetic and industrious.

Wealth and fortune come to those who work hard. But one cannot get rich if one does not know how to protect or take care of what has already been acquired. We must therefore practice the second virtue.

The second virtue, *Arakkha-sampada*, advises us to be vigilant, not careless, about what we have earned or possessed. We must know, for example, how to use our money properly so it will give us maximum benefit. Strange though it may seem, many people do not know how to use their money. They waste it on cigarettes, drinks, and drugs, which only enslave them and drag them toward a premature death impoverishing them in the process. Many people lose their fortune in gambling, shamelessly ruining their families; many are forced to crime or illicit occupations, and end up in prison. Instances of the lack of *Arakkha-*

*sampada* are too many and so obvious that any further explanation would be superfluous.

The third virtue, *Kalyanamittata*, is no less important for achieving the desired success. Man cannot live all alone by himself; he needs friends, associates, and colleagues (in addition to relatives, of course). These people play a significant role in his life. They can influence his thought, change his views and character, even promote or ruin his life. If you are very close, for instance, to a friend who is foul-mouthed, arrogant, and has no respect for his parents, and if you keep company with him long enough, you will gradually imitate his evil characters. This is one of the reasons why many good students from good families fall for drugs and other bad habits.

A balanced life in *Samajivita* means one which is wisely conducted - neither too economical nor extravagant - a Dharmic life, which is noble, useful and contented. A *Samajivita* person lives according to his means; he is not carried away by the "high fashion" of the day. His life is exemplary, free from pretensions and harm. It is a life of service rather than of selfishness. Living in this way ensures not only that whatever has been acquired is well protected, but also that whatever is spent is wisely and usefully spent.



## *Questions*

- 1. What are the virtues necessary for material benefits in the present? Give Pali terms and their English meaning.*
- 2. Explain Utthana-sampada. Illustrate your answer with suitable examples.*
- 3. Why is Arakkha-sampada necessary? Explain.*
- 4. Explain how good friends or associates are important for a happy and successful life.*
- 5. Demonstrate how a Samajivita life is different from a non-Samajivita one.*

## 27. The Doctrine Of Karma

*Karma* means action.

The word *karma* is Sanskrit and its Pali counterpart is *kamma*. (Compare *dharma* and *dhamma* in Sanskrit and Pali respectively.) It is derived from the root *kar* meaning *to do* or *to perform*.

According to the Buddhist doctrine of *Karma*, not all actions are called *Karma*, only those that are performed with an intention, or volitionally, are called *Karma*. Says the Buddha: *Cetanāham bhikkhave kammam vadāmi...* Monks, I call volition *Karma*.

*Karma* can be performed through three “doors” or channels:

1. *Kaya-kamma* - Bodily action.
2. *Vaci-kamma* - Verbal action.
3. *Mano-Kamma* - Mental action.

An action is either good or bad; a good action is called *Kusala-kamma* and a bad one, *Akusala-kamma*. The Pali word *kusala* is also translated as *wholesome*, *skillful*, *meritorious*, etc., and *akusala* means just the opposite.

Thus *Kusala-kamma* means actions that are good, wholesome, skillful, and meritorious and *Akusala-kamma* means those that are bad, evil, unwholesome, unskillful,



and demeritorious. We should always understand well the distinction between the two.

In general, we may say that such good actions as giving a helping hand to mother or father at home, being nice to them, being generous, diligent, truthful, etc, are *Kusala-kamma*. Such actions as selfishness, rudeness, laziness, disobedience to parents, ungrateful gestures, cruelty, stealing, lying, etc, are *Akusala-kamma*. But the Buddha has also classified these good and bad actions according to the three "doors" through which they are performed. They are as follows:

## 10 WHOLESOME ACTIONS

### 3 Bodily Actions

1. Abstention from killing (or injury)
2. Abstention from stealing or cheating
3. Abstention from misconduct with regards to persons or things dear to others (or sexual misconduct)

### 4 Verbal Actions

1. Abstention from false speech
2. Abstention from slandering
3. Abstention from harsh speech
4. Abstention from frivolous speech

### 3 Mental Actions

1. Non-covetousness
2. Good will or kindness
3. Right view or understanding

## 10 UNWHOLESOME ACTIONS

### 3 Bodily Actions

1. Killing (or injuring oneself or others)
2. Stealing or cheating
3. Misconduct with regards to persons or things dear to others (or sexual misconduct, such as adultery, etc.)

### 4 Verbal Actions

1. False speech
2. Slandering or malicious speech
3. Harsh speech
4. Frivolous speech (one that is useless)

### 3 Mental Actions

1. Covetousness or avarice
2. Ill-will or anger
3. Wrong view or understanding

It should be understood that wholesome actions as listed above are not merely negative; they also apply in a positive way. For example, refraining from stealing does not only imply that one should avoid such an act, but it also signifies such positive qualities as respect for the rights of property of other people, right livelihood, being hard-working, etc.

An action, good or bad, produces a result or results. Sometimes the consequences are immediate and explicit; sometimes they are not. But it is always true that good actions produce good results and bad actions bring about the bad ones. We should, therefore, try to do good and avoid evil.



## *Questions*

- 1. Give a clear etymological explanation of the word "karma."*
- 2. What is Kusala-kamma? Give examples of Kusala-actions.*
- 3. What is Akusala-kamma? Give examples of Akusala-actions.*
- 4. What are the ten unwholesome actions?*
- 5. Give examples to demonstrate the positive aspect of wholesome actions.*

## 28. The Doctrine Of Rebirth

The problem of rebirth or life after death has been, since time immemorial, a controversial issue which attracted the attention of almost all religious teachers. There were those who supported the belief and those who rejected it.

Evidences and explanations both for and against rebirth, supplied by its proponents and opponents, seem equally convincing, but at no time in all religious history had there been any definite solution to the problem. This is largely because the character of the issue is such that it defies a conclusively verifiable experimental process or any fool-proof logical analysis. Nevertheless, Buddhism has also participated in the discussion of this complicated, time-honored issue and it is worthwhile to examine how our religion deals with it.

The Pali word for rebirth is *punabbhava*, differently rendered as reincarnation, re-existence, re-becoming, metempsychosis, or transmigration of the soul. To prevent misunderstanding, it should be noted at the outset that Buddhism does not subscribe to the belief of an everlasting, unchanging entity which is supposed to reside in man or animal and is generally called "soul." To be reborn, according to Buddhism, does not, therefore, imply that the soul leaves its old body and goes to take possession of a new one. The Buddha teaches the doctrine of no-soul; this is the point of departure from most of the other religions.

Buddhism states that everything that exists is subject to change; nothing is permanent or everlasting. Life is a continuum of flux, consisting of the *Pancakkhandha* or Five Aggregates, namely, Materiality, Sensation, Perception, Mental Formations, and Consciousness. These five are what we call a "being" or an "individual" and they are ever in the state of change. In other words, they rise and fall, originate and disappear, in an unending continuous succession, the speed of which is so swift and subtle as to elude our empirical perception. In this sense, we can be said to undergo an unbroken process of birth and death, i.e., we are "born" and "die" at every successive moment throughout our lives, and the process continues in the same manner right to the "next life"

Strictly speaking, an individual is not, therefore, the same for two consecutive moments. Neither is he a different one, for the preceding moment gives rise to the next, which again causes the following one, and so on ad infinitum.

When the Five Aggregates arise and fall in the preceding moment, they also lead to the rising of the following set of Aggregates, which in turn produce the next set. This is how life functions and continues to the next birth. Rebirth is thus possible in this way without the intervention of a soul, which is also the reason why Buddhist scriptures say what is reborn is neither the same nor a different individual.

To say that man or animal is to be reborn is one extreme, to say that there is no rebirth is another. Buddhism avoids these two extremes. Based on the law of cause and effect, it states instead that rebirth is possible and will take place when there are appropriate causes or conditions; it will not take place if no proper causes or conditions are present.

Buddhist scriptures also speak of another kind of rebirth. Unlike the popular concept, this type of rebirth is a mere



mental state that keeps changing from one condition to another. We feel happy at one moment, unhappy at another. At one time our mind is wholesome and pure, at another it is just the opposite. This change in the mental state constitutes a "rebirth" according to this special way of linguistic expression. Thus, we are "reborn" every moment into high or low "birth" every time the conditions of our minds change.

Buddhism further asserts that desire or attachment, based on ignorance (*avijja*), is the principal cause both in this life and the next and is also the most powerful moving force behind man's actions. Compared to the oil that feeds a lamp, this "mental defilement" supplies fuel for the continuation of the cycle of birth and death (*Samsara*). Just as a flame dies down and cannot be rekindled once the fuel has been completely exhausted, the cycle of birth and death will naturally come to an end when all the mental impurities are completely destroyed.

*Nibbana* or *Nirvana* is, in fact, the state of perfect freedom from all mental defilements, attainable through the purification of mind. It is the highest bliss.

Rebirth is thus the result of one's own *Karma*. Wholesome *Karma* leads to a good birth and unwholesome *Karma* leads to a bad one. Man should always strive to do good, for it brings about happiness not only in this life, but also in the next.

## *Questions*

- 1. What is the meaning of “punabbhava”? Explain.*
- 2. What is a “being” or an individual according to Buddhism?  
What is an individual consisted of?*
- 3. Why is it said that an individual is not the same nor different for two consecutive moments?*
- 4. What does the Law of Cause and Effect state with regards to rebirth?*
- 5. Why should people always strive to do good and avoid evil?*





*Etādisāni katvāna  
sabbatthamaparājitā  
sabbattha sotthim gacchanti  
tantesam maṅgalamuttaman ti*

In cultivating such virtues as these,  
beings are ever undaunted,  
going everywhere with confidence –  
hence these are the greatest blessings.



## 29. The Dhammapada

*Dhammapada* means the Path of Dharma. It is a very important work and, perhaps, the best known in Theravada Buddhist literature. It contains 423 Pali verses uttered by the Buddha on various occasions to a wide range of audience. These verses have been collected from different books of the sacred Buddhist literature, the *Tripitaka*. Each verse is a guideline for happy living. Whosoever follows the *Dhammapada* wisdoms will definitely taste the bliss of timeless Dharma.

The following are a few verses selected from this great work, simplified and adapted to facilitate comprehension; the essential purport, however, remains intact.

1. Mind is the most important thing. It is the source of all actions. If we act or speak with an impure mind, we suffer. But if we act or speak with a clean mind, then we shall be happy.

2. Hatred never ceases by hatred, but by love and kindness.

3. Just as the rain penetrates through a poorly thatched house, even so does lust break through the uncultivated mind.

4. Hard-working men, ever heedful and alert, outstrip the lazy and careless ones as a swift horse outstrips a weak horse.

5. Ever grows the glory of him who is energetic and mindful, whose deeds are pure and well-considered, who is restrained, righteous, and vigilant.

6. Mind is fickle, unsteady and hard to control. But the wise man straightens it as an arrowmaker fashions his shaft.

7. Good is the taming of the mind, which is difficult to be restrained, which is flighty and goes wherever it pleases. A mind that is trained brings happiness.

8. An ill-placed mind brings greater harm than does one's enemy.

9. This body is impermanent and perishable; some day it will lie on earth, devoid of consciousness and useless like a piece of stick.

10. The sweet smell of flowers does not blow against the wind. But the fragrance of virtue does. Truly, the virtuous man pervades all directions with the fragrance of his virtues.

11. If a fool realizes his folly, he may thereby become wise. But the fool who thinks he is wise will, indeed, remain a fool.

12. Foolish (evil) people are, indeed, enemies of themselves. They do evil actions that bring unhappiness and painful results.

13. As a solid rock is not shaken by the wind, even so do the wise men remain unshaken in blame and praise.

14. Irrigators convey water to where they want; fletchers fashion the arrow; carpenters fashion the wood; good people train themselves.

15. Let not be quick to do good and let one restrain the thought from evil; the mind of one who is slow in doing good finds delight in evil.

16. Refrain from all evil; do only what is good; purify your mind, this is the advice of the Awakened Ones.

17. Let one conquer hatred with love and evil with righteousness; let one conquer the miser with generosity and the liar with truthfulness.

18. Good is restraint in action, speech and mind. One should be restrained everywhere. He who is restrained in every way is freed from all suffering.

### *Questions*

- 1. What is the meaning of Dhammapada? What does it contain?*
- 2. What is the source of our actions? What is the result of a good action?*
- 3. Describe the nature of the mind. Why should we train it?*
- 4. Why did the Buddha say that evil people are the enemies of themselves?*
- 5. Why should a person be prompt to do good?*





Good action begets good results. Generosity is a meritorious practice; it helps to eliminate selfishness in our heart and bring about joy and happiness in the world. Sujata and her maid offered milk rice to the Buddha before his enlightenment.



## 30. Being A Buddhist

There are three things that are most important to Buddhists, namely, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

The Buddha is the founder of the Buddhist religion, the Dharma is his teaching, and the Sangha is the Holy Order of the enlightened disciples, who preserve and propagate the religion. Buddhists regard all these three as the objects of the highest veneration. Collectively, they are called the Holy Triple Gem.

To be a Buddhist means to take refuge in the Holy Triple Gem (*ratanattaya*)—to have firm faith in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha—and to endeavor to follow Buddhist practices and traditions.

One can take refuge in the Holy Triple Gem by making a firm resolution to that effect, with or without accompanying rites or ceremony, and by calling oneself Buddhist. After all, Buddhism is a religion that lays great emphasis on actual practice - one must follow the teaching and conduct oneself accordingly - not on ritual trappings or elaborate ceremonies that bear no ethical or spiritual value.

Nevertheless, since Buddhism has also become institutionalized, there evolved a traditional practice which we may call the Confirmation Ceremony, i.e., one by which a person may be officially "confirmed" or recognized as a Buddhist. This ceremony is usually officiated by a member of the Holy Order and there is a procedure that has to be properly followed.

First of all, an aspirant wishing to become a Buddhist should be taught in the basic tenets of the religion. He should study the fundamental teachings of the Buddha, what a Buddhist should or should not do, how a Buddhist should behave himself in relation to others, how he should behave in a Buddhist congregation, etc. He should also learn how to pay homage and respect to the Holy Triple Gem and how to observe the five precepts, which are the fundamental moral codes of conduct for all Buddhists.

In the confirmation ceremony and in the presence of a member (or members) of the Holy Order he should pronounce the following statements:

*Esāham, bhante, suciraparinibbutampi, taṃ bhagavan-taṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, dhammañca, bhikkhusaṅghañca, buddhamāmakoti saṅgho maṃ dhāretu, anukampam up-ādāya.*

*Dutiyampi, esāham bhante... Tatiyampi, esāham bhan-te...*

#### TRANSLATION:

*Venerable Sir, I go for refuge to that Blessed One, who though long had passed away, as well as to his Teaching and the Holy Order of Sangha. May the Sangha graciously recognize me as a follower of the Buddha.*

*For the second time, Venerable Sir,...*

*For the third time, Venerable Sir,...*

Taking refuge in the Holy Triple Gem is effected by the recitation of the following passages, administered by the officiating monk:

*Buddham saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.*

*Dhammam saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.*

*Saṅgham saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.*



*Dutiyampi buddham...*  
*Dutiyampi dhammam...*  
*Dutiyampi saṅgham...*  
*Tatiyampi buddham...*  
*Tatiyampi dhammam...*  
*Tatiyampi saṅgham...*

### TRANSLATION:

*I go to the Buddha for refuge.*  
*I go to the Dharma for refuge.*  
*I go to the Sangha for refuge.*  
*For the second time,...*  
*For the third time....*

The confirmation ceremony is considered incomplete without the observance of the five precepts, although each serves different purposes. The five precepts are thus dealt with in a separate lesson.

### Questions

1. *What are the things that Buddhists respect most?*
2. *What does it mean by "taking refuge in the Triple Gem"?*
3. *How does one take refuge in the Holy Triple Gem? Is the presence of a Buddhist monk absolutely necessary?*
4. *What is the Confirmation Ceremony? Who usually officiates the ceremony?*
5. *Translate the following:*  
*Buddham saraṇam gacchāmi.*  
*Dutiyampi saṅgham saraṇam gacchāmi.*  
*Tatiyampi dhammam saraṇam gacchāmi.*

## 31. Being A Good Buddhist

A Buddhist should not be satisfied with merely being a Buddhist; he should try to be a good Buddhist, too. Simply calling oneself a Buddhist without making an effort to live up to the name is not enough. Buddhism attaches more importance to actual practice than mere names or appellations. We should therefore learn what a good Buddhist is like and then try to be one.

1. A good Buddhist always holds the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha in highest esteem. He does not act toward them, speak, or think of them in a disrespectful manner. Rejection of the Holy Triple Gem constitutes the forfeiture of one's status as a Buddhist.

2. A good Buddhist not only has firm faith in the Three Gems, but tries also to understand the Buddha's teachings and Buddhist practices. He never ceases to acquire knowledge on the religion. He knows that sound knowledge in the religion will strengthen one's faith and devotion.

3. A good Buddhist endeavors to apply the Buddha's teachings to his daily life. He makes religious practice part and parcel of his life and is ever conscious of its importance. He knows that life without the Dharma is an incomplete and unsatisfactory one.

4. A good Buddhist loves and respects his (her) parents. He is obedient, courteous, and never argues back in an insolent manner. If, however, he wants to make his points clear, he takes care to do so in a respectful and polite manner.



Furthermore, knowing that his parents love him so dearly and sacrifice so much for him, he tries his best to return their love and, with a sense of filial gratitude, make himself useful to them and other family members. In short, a good Buddhist must also be good son (or daughter); if he is not a good son, then he cannot be a good Buddhist either.

5. A good Buddhist is a free-thinker, he does not believe things just because they are told to him. He applies his own reasoning power and, if necessary, experiments to find out the truth for himself.

6. A good Buddhist is broad-minded in matters like religious beliefs, traditional practices, and social values. He understands that people are different, and so are their beliefs, practices, and values. A good Buddhist knows what is best for him and always goes for the best.

7. A good Buddhist is honest, morally incorruptible and has strong will power. He knows that he must be responsible for all his actions and is therefore ever on his guard so that he may not do anything wrong. A good Buddhist takes delight in doing good and tries to avoid evil.

8. A good Buddhist is diligent, ever hard-working, duty-conscious, and altruistic.

9. A good Buddhist, having studied and practiced the religion and being convinced of its teachings, tries his best to promote its spread and make it known to others. He knows that it is a great merit to share the Dharma with other fellow-beings.

## *Questions*

- 1. Why should a Buddhist practice his religion?*
- 2. What do Buddhists respect most? What will happen if he rejects them?*
- 3. How is one's faith in the religion strengthened?*
- 4. What should be the attitude of a good Buddhist toward his parents?*
- 5. Why should Buddhists be broad-minded in religious matters?*



## 32. The Five Precepts

The Pali term for the five precepts is *pañcasīla*. The five precepts are the basic moral codes of conduct that every lay Buddhist should follow.

A person can take the precepts by making a resolution with himself that he will refrain from the actions specified therein. Nevertheless, it is customary to have them administered by a monk or, where one is not available, by a novice.

When we want to take the five precepts from a monk, we first recite, with folded palms, the request passage which runs as follows:

*Mayaṃ bhante, viṣuṃ viṣuṃ rakḥhanatthāya,  
tisaraṇeṇa saha, pañcasīlāni yācāma.  
Dutiyampi, mayaṃ... Tatiyampi, mayaṃ...*

(Venerable Sir, we do seek from you, for individual observance, the five precepts along with the Three Gems. For the second time,... For the third time,...)

The monk would then recite three times the Preliminary Homage and the devotees repeat after him:

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāśambuddhassa.*  
(Homage to Him, the Blessed One, the Exalted One, the Fully-Enlightened One.)

Then follows the acceptance of the Three Gems as our refuge, to be repeated sentence by sentence after the monk.

*Buddham saṇanam gacchāmi.  
 Dhammam saṇanam gacchāmi.  
 Saṅgham saṇanam gacchāmi.  
 Dutiyampi buddham... Tatiyampi buddham...*

(I go to the Buddha for refuge. I go to the Dharma for refuge. I go to the Sangha for refuge. For the second time...For the third time...)

Then the monk concludes at this point: *Tisarāṇa-gamanam niṭṭhitam*. (The Going for the Three Refuges is now complete.) And we respond with : *Āma bhante* (So it is, Venerable Sir.) This summing up is omissible, but we should still learn it. Many monks do include it in the procedure.

Now the monk recites the five precepts one by one to be repeated likewise by the lay devotees:

- (1) *Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi.*
- (2) *Adinnādānā ve...*
- (3) *Kāmesu micchācārā ve...*
- (4) *Musāvādā ve...*
- (5) *Surāmerayamajja-pamādaṭṭhānā ve...*

(I observe the precept refraining from (1)...killing; (2)...stealing; (3)...sexual misconduct. (4)...falsehood; (5)...intoxicants that cause carelessness.)

Having completed the five precepts, the monk then concludes by advising us as follows:-

*Imāni pañcasikkhāpadāni.  
 Sīlena sugatim yanti.  
 Sīlena bhogasampadā.  
 Sīlena nibbutim yanti.  
 Tasmā sīlam visodhaye.*

(These, then, are the five precepts. Men attain a happy state through *sīla*. Men prosper through *sīla*. Men attain peace through *sīla*. Therefore, keep *sīla*. ever pure.)

The devotees respond with : *Sādhu !* (Very well, sir). Then they prostrate three times. The procedure is now complete.

It is clear from the text itself that these precepts are not commandments imposed on us, but are, on the other hand, the moral codes that we willingly undertake to observe out of clear understanding and firm conviction that they are good for ourselves as well as for our society. Our life would be a truly happy one and our society would become a much safer and more peaceful place to live in if these precepts are observed in earnest. When we examine the social implications of the five precepts, we find that:

The first precept implies the rights of all living beings to protect and preserve their life. It also implies the importance of love and compassion for all.

The second precept signifies an individual's rights for the possession as well as the protection of wealth rightly acquired. It also stresses the importance of right livelihood.

The third precept, not to indulge in sexual misconduct, teaches one to respect one's own spouse as well as those of others, including, by extension, all things that are near and dear to them. It is, moreover, intended to inculcate in man self-restraint and a sense of social propriety.

The fourth aims at preserving man's credibility, upon which rests his honor, dignity, and trustworthiness. It makes man honest and truthful.

The last precept intends to keep man healthy physically, mentally, and morally. It helps him to maintain his sense of responsibility in thought and action - something not possible when one is under the spell of drinks or drugs.

We can see, therefore, that the five precepts are not only something good, but something absolutely necessary for a truly happy and peaceful society.



## *Questions*

- 1. What are the five precepts? What is the Pali word for the five precepts?*
- 2. How does a person observe the five precepts? Is a monk absolutely necessary? Explain.*
- 3. What do the second and the fourth precepts tell us to do?*
- 4. What are the benefits of the five precepts? Write as much as you can understand from the lesson.*
- 5. Explain the social implication of the third precept?*

### 33. Buddhist Worship

According to a generally accepted notion, worship is an expression of reverent honor shown to deities or some supernatural beings who the worshippers believe are capable of preventing misfortunes and dangers, or granting them certain boons and blessings.

Every religion has a system of worship. In some religions worship can be very elaborate and time-consuming, confusing and hard to understand. Others have more simple forms of worship. Some religions consider worship the most essential part, indispensable and vital, while others assign a secondary role to it. So although worship is there in all religions, it is not the same, nor is it equally important.

Worship in Buddhism has a different meaning from other religions. It is the expression of one's love and respect in the Holy Triple Gem (*ratanattaya*), namely, the Buddha the Dharma, and the Sangha, not in the so-called deities or supernatural beings as such. When we perform an act of worship, we do not "pray" for them to grant us anything, but in order that we may be further strengthened in our faith and inspired to do good and to perfect ourselves. We know that the Buddha is the paragon of perfection, and worshipping him will inculcate in us the wholesome aspiration to follow him in his teaching. We also know that all the blessings in life come from our own good deeds. So if we want those blessings, we must do good and conduct ourselves in a proper manner according to the *Buddhadharma*.

When we worship, we should therefore concentrate on the virtues of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, not allowing our minds to be clouded with other thoughts or worries. We should feel our faith and conviction in the Three Gems grow in our hearts, and our determination to do good strengthened with every word of worship we utter.

Things you should always bear in mind while worshipping:

1. You should not talk with friends or anybody close by. A good atmosphere of calm and quiet should be maintained. Do not disturb others with your gossip.
2. You should not laugh or make joke. To do such thing is considered great disrespect. It is a very contemptible act, a great blasphemy.
3. You should never do such things as eating, drinking, smoking, or chewing gum, etc.
4. You should sit (or stand) very still, make the body straight and firm. Do not shake your body, your head, hands or feet. You should not look around, but should pay full attention to the worship.

### RECITATION

1. *Araham sammāsambuddho bhagavā buddham bhagavantam abhivādemi.*
2. *Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo dhammam namassāmi.*
3. *Supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakaśaṅgho saṅgho saṅgham namāmi.*

Bow down at the end of each.



## TRANSLATION

1. The Exalted One, far from defilements, perfectly self-enlightened; I bow low before the Buddha, the Exalted One.
2. The Dharma well expounded by the blessed One: I bow low before the Dharma.
3. The Order of the Blessed One's disciples are well-behaved; I bow low before the Sangha.

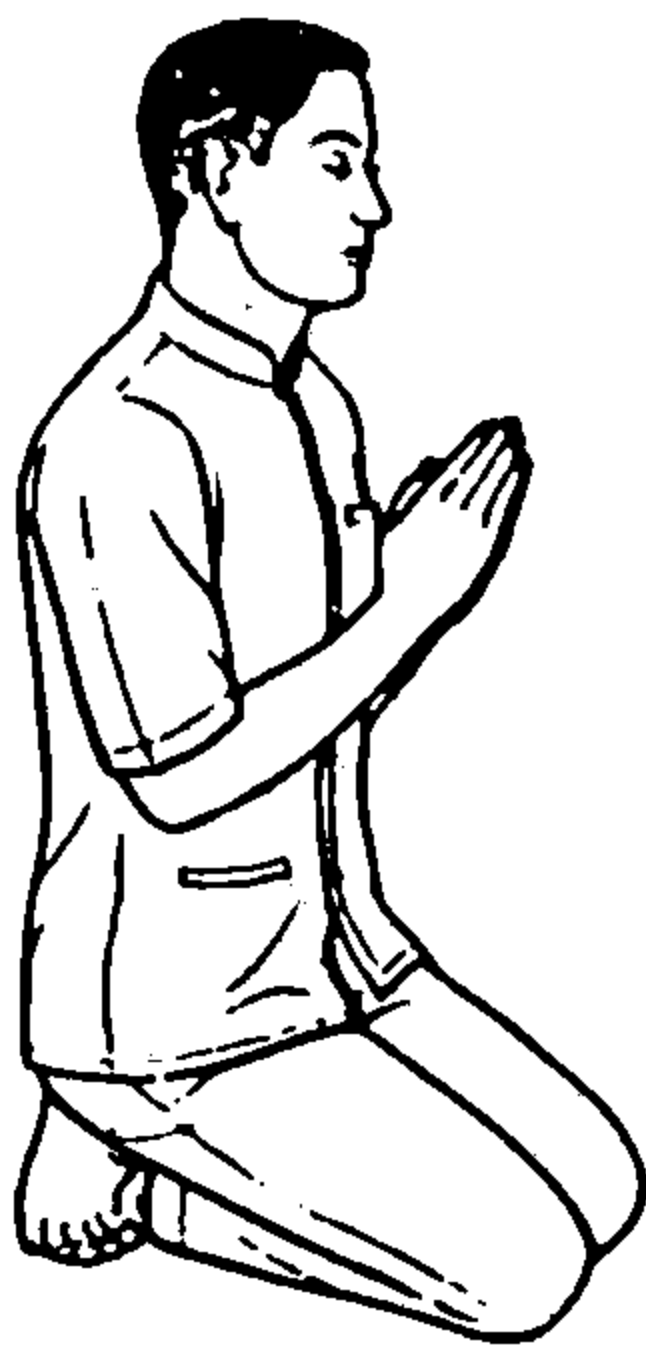
*Questions*

1. *What is worship as generally understood? Explain.*
2. *What is worship in Buddhism? What do we get from it?*
3. *Explain what we should and should not do while worshipping.*
4. *When we worship, what should we concentrate on? What should be strengthened in our hearts?*
5. *Translate : Svākkhāto bhagavata dhammo dhammam namassāmi.*

## SITTING POSTURE

Thai Buddhists have a special way of sitting and prostrating in worship. Please learn from the illustration below:

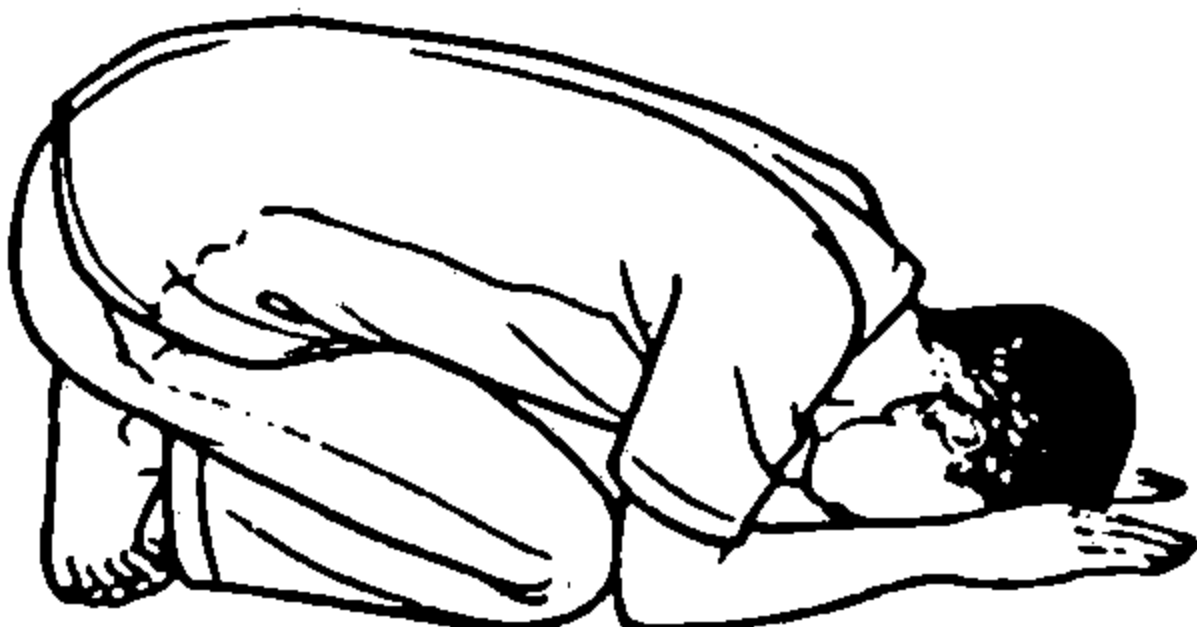
(Women sit in the same way as men, but with the back of feet lying flat on the ground.)



*Hands at chest level.*



*Lift hands to forehead.*



*Forehead, hands, elbows  
touch the ground.*



*Back to first position*

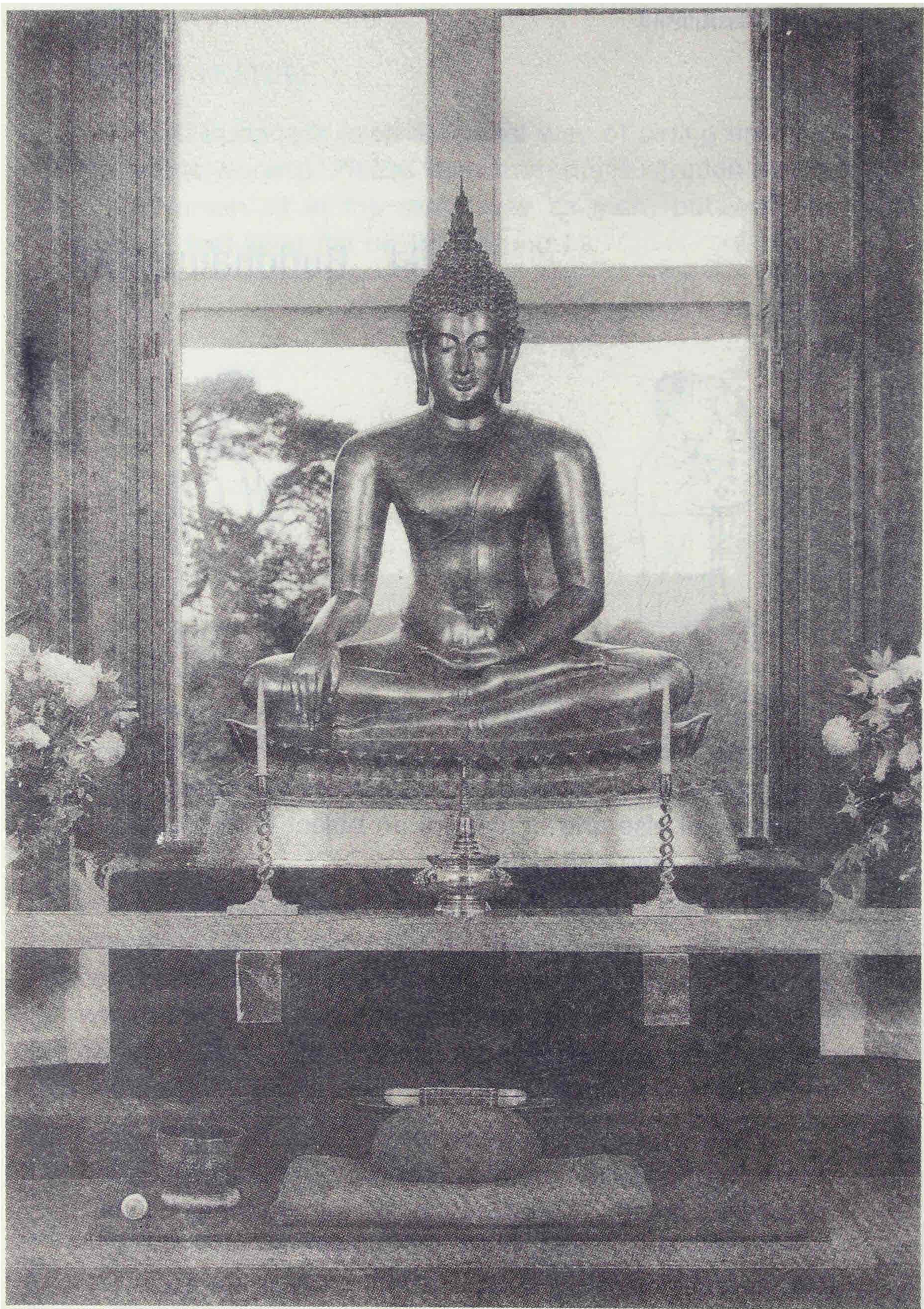
## 34. Buddhanussati

The Buddha was the greatest teacher who had given the world a noblest religion unequalled in man's history. He himself was the embodiment of all virtues that distinguished him from all else and made him an object of supreme veneration for man and gods.

When we worship the Buddha, we pay homage to the Supreme Teacher; we meditate on his virtues and greatness and at the same time strengthen our faith and confidence in him. With a sense of gratitude and deference we renew our resolve to follow in his footsteps to enlighten ourselves and to render selfless service to others as did the Buddha.

The following passage is recited as a means of concentration meditation practice. This kind of practice is called *Buddhanussati* or "Recollection of the Buddha." While reciting this we should, therefore, concentrate on the text and its meaning.







<i>Pali</i>	<i>Translation</i>
<i>Itipi so bhagavā araham sammāsambuddho vijjācaranasampanno  sugato  lokavidū anuttaro purisa- dammasārathi satthā devamanussānam buddho bhagavā' ti</i>	He is, indeed, the Blessed One, far from defilements, perfectly self-enlightened, fully possessed of wisdom and ex- cellent conduct, one who has proceeded by the noble way, knower of the worlds, unexcelled trainer of trainable men,  teacher of deities and men, the Awakened One, skillful in teaching Dharma.

Questions

- 1. Why is the Buddha worthy of supreme veneration?
- 2. What does Buddhanussati mean? What is its practical use?
- 3. How should we make up our mind while paying homage to the Buddha?
- 4. What is the meaning of "araham," "lokavidū," and "anuttaro purisadammasārathi"?
- 5. What kind of selfless service did the Buddha give to the world?

## 35. Dhammanussati

*Dhammanussati* means Recollection of the Dharma.

Even though the Buddha in his physical form is no more with us now, we still have the Dharma as our guide and teacher. Thus the Dharma has virtually taken the place of the Buddha. In fact, the Dharma itself constitutes Buddhahood and Buddhahood is, in truth, nothing but the Dharma.

Buddhahood is achieved through the realization of the Dharma and there could never have been a Buddha without the Dharma. That is why the Buddha says:

*"He who sees the Dharma sees me, and he who sees me sees the Dharma."*

Obviously, "me" here does not signify the Buddha in his physical form, as generally understood, but the Buddhahood or Buddha-nature with which the Dharma is equated. Thus in the ultimate sense both the Buddha and the Dharma are one and the same.

Like *Buddhanussati*, *Dhammanussati* is also recited as a means of concentration meditation practice. The following is the passage under discussion:



<i>Pali</i>	Translation
<i>Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo sanditthiko akāliko ehipassiko opanayiko paccattam veditabbo viññūhī ti</i>	Well-expounded is the Dharma by the Blessed One, to be realized by oneself, with immediate result, (is) capable of standing the test, leading to Nirvana, to be attained by the wise,  each for himself.

It is clear from the above passage that the Dharma is something to be practiced, not merely studied or memorized. To practice Dharma means to follow the teachings of the Buddha and to come closer to Buddha-nature. Remember that the Dharma will benefit us only when we seriously practice it.

Questions

- 1. What is the meaning of Dhammanussati? What is its practical use?*
- 2. After the Buddha passed away, what filled his place as our Teacher?*
- 3. In what words does the Buddha equate Dharma with Buddhahood? Explain their implication.*
- 4. How can we benefit from the Dharma?*
- 5. What is the meaning of “sanditthiko” and “ehipassiko”?*





*Gāravo ca nivāto ca  
santutṭhī ca kataññutā  
kālena dhammasavaṇaṃ  
etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ*

Having respect, humility,  
contentment and gratitude,  
with the timely hearing of Dhamma –  
this is the greatest blessing.



## 36. Sanghanussati

The third of the Holy Three Gems came into existence the moment *Kondañña* attained the Eye of Truth. Since then the number of the Buddha's noble disciples continued to grow at a phenomenal rate and they all helped the Master in one way or another to spread the Dharma.

The Buddha discovered the Dharma and taught it to the world. But without the *Sangha*, his teachings would not spread very far or last much longer after he passed away; and the world today, probably, would not benefit from them.

The noble disciples, having realized the Dharma, endure to enlighten others, too. They are the treasurers and the protectors of the Dharma; they study it, practice it, and teach it to others. This is how the tradition continues. The Sangha therefore plays a primary role in the preservation and spread of the religion. The fact that we still have a relatively easy access to the Buddha's teachings today, over 2,500 years after the Great Demise, is due largely to the efforts and sacrifice of the Sangha.

*Sanghanussati* means Recollection of the Sangha. The Pali passage with translation is as follows:

<i>Pali</i>	<i>Translation</i>
<i>Supatipanno</i> <i>bhagavato</i> <i>sāvakasaṅgho</i> <i>ujupatipanno</i> <i>bhagavato</i> <i>sāvakasaṅgho</i> <i>ñāyapatipanno</i> <i>bhagavato</i> <i>sāvakasaṅgho</i> <i>sāmīcipatipanno</i> <i>bhagavato</i> <i>sāvakasaṅgho</i> <i>yadidaṃ cattāri</i> <i>purisayugāni</i> <i>aṭṭhapurisapuggalā</i> <i>esa bhagavato</i> <i>sāvakasaṅgho</i> <i>āhuneyyo</i> <i>pāhuneyyo</i> <i>dakkhiṇeyyo</i> <i>añjalikaraṇīyo</i> <i>anuttaram</i> <i>puññakkhettaṃ</i> <i>lokassā' ti</i>	<p>The Holy Order of the Blessed One's disciples is of good conduct: the Holy Order of the Blessed One's disciples is of upright conduct; the Holy Order of the Blessed One's disciples is of dutiful conduct; the Holy Order of the Blessed One's disciples is of proper conduct.</p> <p>This Holy Order, namely, the four pairs of men, the eight individuals, that is the Holy Order of the Blessed One's disciples, worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, an incomparable field of merits to the world.</p>



## Questions

1. *What is the primary role of the Sangha?*
2. *What will happen to the Buddha's teachings if the Sangha were not there?*
3. *In what way are we indebted to the Sangha? Explain.*
4. *What is the meaning of Sanghanussati?*
5. *What is the meaning of "ujupaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho," sāmīcipatipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho," and "anuttaramṃ puñṇakkhettaṃ lokassa"?*





*Āratī viratī pāpā  
majjapānā ca saññāmo  
appamādo ca dhammesu  
etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ*

Turning away from all that is wrong,  
renouncing the use of intoxicants,  
and being scrupulous in all one's affairs –  
this is the greatest blessing.



## 37. Buddhist Meditation (I)

Of all the many aspects of the Buddhist religion, meditation occupies a very important place of interest, especially in the West. In a number of Asian nations, like Thailand, Japan, Sri Lanka, and Burma, where Buddhism is still very much a living force, it enjoys a long and uninterrupted tradition receiving, in more recent years, even a wider recognition among the populace.

As science and technology becomes increasingly developed, people have more and more come to realize the relevance and significance of Buddhist meditation to life. Those who are earnest in this unique practice and have right understanding of its nature and application always find their effort more than rewarding.

Meditation is a means to mental development. In Buddhism, mind is the most important composite of the entire human entity. All the evil and noble deeds that are committed in the world are, in fact, a result of our thoughts. That is why the Buddha has repeatedly proclaimed that mind is the forerunner of all actions, the chief of all things. It should therefore be trained, refined and perfected. Meditation is the way to achieve this.

Beginners who desire favorable results should be instructed and trained by an experienced teacher, who will also supervise and guide them as they progress in the venture.

Because meditation is the training of the mind and because mind is the most important factor that manipulates and controls our action and speech, the practice of meditation can bring infinite benefits to us in life. Below is the list of just a few to illustrate the point in question:

1. Meditation helps to calm the mind and get it better organized.
2. Meditation strengthens our will power and enables us to face all problems and difficulties with confidence.
3. Meditation makes us think positively.
4. It improves our efficiency in work by helping us to concentrate better and by sharpening our mental faculties.
5. It frees us from worries, restlessness, etc.
6. Meditation increases our mental health and therefore bears a positive effect to a large extent on our physical health.
7. It cleanses our mind of defilements (*kilesa*).
8. It creates in us virtuous qualities like kindness, inner peace, humbleness (as opposed to arrogance), a realistic attitude toward life, and prevents us from being influenced by such elements as passion, selfishness, hatred, jealousy, or greed.
9. An untrained person is often dominated by delusion (*avijja*) and his own preconceptions which prevent him from having proper insight into reality. Meditation helps to remove such disadvantages.



It should, however, be borne in mind that the degree of benefits a man can derive from such practice depends entirely on the degree of achievement he makes and on how far he can apply it (meditation) to real life. There are several factors that are important for the success of the practice; for example, proper atmosphere, spiritual preparedness, proper frame of mind, self-confidence, frequency and regularity in practice, and so on. But, as with other activities in life, trying to do one's best is always better than not trying at all.

### *Questions*

- 1. What aspect of Buddhism is the most popular in the West? Please explain why?*
- 2. Why is it said that mind is the forerunner of all actions? And why should we train our mind?*
- 3. From whom should we learn the techniques of meditation? How does he help us?*
- 4. What is the difference between trained and untrained mind?*
- 5. Describe the benefits of Buddhist meditation.*







## 38. Buddhist Meditation (II)

Buddhism teaches two kinds of meditation:

1. *Samatha-bhavana* - Concentration Meditation
2. *Vipassana-bhavana* - Insight Meditation

*Samatha-bhavana* aims at gaining concentration or one-pointedness of mind and *Vipassana-bhavana* enables the practitioners to purify their minds and acquire an insight into the real nature of all phenomena.

Technically speaking, concentration is the basis of insight. It is developed by fixing one's mind on a chosen object, say, a Buddha image, candlelight, a circular disc painted in a particular color, or on breathing. Buddhist commentaries elaborate forty varieties of such meditation objects, but the list may be extended indefinitely.

Insight meditation, on the other hand, is practiced through the application of one's mind to the nature of things -to be constantly mindful of one's physical and mental activities - so one may be able to penetrate deeply into the real nature of existence and do away with own mental impurities. In short, insight meditation is the direct purification method to cleanse one's mind of all evils.

Both concentration and insight meditation can be developed side by side and the development of one helps in the cultivation of the other. But, ultimately, it is only insight meditation that, when perfected, leads man to the highest wisdom and cleanses his mind of all impurities, once and for all.

Both kinds of meditation can be practiced and applied to our daily life. Both are of immense benefit to practitioners. Nevertheless, for those who are not acquainted with the practice or have no prior personal experience, the guidance and supervision of an expert teacher is highly recommended.

One of the most popular methods of gaining concentration, practiced widely now in both the East and the West, is the breathing exercise. This is done by focusing our minds on the in - and out - breaths. The point of focus may be the nosegip or the abdomen that keeps rising and falling as we breathe in and out. Repeating in one's mind the word *bud-dho* (Buddha), as one breathes in and out, is another very effective way of developing concentration and is much recommended. It is so easy to practice even a little child could do it, yet it is so useful to us in all our work.

For practical purposes one may take the following steps:

1. Sit cross-legged with the right foot on the left one. Use a cushion if necessary. Make the back straight, upright.
2. Place the right hand on the left, palms upward.
3. Close your eyes, relax the whole body, relax every muscle. Free your mind from all worries and cares.
4. Breathe in and out slightly, only slightly, more deeply than normal. Mentally repeat *bud* (u as in put) when breathing in, and *dho* when breathing out. Do not think about anything else. Try to control your mind the best way you can.

The best methods for insight meditation are found in a famous discourse delivered by the Buddha called *Satipatthana Sutta* or the Foundations of Mindfulness. According to this discourse, there are four objects that may be taken for the practice, namely, Body, Sensations, Mind, and Mental Objects (Pali : *Kaya, Vedana, Citta, and Dhamma*).

Mindfulness is the key in insight meditation. When



practicing this type of meditation, one should endeavor to be mindful at all time of one's activities, mental or physical. Mindfulness should be developed to such an extent that it becomes natural and automatic. When that stage is reached, one can be said to dwell constantly in mindfulness. This is the way to spiritual purification.

Remember that meditation can be best learned not from a written lesson, but from an experienced teacher.

## *Questions*

- 1. What is Samatha-bhavana? What does it aim at? Explain.*
- 2. What is Vipassana-bhavana? What are its benefits?*
- 3. What objects are used in Samatha-and Vipassana-bhavana?*
- 4. Briefly describe how concentration is practiced. Mention the steps to be followed.*
- 5. What is Satipatthana Sutta? What does it teach?*

## 39. Understanding Dukkha

*Dukkha* is one of the most misunderstood Pali words in Buddhism. It is found in the first sermon and in many other discourses dealing with the nature of life or existence. The term embraces many meanings and refers to different things in different contexts.

Buddhism has often been criticized for its alleged pessimistic slant in its world outlook: it has been accused of giving undue emphasis on the many unsatisfactory conditions of existence such as physical sufferings, frustration, disappointment, poverty, and diseases, and overlooking at the same time the pleasurable conditions that are equally available to the world.

Such a criticism is primarily based on the wrong interpretation of the first Noble Truth proclaimed by the Buddha, which attempts to define the nature of the world in realistic perspectives. It is the Noble Truth of *Dukkha*, popularly, but erroneously, translated as "suffering," "unsatisfactoriness," "pain" and similar terms or phrases, each of which carries but a partial implication of the original Pali expression specifically intended by the *Buddha*.

It is true that in ordinary usage the word *dukkha* means suffering, sorrow, etc., as opposed to the word *sukha*, which implies comfort or happiness. But when it is used in the first Noble Truth to represent the view of life and the world, the term acquires a much profounder philosophical implication. It signifies, beside the ordinary meanings, deeper



ideas such as imperfection, impermanence, emptiness, insubstantiality, which are not altogether in the scope of the popular usage.

Buddhism distinguishes three kinds of *dukkha*. To the first category, *dukkha-dukkhata*, belong all mental and physical experiences that are generally considered as unpleasant, undesirable, and painful, such as, sickness, death, miseries, poverty, agony, distress, discomfort, etc. In other words, *dukkha-dukkhata* means all kinds of sufferings in the ordinary empirical sense, to which all living beings must be subject albeit in varying degrees as per individual circumstances. It is the most apparent form of *dukkha* because it can be directly experienced by the senses.

Oftentimes, it is only this category of *dukkha-dukkhata* that the first Noble Truth is taken to represent, which gives rise to the misconception the Buddhism is pessimistic in its outlook of the world.

The second category of *dukkha* implies the unsatisfactoriness as produced by the vicissitude-potentiality, which is the nature of all conditioned phenomena.

The Buddha does not deny happiness in the ordinary sense of the word when he speaks of *dukkha* as an inherent characteristic of things and necessary condition of life. Nor does he advocate an asceticism whereby we have to avoid all pleasures by closing our eyes and ears and pretending to be blind and deaf to all objects around us.

The Buddha, however, wants those who experience such pleasures to realize their limitations and impermanent nature. In *Anguttara Nikaya*, he refers to happiness based on the senses and spiritual bliss which is independent of material things or sensual desires. The first is the happiness of sense pleasures and the other, of renunciation. But all these are included, in their ultimate sense, in *dukkha*.

The second category of *dukkha* is designated *viparinama-dukkhata*, being characterized by impermanence, transiency and ephemerality.

The third form of *dukkha*, which is recognized in inherent liability to sufferings as a result of conditionality in all existential phenomena (*sankhara-dukkhata*), is the most important aspect of the first Truth. It is identified with the Five Aggregates, namely, Corporeality, Sensation, Perception, Mental Formations, and Consciousness, that constitute an “individual,” the object of primordial attachment, an “I” or “being.”

Greed, desire, and attachment are the sources of *dukkha*. We feel unhappy, disappointed, and depressed because we are attached to ourselves or our identities. Everything that we experience is related to us and consequently causes in us the dual concepts of like and dislike, good and bad, desirable and undesirable. Our mind is thus influenced by what we experience and loses its freedom. The Buddha, therefore, says: The Five Aggregates of Attachment are *dukkha* (*Pañcupādānak-khandhā dukkhā*).

## Questions

1. What does “*dukkha*” really mean? Give an explanation in your own words.
2. How many kinds of *dukkha* are mentioned in Buddhist philosophy? Write them out in Pali terminology.
3. What kind of *dukkha* is most apparent, and why?
4. Explain the second category of *dukkha*. Why are happiness and pleasure included in *dukkha*?
5. How is the third form of *dukkha* recognized and identified?



## 40. Why We Study Buddhism

There are many good reasons why we should study Buddhism; some are quite explicit while the other will become clear only after an earnest deliberation. The following are some of the more significant reasons that are more relevant to us here.

1. Buddhism is our religion and is therefore a vital part of our life. It gives us an identity and inexorably relates us to one of the most powerful civilizing forces in the history of mankind. Whatever we are, we should always strive to be the best, and to be good Buddhists we should first study Buddhism.

2. Buddhism is one of the most important sources of world civilization, which imposes the strongest and widest influence on humanity at large. Even the Christian faith in its early days was greatly influenced by the Buddhist teaching, although some are reluctant to acknowledge it. Buddhism is time-tested, being more than 2,500 years old, enjoys worldwide acceptance, and is regarded with respect by intellectuals throughout the world. This is a strong reason why we should study Buddhism.

3. In terms of physical wants and needs, man does not basically differ from animal; both need food, shelter and rest. Both need protection and care. Most that we do are intended to satisfy these physical needs; the difference lies only in the ways we find them. It is religion that elevates

man above the physical plane and gives him a totally different dimension. When we study Buddhism, we learn how to rise beyond animal instincts and find satisfaction in the spiritual realm, we learn how to make our life more meaningful than it would be without the religion.

4. Buddhism constitutes the most scientific and practical teachings, and that is why more and more knowledgeable people are turning toward it. Buddhist doctrine (Dharma) helps those who study and practice it not to fall prey to superstition and false beliefs. During the time of the Buddha, people believed in the caste system, in animal and human sacrifices and in self-mortification - to quote only a few - but the Buddha denounced them all. He fought hard against all those vicious practices and taught the noble doctrine to the people. Those who believed in him became enlightened and free. We should, therefore, study the religion so we, too, could benefit from his wisdom.

5. During the forty-five years of his mission, the Buddha gave countless discourses to the people. These discourses contain very valuable advice and practical guidance which can be applied to our everyday life. In fact, they are meant to be practiced by the followers, not simply to be believed.

Let us take, for example, the Buddha's advice: Depend on yourself. This simple advice is undoubtedly true and realistic. It teaches man to be strong, to take responsibility of his own action and to be brave to face its consequences. It is so true and reasonable that no one in his sanity would argue otherwise. If only man follows this advice, the world would, indeed, be a much happier place to live in. It would eventually turn into heaven!

6. All Buddhists should consider it their duty not only

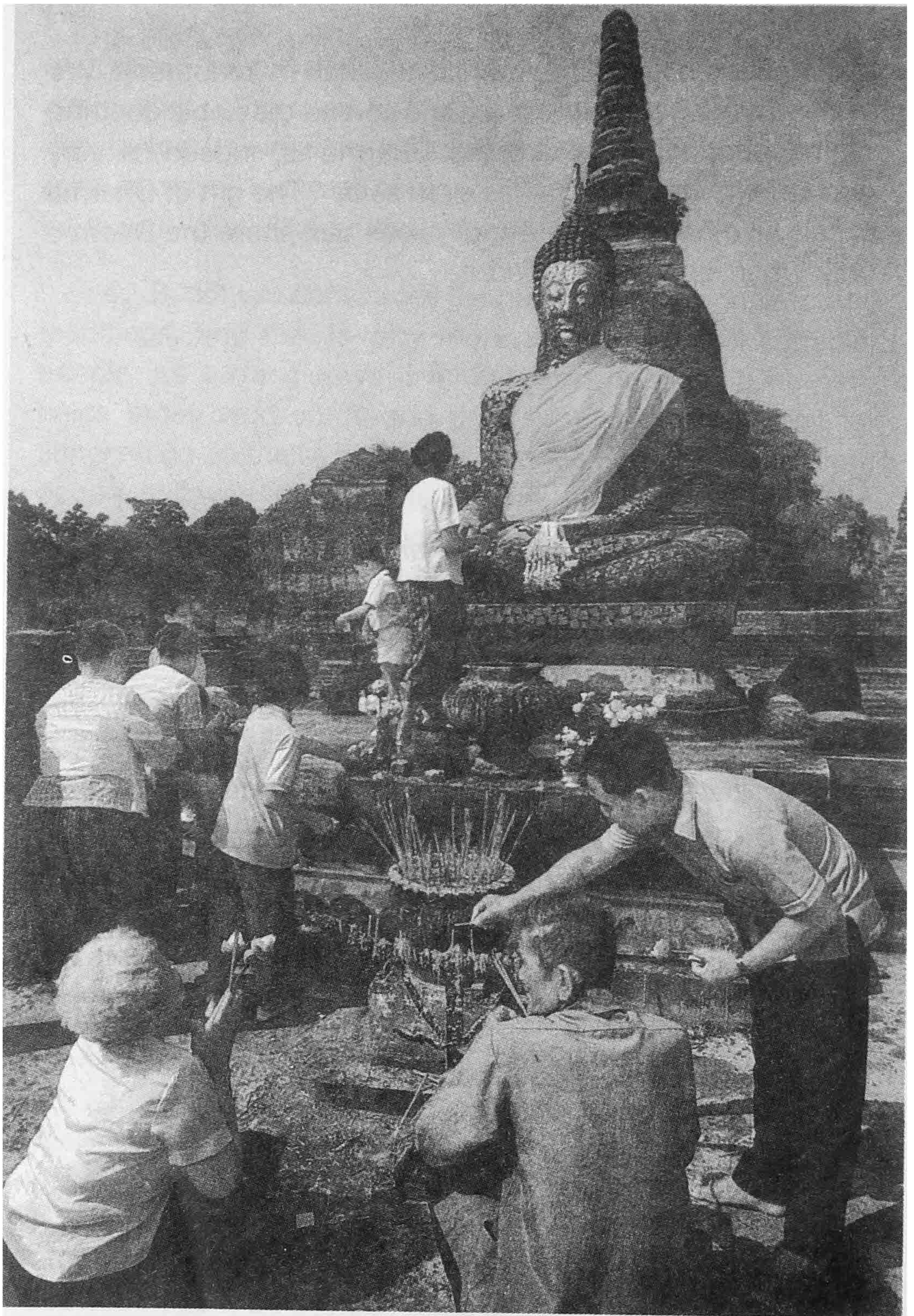


to practice the religion, but also teach it to others. We must all work hard to preserve and spread the noble doctrine of the Buddha. To share the Dharma is, indeed, a very great merit. The Buddha has even said, "The gift of Dharma excels all other gifts." Naturally, one can share the Dharma only when one has studied it.

### *Questions*

- 1. How does man rise above animal instinct? How does Buddhism help him?*
- 2. Name a few things that the Buddha fought against. How does the religion free us from those evils?*
- 3. How long did the Buddha's mission last? What do his discourses contain?*
- 4. If we believe in the Buddha's advice to depend on ourselves, what effect will it have on us?*
- 5. What is the best gift according to the Buddha? How can we share this gift with others?*





Historic Place, Sukhothai. Sukhothai was the first capital of the Thai nation. Founded some eight hundred years ago, it remained capital for two centuries.



## 41. Thailand And Buddhism

Thailand is a beautiful and thriving country in Southeast Asia. It has an area of 198,455 square miles - some 50,000 square miles larger than Japan. Its present population is 55 million, 93 percent of whom are Buddhist.

Buddhism has a deep influence on the Thai nation as a whole. It has molded the life of the people, their thoughts and behavior. Its influence can be seen in all spheres of life and activities, in architecture, painting, and sculpture, in manners and speech, in language, traditions and entertainments, rites and ceremonies, and in all other forms of Thai culture.

The written history of Thailand dates back to some 800 years, long after the Thai nation actually came into existence. Yet more recent archaeological finds in various parts of the country have produced a definite proof that the civilization in the area can be traced back as far as 6,000 years ago. It is still controversial, however, as to what race actually did occupy the region.

The word "Thai" means "free", Thailand is therefore the "Land of the Free." Thai people take great pride in this name because during the 800 years of her history the country as a whole had never lost her independence or freedom. Even when Western colonialism in that part of the world was at its peak and the countries around her fell one after another under the Western rule, Thailand was able to preserve her sovereignty.

According to *Mahavamsa*, the Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka, Buddhism came to the area which is now Thailand more than 2,000 years ago, during the reign of Emperor *Asoka* of India. Since the day of its arrival until the present, the religion has occupied an undisputed position as the most popular faith of the people. Today Thailand is the only country in the world that has constitutionalized Buddhism as the religion of the nation.

Since ancient time, Thai rulers have all along been Buddhist and great patrons of the religion. They encouraged and supported Buddhism by building and maintaining monasteries, casting new Buddha images and restoring the old ones, providing monks with material necessities and assisting them in their religious duties. Many Thai kings and princes entered the Holy Order, either for life or for a certain period of time, in order to devote more time for the study and practice of the religion. Some of them, like *King Li Thai* and *King Mongkut* even became great scholars in Buddhism and the Pali language. Since 1903 the State has passed the laws, called the Sangha Acts, to give the Order more power for its internal administration.

The Department of Religious Affairs has been established in the Ministry of Education in order to provide an effective channel of communication and cooperation between the Sangha and the State. In addition to Buddhism, the department is also responsible for the affairs of all other religions in the country.

There are two main sects of Buddhism, *Theravada* and *Mahayana*. *Theravada* means Teaching of the Elders and *Mahayana* means The Great Vehicle. Thai Buddhism belongs to the first. Here the institution of monks, known as the Holy Order of *Sangha*, plays an important role in religious affairs and activities. According to tradition, every young



man in Thailand is expected, though not compelled, to enter the Order, at least for a brief period, in order to acquaint themselves with the religion. The number of monks in the country is, therefore, considerably large - about 300,000 at any given time. An individual member of the Sangha is called a *Bhikkhu*.

Thai monks are easily distinguishable. They shave their hair and eyebrows every month (on the fullmoon eve); they wear brownish yellow robes (color shades may vary); they do not take solid food after midday until the following dawn; they refrain from unwholesome physical contact with women and from all forms of sexual activities. Altogether there are 227 rules in the *Patimokkha* that regulate their conduct.

Buddhist monks devote their time in studying scriptures and other subjects, meditation, teaching, helping people with their problems, giving them advice when needed, doing social work, etc. They work for the benefit and well-being of society without expecting remuneration or rewards in any form and are supported in their work by lay devotees. The Buddhist principle underlying social service is universal love and altruism, which is amply exemplified in monks' conduct and activities.

## Questions

1. *Where is Thailand located? What is her population now, how many percent of the population are Buddhist?*
2. *When did Buddhism come to Thailand? What is its status in the country today?*
3. *In what way do the rulers of the country support Buddhism?*
4. *What are the main sects of Buddhism now? To what sect does Thai Buddhism belong?*
5. *What do Buddhist monks generally do as a matter of duty and service to society?*



## 42. Buddhist Holy days (I)

There are five major Buddhist holy days celebrated in Thailand. They are *Magha Puja*, *Visakha Puja*, *Asalha Puja*, Lent Commencement Day, and Lent Ending Day. We Buddhists should know the origin and significance of these important days. Some of the days are celebrated with equal zeal by other Buddhist countries, while others are treated with less enthusiasm.

### *Magha Puja Day*

*Magha Puja* Day falls on the fullmoon of the third lunar month, somewhere toward the end of February. *Magha* is the name of a month in the lunar calendar used in ancient India, and so are *Visakha* and *Asalha*. The word *puja* signifies worship. So *Magha Puja* means the worship in the month of Magha.

The *Magha Puja* Day is also known as the day of the Fourfold Assembly. This was a special assembly which took place at the Bamboo Grove (*Veluvana*) and contained four extraordinary features, namely:

1. It was the fullmoon day of the month *Magha*.
2. 1,250 monk disciples assembled to see the Buddha, all by themselves, without an appointment.
3. All these monks were *Arahants* who had attained the sixfold superknowledge.
4. All of them were the Buddha's direct disciples having been ordained by the Lord himself.

At the fourfold assembly the Buddha gave the monks an important discourse summarizing his teachings into three main principles, namely,

- (1) not to do any evil;
- (2) to do good;
- (3) to purify the mind.

These three principles are fundamental in the Buddha-dharma (Buddhist doctrine).

*Magha Puja* Day is also known as the Dharma Day as it was the occasion an important Dharma discourse was delivered by the Buddha.

*Magha Puja* Day is also important in another respect. It is said that in the last year of his life, just three months before his passing away, the Buddha had determined the day he would die and announced it to his disciples. The incident is known as the Rejection to the Aggregates of Life and it also took place on the fullmoon of the third lunar month (*Magha*). This fact adds more significance to the *Magha Puja* Day and makes it even more sacred for all Buddhists.

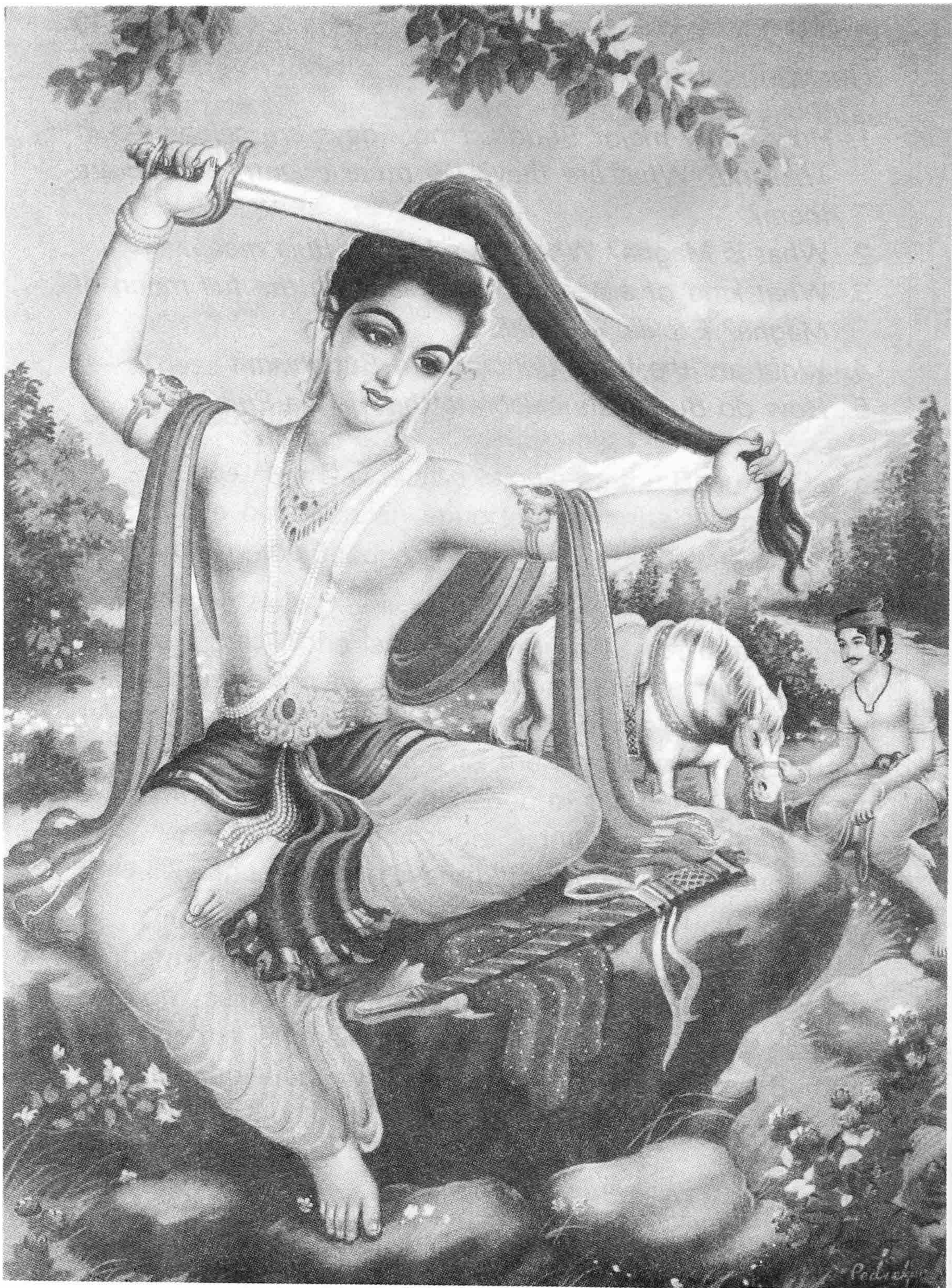
On *Magha Puja* Day, Buddhists flock to the temple in the morning. They observe the five precepts, listen to a sermon, serve food for monks, meditate or take part in other forms of meritorious activities. They also perform circumambulation, walking around a shrine or a Buddha image three times, as a gesture of faith and respect in the Holy Triple Gem.



## *Questions*

- 1. How many major Buddhist holy days are celebrated in Thailand? What are they? Do other countries celebrate them?*
- 2. What is Magha? What does Magha Puja mean?*
- 3. What kind of assembly took place on the full moon of Magha? Explain in detail.*
- 4. What are the three principles of Buddhism?*
- 5. How do Buddhists celebrate the Magha Puja?*





At the age of 29, Prince Siddhattha renounced the world, leaving the palaces, the throne, the kingdom, and everything behind. The Great Renunciation was a momentous sacrifice, an act of ultimate altruism.



## 43. Buddhist Holy Days (II)

### *Visakha Puja Day*

This is the most sacred occasion for the whole Buddhist world. It marks the three important events in the Buddha's life, namely, his birth, enlightenment, and the Great Demise, which all took place on the fullmoon of the sixth lunar month (*Visakha*).

The Buddha was born in 623 B.C. His father was King *Suddhodana*, his mother was Queen *Maya*, and their capital city was *Kapilavatthu* in the North of India. Before enlightenment the Buddha was known by his personal and clan name as *Siddhattha Gotama*.

Seven days after *Siddhattha's* birth, Queen *Maya* died and the baby prince was thereafter looked after by his foster mother, *Pajapati*. He was an extraordinary person, extremely intelligent and compassionate. It was predicted that he would either become a Universal Monarch or a Buddha.

Despite all the comfort and luxury of a royal household, Prince *Siddhattha* decided at the age of twenty-nine to leave home and family and become a wandering ascetic in search of the Truth. He labored hard for six long years, experimenting with all kinds of spiritual practices and meditation. Then, on the fullmoon of the month *Visakha*, at exactly thirty-five years, he attained enlightenment and became Buddha, the Enlightened One.

The Buddha worked hard to spread his teachings and to enlighten people. During the forty-five years of his mission, he was able to establish his religion, which is now known as Buddhism. His following came from all walks of life: there were kings and princes, traders and peasants, *Brahmins* and outcastes, the rich and the poor, the influential and the ordinary. His teaching is now one of the major world religions and it was at one time the greatest and the most influential civilizing force in human history.

The Buddha passed away at the ripe age of eighty, again on the fullmoon day of *Visakha*. He had left us an invaluable legacy - a spiritual heritage - which has benefited the world at large (and still does) through its long existence and wide spread of over 2,500 years.

In Thailand, *Visakha Puja* is celebrated in very much the same way as the *Magha*, but only on a larger scale and with more enthusiasm. In Sri Lanka, a Buddhist country to the south of India, it is the year's biggest and most festive event. *Visakha* is, in fact, celebrated in all Buddhist countries and by all Buddhist communities. The day is also known as the Buddha Day as it commemorates the three important events in the Buddha's life mentioned above.

## Questions

1. *When is the Visakha Puja Day? What is its significance?*
2. *When was the Buddha born? Who were his parents?*
3. *At what age did Siddhattha leave home to become an ascetic (monk)? Please compare his life as a prince and an ascetic.*
4. *How long did the Buddha's mission last? What kinds of people became his disciples?*
5. *At what age did the Buddha pass away? What did he leave us?*



## 44. Buddhist Holy Days (III)

### *Asalha Puja Day*

The Buddha attained enlightenment at Buddha-Gaya (*Bodh-Gaya*) on the fullmoon of *Visakha*. He delivered the first discourse to his first five disciples, viz. *Kondañña*, *Vappa*, *Bhaddiya*, *Mahanama*, and *Assaji*. This epoch-making incident marks the establishment of the Buddhist religion by the Lord Buddha.

It was on the fullmoon of *Asalha*, the eighth lunar month, that the first discourse was delivered. At the end of the sermoon, *Kondañña* attained the Eye of Truth; the Order of *Sangha* was initiated and the Holy Triple Gem became complete. There are thus three reasons why the *Asalha Puja Day* is celebrated by Buddhists:

1. It is the day the Buddha delivered the first discourse;
2. It is the day the religion was established;
3. It is the day the Sangha came into existence and the Holy Triple Gem became complete. (For this reason it is also known as the Sangha Day.)

The name of the first discourse is *Dhammacakkappa-vattana Sutta*. *Dhammacakka* means the Wheel of Dharma and the whole word means Setting into Motion the Wheel of Dharma. *Sutta* means a discourse. The main theme of the first sermon is the four Truths, namely, suffering (*dukkha*), the cause of suffering, the end of suffering, and the way to the end of suffering. These Truths are universal and invariably valid at all time and in all places. They are therefore known as the Four Noble Truths (*Cattāri Ariyasaccani*).

The first Truth states that existence is unsatisfactory, incomplete, empty, subject to change and undesirable. Because of this we have to suffer one way or another. For example, we cannot be happy at all time even if we want to; men are born, grow old, become weak, and die; and there are times when we have to be separated from those we love and care for. All these and other undesirable elements are the conditions of life.

The second Truth explains the cause of suffering. Everything that exists comes under the law of cause and effect. This law operates in all spheres, and at all levels, of existence. Suffering can be removed, according to this law, by destroying its causes.

The third and the fourth Truths offer the way out of suffering. *Nirvana* is the end of suffering. It is the state of perfect calm and bliss, the ultimate freedom from all forms of suffering. One can reach this state by following the Eightfold Path, also known as the Middle Way (fourth Truth), which are, Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration. This is the way of true happiness. This is the way we all should follow.

## Questions

1. *Where and to whom did the Buddha preach the first sermon? What happened at the end of the sermon?*
2. *When did the Buddha deliver the first sermon? Be exact.*
3. *What is the significance of the Asalha Puja Day? Please give reasons why it is so important for Buddhists.*
4. *What is the name of the first sermon, what does it signify?*
5. *What is the Eightfold Path? What will be the results of following the Path?*



## 45. Buddhist Holy Days (IV)

### *Buddhist Lent*

The day following the *Asalha* fullmoon is called the Lent Commencement Day or *Vassupanayika* in Pali. The Lent, or Rains Residence (Retreat), is one of the monastic observances having its origin in the time of the Lord Buddha.

When Buddhism became first established, the number of monks was relatively small and the Sangha organization was more manageable. Originally, monks did not stay at any particular place, but were most of the time on the move in their mission to spread the Buddha's teachings. During the rainy season, when the country experienced heavy and frequent rainfalls, things were quite difficult for them and their travels were often impeded or interrupted. The season was also the time for farmers to cultivate their land and grow crops. It was, naturally, the time for most ascetics to stop wandering and remain stationed in a specific place.

The Buddha therefore thought it fit to promulgate a rule for the *Sangha*. According to this rule, monks are obliged to remain posted at a certain place, preferably a monastery, for a period of three months, starting from the first day of the eighth waning moon (i.e., the day following the *Asalha* full-moon).

During these three months, monks cannot spend the night outside the area they have taken for rains residence. If they have to go out, they make sure to return before the dawn of the following day. Such is the rule laid down by the Buddha for the Holy Sangha.





Two months after his enlightenment, the Buddha proclaimed the Truth he had discovered. The Wheel of Dharma was set in motion and the Buddhist religion was established. This event took place on the full moon of the eighth month (*Asalha*) in the year 588 B.C.



There are, of course, exceptions to this rule by which a monk is allowed to spend the night elsewhere, other than his rains residence; for instance, when his parent is seriously ill, or he is required for some urgent religious work at a place too far to return in one day. But even in such cases, he may be away only for seven days at a stretch. This practice, like many others, is preserved to the letter down to these days and the period is considered by all Buddhists as exceptionally sacred to perform merits, or to take certain vows for one's spiritual upliftment.

In some Buddhist countries this is a high time for young men to enter monkhood and stay in a monastery in order to acquaint themselves better with the religion - something they cannot conveniently do while leading a household life. The number of monks during the Lent in such countries is therefore much greater than at other time of the year. This is particularly true of Thailand, where the Buddhist tradition is still very much alive and strong.

Religious activities usually increase for both monks and the laity. Monasteries conduct special courses for new Sangha members; intensive meditation classes and Dharma lectures may also be organized for both parties.

## Questions

- 1. What is Vassupanayika Day? When is it observed?*
- 2. Explain why the Buddha decreed Lent observance for monks.*
- 3. How long do monks observe the Lent? State the days of observing and ending.*
- 4. Explain the rules concerning the Lent.*
- 5. Why are there more monks during the Lent than at other time? What do they do during the Lent?*

## 46. Buddhist Holy Days (V)

### *Buddhist Lent (Con.)*

In Thailand it is during the Lent, especially, that the Great Birth discourses are delivered, often with great pomp and show. This is, in fact, the story of *King Vessantara*, the *Bodhisatta* who took birth in order to fulfill Charity Perfection (*danaparamita*). The story exerts a deep influence on the Thai national character as a whole; it helps to explain, at least partly, why Thai people are so noted for their kind-heartedness and generosity.

As the Lent is regarded a sacred period, it has become a common practice among the more devout Buddhists to make a vow to abstain from undesirable habits that they want to get rid of, or to commit themselves to certain practices for their spiritual progress. For instance, they may resolve to give up alcoholic drinks or cigarettes, or take a vow to practice meditation for a certain length of time on a daily basis, or observe the five precepts more strictly. In short, they perform merits in any possible ways, try to learn and practice the Dharma with greater determination and effort, all this partly as a means to perfect themselves and partly as a practical tribute (*patipattipuja*) to the Lord Buddha.

At the end of three months, i.e., on the fullmoon of the eleventh lunar month (mid-October), Buddhists hold a ceremony to mark the termination of the Lent. This is



Lent Ending Day, also known as *Pavarana* Day. Lay devotees go to a monastery in large number and share food with monks in the traditional way called *Pindapata*.

First the lay devotees, with bowls of rice, curries, and other offerings, line up at an appointed place waiting for the time. When all is in order, a singal is given to inform the monks in the monastery who would then form a single or double file, according to seniority of ordination. With eyes cast down and food-bowls in hands, they walk slowly along the devotees' line(s), receiving their offerings with compassion and grace. Thus they continue until the last devotee has had the opportunity to serve them his food. Then they all assemble in the main hall, where the lay followers perform other kinds of merits, such as, observing five or eight precepts, listening to a sermon, and meditation. Various cultural programs may also be staged to entertain and educate the people. There is much merriment and merit-making all at the same time.

The above practice has its origin in a story allegedly connected with the Buddha. According to this, the Buddha once went to spend the rains retreat in *Tavatimsa* Heaven, where he delivered *Abhidhamma* to *Mayadevaputta* (his mother Maya in her previous life) and other gods. At the end of the Lent, he returned to earth to a happy welcome and great rejoicing and celebration. This was in the seventh year after the enlightenment. Accordingly, ceremonies and festivities are held in order to commemorate the event. The place where he came back to earth is called *Sankassa* City. It is in the North of India.

## *Questions*

- 1. Who was King Vessantara? How has his life story influenced Thai life and character?*
- 2. What kind of vows do devout Buddhists take for the Lent? Explain with examples.*
- 3. When is Lent Ending Day? What do Buddhists do on that day?*
- 4. Explain how the Pindapata is conducted on Lent Ending Day.*
- 5. Describe how the Lent Ending Day celebration originated.*



## 47. The Kathina Ceremony

*Kathina* in Pali refers to the wooden frame which monks in ancient India used to sew their clothes on. The clothes thus prepared came to be known as *Kathina* clothes. The Buddha allows *Kathina* clothes to be presented to the monks who have completed the three-month period of rains retreat. The event in which the clothes are offered to the monks is, therefore, known as the *Kathina* Ceremony or more popularly, the Robe-Presentation Ceremony.

There are several reasons why the *Kathina* has come to occupy so much importance in Buddhist monasticism and among the Buddhist public:

1. It is a ceremony that can be effected only once a year for a monastery and it must take place within a specific period of time - never before or after that. (See below).

2. The ceremony enables participant monks to extend the benefit period of one month (from the day following the Lent Ending Day) to four extra successive months right through the cold season.

3. Traditionally, Buddhists believe that offerings made to individual monks accrue less merit than those made in the name of the *Sangha* (a group of four monks or more). The *Kathina* robes can be presented only to the *Sangha*; at least five monks must be present in order that this ceremony may be fulfilled, according to the *Vinaya*.

4. The Lent is a period during which religious activities





During the Kathina Season ( the lunar month in which October falls), it is a Buddhist custom for laypeople to make offerings of robe cloth and other requisites to the Sangha, marking the end of the Vassa, or Rainy-Season Retreat. In keeping with the tradition, the cloth which is offered is sewn into a robe on the same day.



in the monasteries are at their peak : there are more monks, more intensive spiritual training, and more social service activities. Offerings made to monks engaged in such meritorious work are believed to acquire much merit and ensure great happiness and prosperity in life.

This is how the *Kathina* originated: Once a group of thirty monks from *Patha* township went to *Savatthi* to see the Buddha, who was then residing at *Jeta* Grove (*Jetavana*). But they could make it only to *Saketa*, a neighboring town of *Savatthi*, when the day to observe the Rains arrived, and were thus compelled to break off their journey there for the three rainy months. They were sad not being able to see the Buddha as planned.

When the Rains ended, they hastened to *Savatthi*. There they sought audience with the Master, who, perceiving a need for extra clothings for monks after the rains retreat, decreed a provision for them to accept the clothes given by devotees within one-month period from the first day of the eleventh waning moon to the fullmoon of the twelfth lunar month (i.e., between mid-October and mid-November).

Since then, it has become a tradition for Buddhist devotees to help in the fulfillment of this special provision. Monks who have not completed the Rains are, however, excluded from this privilege.

In Thailand, the *Kathina* ceremony is often accompanied by great festivities and colorful celebration. The robes and their supplementary appurtenances, if any, are taken to the monastery for which they are intended and to which the chief donors' intention has previously been intimated. They are then presented to the assembly of the Sangha in accordance with a prescribed formula and procedure.

When the statement of dedication has been duly pronounced by the lay followers, one of the Sangha members proceeds to address a formal announcement so the matter

may become absolutely clear to the whole assembly. Another then makes a proposal as to who should represent the Sangha to receive and make use of the robes. Normally, the name of the abbot or a very senior monk in the monastery is quoted and then, if no objection is raised, approved by the Sangha.

When the presentation ceremony is completed, then it becomes the duty of the Sangha to reassemble in the *Uposatha* Hall and perform certain ecclestatical rites dictated by the Discipline (*Vinaya*). An *Uposatha* Hall is a place for special rites performed by the Sangha. Such rites are exclusively for monks and no lay persons can take part in them.

Thai Buddhists often mix merit making with merriments and foreigners are baffled by the obvious lack of solemnity and seriousness in most of the Thai religious events. One should understand, however, that such functions are generally organized in two parts, namely, the traditional, non-religious, festive celebration and the solemn religious aspect. Of these two parts, the first is, of course, more popular amongst the masses.

## Questions

1. *What is the meaning of the word "kathina"? Explain the origin of the word.*
2. *State the reasons why the Kathina ceremony is so important.*
3. *How did the Kathina originate?*
4. *When is the time for Kathina ceremony? Name exact period.*
5. *Briefly describe the way the Kathina robes are offered to monks. At least how many monks should be present?*



## 48. The Songkran Day

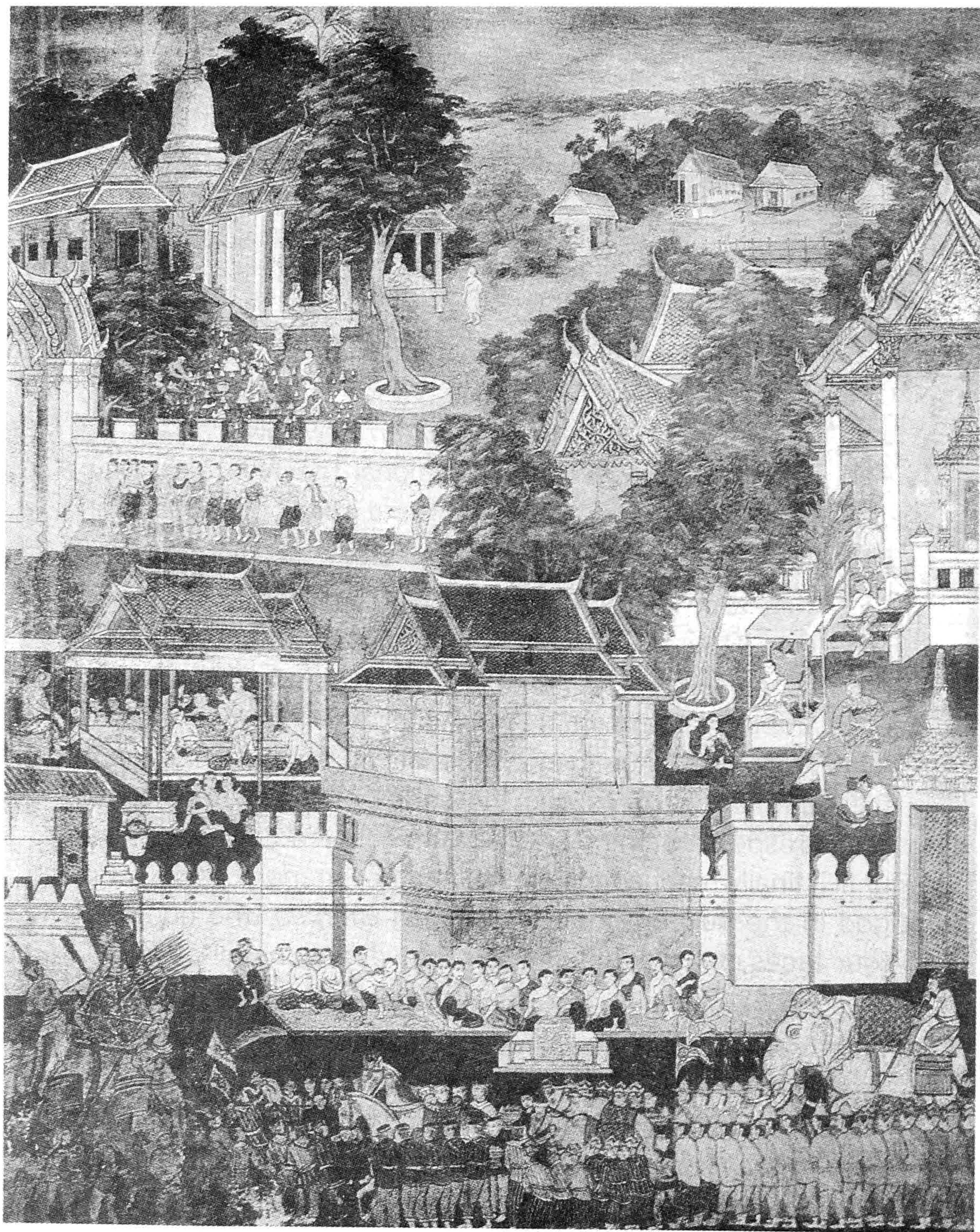
Two New Year Days are celebrated by the Thai people: One is the regular New Year Day, which falls on January 1, and the other is called the *Songkran* Day, which falls on April 13. Thus *Songkran* is the traditional Thai New Year Day; it is an important occasion for merit making and a high time to have fun and games.

There is an interesting story connected with the *Songkran* Day. Once there lived in a certain village an extraordinary boy by the name of *Dhanapala*. He was born into a very rich family, was extremely intelligent and kind-hearted. He even knew the languages of animals and could understand the humming of bees and the songs of birds. People had great respect for him and his fame spread far and wide until it finally reached the ears of a rather strange but powerful god in the heaven. This was *Kapila Brahma*, the god with four faces, who could see the four directions all at once.

*Kapila* was a conceited god. He could not bear to think that there was anyone so intelligent and kind as to command the respect of so many people. He had the feeling that those people had, somehow, begun to place more and more faith in *Dhanapala* than in himself. This he did not like and would not tolerate it.

So one day he came down from heaven and challenged *Dhanapala* to answer three questions. The stakes were high: if the boy could answer them, *Kapila* would offer his own head to him; if *Dhanapala* could not, then he would





Songkran Festival or the Thai New Year. People go to temples to ask blessing from monks. They pay respect to monks by pouring water on their hands and feet as they do also for older people and those of higher status. It is a time of much rejoicing and merit making.



get the boy's head as the trophy for his triumph. *Dhanapala* accepted the challenge and promised to find the answers in seven days.

Eventually, *Dhanapala* was able to discover the solution to *Kapila's* riddles on the seventh day by eavesdropping on the conversation of two eagles. *Kapila* lost the bet and was therefore compelled to cut off his head according to their agreement. Before fulfilling his promise, however, the unfortunate *Brahma* proclaimed:

*"I am a very powerful god. If my head is dropped on the ground, the whole world will go into flame. If my head is thrown into the ocean, it would dry up immediately. And if it is thrown up into the air, then there would be no rain for seven years"*

To avoid this catastrophe, God *Kapila* ordered his seven daughters to take turn to carry his head in a big gold bowl, each for a period of one year. So the *Songkran* Day marks the occasion when *Kapila's* head changes hands - and then the year changes too!

There is an important message hidden in this unusual story. The four faces of *Brahma* symbolize the four Sublime Virtues taught by the Buddha, namely. Loving-kindness (*metta*), Compassion (*karuna*), Sympathetic Joy (*mudita*), and Impartiality or Equanimity (*upekkha*). These four virtues are the qualities of the mind essential for peaceful coexistence and cooperation in society. If people do not practice them, but throw them away, there would be great trouble in society. So these four virtues should be carried along, i.e., practiced, carefully in the same way that the *Brahma's* head is treated.

On the *Songkran* Day, Buddhists go to temple to perform merits. They worship the Buddha, offer food to monks, observe the five precepts, bathe a Buddha image, and meditate. Young people take delight in splashing water at each other (hence the name Water Splashing Festival); they sing

together, play games and make mischiefs. Friends laugh and enjoy themselves, enemies become friends and forget their past conflicts. *Songkran* is, indeed, an occasion to cultivate good qualities or virtues in our hearts.

## *Questions*

- 1. What is the Songkran Day? When do people celebrate it?*
- 2. Who was Kapila? Why was he angry with Dhanapala?*
- 3. Describe Kapila's challenge to Dhanapala. What was their agreement? Who lost? What did he do then?*
- 4. Explain the symbolism of the four faces of Brahma Kapila. What do we learn from this?*
- 5. What do people do on the Songkran Day?*



# PART TWO

## 1. Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

Thus have I heard: Once the Blessed One was dwelling near *Benares*, at *Isipatana*, in the Deer Park. Then the Blessed One spoke thus unto the company of five monks:

These two extremes, brethren, should not be followed by one who has gone forth from the world:

Indulgence in sense pleasures, which is low, vulgar, common, ignoble, and useless, and indulgence in self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and useless.

Avoiding these two extremes, the *Tathagata* (Buddha) has gained the realization of that Middle Path which produces insight and knowledge and tends to calm, to higher knowledge, enlightenment and *Nirvana*.

And what, brethren, is that Middle Path which produces insight and knowledge, and tends to calm, to higher knowledge, enlightenment and *Nirvana*?

Verily, it is this Noble Eightfold Path (*Atṭhaṅgika-magga*), namely, Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

This then, brethren, is the Middle Path which produces insight and knowledge, and tends to calm, to higher knowledge, enlightenment and *Nirvana*.

Now this, brethren, is the Noble Truth of Suffering (*dukkha*): Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain,



dejection, and despair are suffering. Association with undesirable things is suffering, separation from desirable things is suffering. Not getting what one desires is suffering. In short, the Five Aggregates of Attachment are suffering.

Now this, brethren, is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering: It is that craving which leads to rebirth, combined with pleasure and lust, seeking delight here and there; namely, craving for sensual pleasure, craving for existence and craving for non-existence.

Now this, brethren, is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering : it is the extinction without a remainder of craving, the abandonment, renunciation, release, and non-attachment.

Now this, brethren, is the Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering. Verily, it is this Noble Eightfold Path, namely: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

Brethren, of things unlearnt before, there arose in me vision, insight, understanding, there arose in me wisdom and light as to, "This is the Noble Truth of Suffering"

Brethren, of things unlearnt before, there arose in me vision, insight, understanding, there arose in me wisdom and light as to, "Indeed, that Noble Truth of Suffering is to be comprehended."

Brethren, of things unlearnt before, there arose in me vision, insight, understanding, there arose in me wisdom and light as to, "Indeed, that Noble Truth of Suffering has been comprehended."

Brethren, of things unlearnt before, there arose in me vision, insight, understanding, there arose in me wisdom and light as to, "This is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering."

Brethren,...there arose in me wisdom and light as to,

“This...Origin of Suffering is to be destroyed.” Brethren,... there arose in me wisdom and light as to, “This...Origin of Suffering has been destroyed.”

Brethren,...there arose in me wisdom and light as to, “This is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering. ...The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering should be realized. ...The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering has been realized.”

Brethren...there arose in me wisdom and light as to, “This is the Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering...The Noble Truth of the Way Leading to Cessation of Suffering should be developed.”

Brethren, of things unlearnt before, there arose in me vision, insight, understanding, there arose in me wisdom and light as to, “Indeed, this Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering has been developed.”

So long as in these Four Noble Truths my true knowledge and insight was not perfectly purified in threefold and twelve ways, even so long I would not proclaim myself the Supreme Enlightened One of incomparable supreme wisdom in the world with gods, devils, *Brahmas*, among its population with recluses, *Brahmins*, and deities and men.

But so long, brethren, as in these Four Noble Truths my true knowledge and insight was perfectly purified in threefold and twelve ways, even so long I would proclaim myself the Supreme Enlightened One of incomparable supreme wisdom in the world with gods, devils, *Brahmas*, among its population with recluses, *Brahmins*, and deities and men.

Knowledge arose in me, insight arose in me that the release of my mind is total. This is my last existence; now there is no more rebirth.

Thus spoke the Blessed One, and the five monks, glad-denied, complimented the Lord’s utterance. While this exposition was being uttered, there arose in the Elder *Kondaṇṇa*



the pure and stainless Eye of Truth (which made him realize that) whatever arises, it is all liable to disappear.

Thus, when the Wheel of Dharma was set in motion by the Blessed One, the earth-dwelling gods proclaimed:

*“This supreme Wheel of Dharma has been set in motion by the Blessed One at the Deer Park in Isipatana near Benares, a Wheel which has never been set turning by any recluse, Brahmin, god, devil, Brahma, or by anyone else in the world.”*

(Then follows a description of the proclamation by gods of different heavens up to the Brahma world.)

Thus, at that very time, at that moment, the sound of proclamation went up as far as the Brahma world. This ten-thousandfold world system shuddered, shook, and trembled. Infinite and magnificent light appeared in the world surpassing all the divine majesty of gods.

Then the Blessed One gave out an utterance : *“Kondañña has, indeed, understood. Kondañña has, indeed, understood”*. In this way, Elder *Kondañña* has become known as *“Aññakondañña”* (*Kondañña* who has understood).

## 2. Buddha's Final Address

(The following translation is an extract from *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* or the Great Demise Discourse).

When the Blessed One had stayed as long as he wished at *Ambapali's* grove, he proceeded to *Beluva*, near *Vesali*. There the Blessed One addressed the monks, saying:

*"O monks, do you take up your abode for the rainy season roundabout Vesali, each one according to where his friends and close companions may live. I shall enter upon the Rains here at Beluva."*

When the Blessed One had thus entered upon the Rains there fell upon him a dire sickness, and great pains crushed upon him even as unto death. But the Lord, mindful and self-possessed, bore the pains of sickness in silence and calm.

Then this thought occurred to the Blessed One:

*"It would not be proper for me to pass away from life without addressing the disciples, without even taking leave of the Order. Let me now, by a strong effort of the will, subdue this sickness again, and keep my hold on life until the proper time has come."*

And the Lord, by a strong effort of the will, subdued sickness, and kept his hold on life until the time he fixed upon should come. And the sickness abated.



Thus the Blessed One began to recover; and when he had quite got rid of the sickness, he went out from the monastery, and sat down on a seat spread out in the open air. And Venerable *Ananda*, accompanied by many other disciples, approached where the Blessed One was, paid him due homage, and, having respectfully taking a seat on one side, said:

*"I have beheld, Lord, how the Blessed One was in health, and I have beheld the Blessed One suffer. Though at the sight of sickness of the Lord, my body became weak as a creeper, and the horizon became dim to me, and my faculties were no longer clear, yet notwithstanding, I sought some consolation in the thought that the Blessed One would not pass away from existence so long as he had not left instructions concerning the Order."*

And the Blessed One addressed *Ananda* for the sake of the Order and said:

*"What, then, Ananda, does the Order expect of me? I have preached the Truth without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrines; for in respect of the Truth, Ananda, the Tathagata has no such thing as the closed fist of a teacher who holds some things back."*

*"Verily, Ananda, should there be anyone who thinks, 'It is I who will lead the Order,' or 'The Order is dependent upon me,' he should then lay down instructions in matters concerning the Order. Now the Tathagata (Buddha), Ananda, thinks not that it is he who should lead the Order, or that the Order is dependent upon him."*

*"Why, then, should the Tathagata lay down instructions in matters concerning the Order?"*

*"I am now grown old, Ananda, and full of years. My journey is nearing its end. I have come to the sum of my days, turning eighty years of age. Just as a worn-out cart*

*can be made to move on only with much difficulty, so the body of the Tathagata can only be kept going with much additional care.*

*“Ananda, it is only when the Tathagata, ceasing to attend to the outward, becomes absorbed in that deep meditation of heart, having no concern with bodily object, it is only then that the body of the Tathagata is at ease.*

*“Therefore, monks, be ye lamps unto yourselves. Rely on yourselves; rely not on external help. Hold fast to the Truth as a lamp. Seek salvation alone in the Truth. Look not for assistance to anyone beside yourselves.*

*“And how, Ananda, can a monk be a lamp unto himself, rely only on himself and not on any external help, holding fast to the Truth as his lamp and seeking liberation in the Truth only, not looking for it from anyone beside himself?*

*“Herein, Ananda, let a monk, as he dwells contemplating on the body, so regard the body that he , being full of effort, thoughtful, and mindful, may, whilst in the world, overcome the pain which arises from the body's cravings.*

*“While subject to sensations, let him so regard the sensations that he, being full of effort, thoughtful, and mindful, may, whilst in the world, overcome the pain which arises from the sensations.*

*“And so, too, when he thinks, reasons or feels, let him so regard his thought that, being full of effort, thoughtful and mindful, he may, whilst in the world, overcome the pain which arises from the craving due to ideas, reasoning, or feeling.*

*“Those who, either now or after I am gone, shall be a lamp unto themselves, relying upon themselves only and not relying upon any external help, holding fast to the Truth as their lamp, and seeking their liberation only in the Truth,*



*not looking for help from anyone beside themselves, it is they, Ananda, among my Bhikkhus, who shall reach the very topmost height! But they must be glad at heart to learn...*

*“Bhikkhus, Now I address you. Perishable are all conditioned things. Work out your way with diligence.”*

### 3. Western Buddhism At A Glance

Professor *Rhys Davids*, a Buddhist scholar of international standing, speaks of his deep conviction in the religion:

*"I have examined every one of the great religions of the world, and in none of them have I found anything to surpass the beauty and comprehensiveness of the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha. I am content to shape my life according to that path."*

The Four Noble Truths referred to by this intellectual giant constitutes the core of Buddhism, which has become increasingly popular in the Western world and in gaining ground in all levels of society, especially the intelligentsia.

History of the religion in the West begins at a very early period. Originated in India some 600 years before the birth of Christ, Buddhism made its first contact with the West in the fourth century B.C. when *Alexander the Great* (356-323 B.C.) invaded India in a series of his ambitious war missions to conquer the East. He was deeply appreciative of arts and sciences, having in his army a considerable number of scholars, experts, and artists in various fields. They consequently took the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the cultural elements of India, including those of Buddhism, which was by then a widespread phenomenon. Alexander's conquest of India was brief and his rule in the country was short-lived, but the consequences of both were far-reaching.





Aloka Cottage, Chithurst Buddhist Monastery (Wat Pah Cittaviveka), England

*Phuṭṭhassa lokadhammehi  
cittam yassa na kampati  
asokam virajam khemam  
etam maṅgalamuttamam*

Though living in the world,  
one's heart is perfectly unshakeable,  
beyond sorrow, confusion and need –  
this is the greatest blessing.



An end to the Greek occupation of India was ushered in by *Emperor Chandragupta* (321?c.-296 B.C.), who established the *Maurya* dynasty and was identified with Sandro-cottus in the Greek accounts. His reign witnessed the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Greek rulers and India.

The *Maurya* dynasty found the greatest son in *Emperor Asoka*, who succeeded his father *Bindusara* to the throne in the year 218 of the Buddhist Era (B.E.). His was a rich and extensive empire: on the northwest it included the *satrapies* of *Paropanisadae* (*Kabul*), *Aria* (*Herat*), *Arachosia* (*Kandahar*), and parts of *Gedrosia* (*Baluchistan*), yielded to *Chandragupta* by *Seleucus I Nicator*; on the northeast it stretched as far as *Kamarupa* (*Assam*), and included *Kashmir* and *Nepal*; southward it extended to cover most of the Indian peninsula as far as the Penner river. A great deal of information about *Asoka* and his reign comes from the numerous stone inscriptions and the many religious edifices he had left throughout the empire. He was not a born Buddhist, but a converted one. Once a Buddhist, however, he went to great length, with all the zeal and enthusiasm unequalled in the history of the religion, to propagate the Buddha's doctrines. It is also during his reign that India's diplomatic relations with the Western world were at their height. He was, indeed, the moving force behind the earliest dissemination of the Buddhist doctrines to the West, and the diplomatic intercourse provided a wholesome channel through which he successfully implemented the noble schemes of the "Missions of Piety".

In three of his Edicts (Rock Edicts II, V and XIII), *Asoka* described how he had, in the thirteenth year after his coronation, instituted quinquennial circuits of officials whose charge was to proclaim the moral law, and in the following year he initiated the *Dharma-mahamatras*, an equivalent



of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The Edicts also speak of the "Mission of Piety" he sent to many countries, including five Greek territories whose kings have been identified as *Antiochus II of Syria* (261-246 B.C.), *Antigonas Gonatas of Macedonia* (276-246 B.C.), *Ptolemy II of Egypt* (285-247 B.C.), *Alexander of Epirus* (272-258 B.C.), and *Magas of Cyrene* (300-258 B.C.).

That Buddhism was known to the ancient Greeks and even practiced by them there can be no reasonable doubt. Since the second century B.C. down to the days of Christ, Buddhism was an active force in the regions where Christ grew up and preached. The influences of Buddhism on early Christianity cannot be ruled out. (Christian monasticism, for example, seems to have been influenced by that of Buddhism, which was the first in history to establish and organize cenobitic monasticism.) An Asoka Edict recently discovered in Afghanistan, once part of the *Asoka* empire, bears inscriptions in both Greek and Aramaic languages, the latter being the language of Christ. The ancient Greeks are known to have developed some very advanced and sophisticated philosophical systems, which the Christians later incorporated to enrich their religion. It is not as yet definite how far Buddhist thoughts were known to those Greek philosophers, but the possibility cannot be dismissed altogether. For such hypothetical conclusion, however, students of religious history should exercise their judgment with care and discretion.

The Greek who settled in India were, no doubt, greatly influenced by Buddhism and their number might have been considerable. They were, in fact, the first to create Buddha images. The discovery of many *Asoka* edicts in the Greek language, whose contents are largely identical with their Indian counterparts, indicates that they were made solely for Greek-speaking communities in the country.

*Mahavamsa*, the Chronicle of Sri Lanka (Ceylon), compiled in the fifth century but based on much earlier materials, narrates how in the first century B.C. a group of Buddhist monks from the Greek City of Alexandria (*Yonanagara-Alasanda*) attended the inauguration ceremony of Great Stupa *Ratanamali* at *Anuradhapura* in Sri Lanka. The delegation was headed by a Greek monk named *Dhammarakkhita* the Great. This clearly shows that Buddhism was then a flourishing religion in Greek territories.

Further evidence to the point under discussion is found in *The Questions of Milinda* (*Milindapañha*), a Buddhist classic written in the Pali language around the first century. This treatise records a lengthy debate between King *Milinda* and Elder *Nagasena*. The former has been identified with the Greek king, *Menandros*, whose rule over the northwestern part of India dates back to the first century B.C. He is said to be one of the most well-versed in the Buddhist doctrine, and was able to expound it with great eloquence. One of the most oft-quoted, this literary masterpiece, indeed, contributes in no small measure to the early exposition of the Buddha's teachings.

References such as quoted clearly testify to the early prevalence of Buddhism in certain regions in the West since ancient time and its impact on early Christianity. But the scarcity of literary evidence in the West makes it difficult to pinpoint the nature and the extent of the Buddhist role here. One cannot help wondering if this scarcity of "evidence" is the result of a wholesale destruction caused by narrow-minded religious fanatics in later periods, who were antagonistic to Buddhism. Whether this is the case is a subject for the students of religious history to investigate. Nevertheless, it is well known that the religious fervor and fanaticism of the early Christians were responsible for much bloodshed and violence against the so-called "heretics" who did not



agree with traditional Christianity. Early Christian irrational hostility to freedom of thought and the advancement of science is a matter of historical record.

After a lapse of many centuries and the link of the past long disconnected, Buddhism once again began to make itself felt on the Western horizon. This time the religion was welcome with all the zeal and enthusiasm and the prospect seemed even more encouraging. Although the Westerners' interest in the religion was primarily academic, yet the very appeal of its sublime teachings did command their respect and admiration and has succeeded in winning a number of the more knowledgeable to the faith. The very fact that the religion had, in the first place, gained the attention of academicians and free thinkers works out well for its creditability and, hence, its acceptability. Centers for Buddhist studies and practices were inaugurated in universities and colleges; various organizations devoted to religio-social activities as well as to the dissemination of the faith came into being. The influx in recent years of Indochinese refugees, who are by and large Buddhist, provides a new impetus and has spurred the growth to a dramatic proportion.

Of The *Theravada* countries, Sri Lanka, though somewhat limited in resources and manpower, seems to be in the forefront in missionary activities in the West. The *Maha Bodhi* Society, with its headquarters in Sri Lanka and branch offices all over the world, is one of the most successful pioneers in the field. Sri Lankan monks are active in organizing community activities, meditation retreats, or coordinating with other groups in social service endeavors. A few of them are engaged in teaching Buddhism in colleges and universities. The Burmese have also made valuable contributions mostly in the field of meditation and *Abhidhamma* studies in which they are known to specialize.

Thailand became involved in international missionary activities in comparatively recent time, but its role and potential cannot be underestimated. The Thais have opened up, during the past two or three decades, quite a few temples around the world. Now there are some forty Thai temples in the United States, all active and determined in their efforts to propagate the Buddha's teachings; there are, in addition, many more lay organizations dedicated to the spread of the religion. Thai- or Burmese-trained Westerners, some of whom are monks, compete with one another to make the knowledge of Buddhism available to as many interested individuals as possible. According to statistics published in 1969, there were 254 Buddhist groups, centers, societies, temples and missions in the United States, 84 in Hawaii alone. The increase in number of those organizations and their activities in the last two decade is very impressive.

Laotians and Cambodians are other major groups in the United States and some European countries. They are also large in number and have contributed in no small measure to the growth of Buddhism in this part of the world.

Among the *Mahayana* countries, Japan is one of the most active in the Western scene. With a century's experience, Japanese Buddhists in the West today are one of the best organized. The Tibetans are another important group; their presence became more conspicuous here since the annexation of their country of China around the middle of the century. Both Japan and Tibet are highly successful; they have established centers of learning, colleges, and universities all over the United States and their religious organizations keep expanding by leaps and bounds. The success of the Chinese, Koreans, and Vietnamese is also impressive. (The Chinese are, in fact, among the earliest arrivals.) They have a nationwide network in the United States and a host of affiliated organizations. Their member-



ship is considerable and their contribution quite significant.

The greatest contribution to the growth of Buddhism in the West in the field of academic research and studies comes, however, from the Westerners themselves. Not all of these scholars are Buddhist, but their appreciation and respect for the Buddha's teachings is genuine. The first impetus for serious studies of the religion in its multifarious aspects may be said to be generated in the early nineteenth century by no less a person than the German philosopher *Schopenhauer* (1788-1860) who aroused an interest among Western thinkers and intellectuals through his references to Buddhist philosophy. A systematic and scientific study of Buddhism was, however, undertaken by *Eugene Burnouf* (1801-1852), the French Orientalist. His *Essai sur le Pali* saw the daylight in 1826 and the years that followed its publication witnessed a series of attempts to produce even greater works and to expand the fields of research. Everywhere in Europe - Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, England, etc., - Buddhist temples, associations, and study centers began to mushroom. Australia is certainly not lacking behind Europe and America; Thai, Sri Lankan, and other temples have already been founded and are well organized and attended. The beginning there was typically a modest one, but the current developments are quite promising.

England must be mentioned, above all, as having rendered the greatest service to Buddhism in the West. Here the name of *T.W. Rhys Davids*, whom we quoted at the beginning of this essay, should be singled out as one of the most, if not the most, outstanding champions for the Buddhist cause here. He founded, in 1881, the *Pali Text Society* with an aim "to render accessible to students the rich stores of the earliest Buddhist literature". The service

this society has contributed toward dissemination of the knowledge of Buddhism in the West is still unsurpassed. It has succeeded in bringing out in Roman characters all the Pali texts of the Buddhist scriptures. Their English translations, numbering some fifty-eight volumes, and many treatises by authorities from both the East and the West have also been published. In addition, the society has edited Pali Commentaries of the *Tripitaka*, numbering some sixty volumes, as well as a number of post-canonical works.

Thanks to the efforts and sacrifice of all these scholars, many in the West have now come to understand and respect the religion as one abounding in wisdom and profound philosophy. *William Macquitty*, a renowned scholar observes: "With the advance of science and psychology many of the older faiths have suffered. Their beliefs went against the new knowledge and the new knowledge won. But in this conflict the teaching of Buddha required no adjustments. Its wisdom has encompassed everything that modern thought can devise. Over 2,500 years ago the Buddhists had already solved many of the problems that modern psychology is still discovering."

*Francis Story*, an English advocate of Buddhism, could not agree better when he says: "The doctrines of Buddha-dhamma stand today, as unaffected by the march of time and the expansion of knowledge as when they were first enunciated. No matter to what lengths increased scientific knowledge can extend man's horizon, within the framework of the Dhamma there is room for the acceptance and assimilation of further discovery."

There is no doubt that Buddhism has come to stay in the United States and has gradually gained public interest on many levels. Many American universities have programs of Buddhist studies up to the Ph.D. levels or include Buddhism



as one of the subjects for academic pursuit in their religion-related departments. At the University of Wisconsin a program of Ph.D. Degree in Buddhist Studies has been established with the express aim "to train teachers and scholars to understand Buddhism not only as a datum of social or philosophical history but also as a profound expression of human religious experience, with ramifications in art, music, literature and the lives of its followers." The Harvard University also offers facilities for Ph.D. students to pursue a program in the Study of Religion in the Special Field of Buddhism. Similar opportunities are also available at the Columbia University where study in the special interdepartmental program on Buddhist subjects is worked out in conjunction with courses for the Ph.D. Degree.

With the interest and enthusiasm the Western world shows to Buddhism and placing our faith in the greatness and virtues of the Dharma, we have every reason to feel content that the noble religion of the Buddha has now taken permanent roots in the Western soil and it is only a matter of time for the roots to go deep. That, of course, will not be too far away.

## Recommended books for further reading

### The Life of the Buddha

1. *Arnold, Edwin.* The Light of Asia, Jaico Publishing House : Calcutta 1949
2. *Khantipalo.* The Splendour of Enlightenment (A life of the Buddha, compiled from Pali and Sanskrit Sources.) 2 Vols. Wat Buddha-Dhamma, Ten Miles Hollow, Wiseman's Ferry, N.S.W. 2255, Australia
3. *Nyānamoli Bhikkhu.* The Life of the Buddha (According to the Pali Canon), BPS : Sri Lanka
4. *Piyadassi.* The Buddha (A short study of his life and teachings) BPS : Sri Lanka
5. *Saddhatissa H.* The Life of the Buddha, Unwin Paperbacks : London 1988
6. *Thomas J. Edward.* The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History, Routledge Kegan Paul Ltd., London

### Translations of Pali Texts

1. *Narada.* Dhammapada (A canonical verse collection), Maha Bodhi Society : Calcutta
2. *Nyānatiloka.* The Word of the Buddha (An outline of the teaching of the Buddha in the words of the Pali Canon) BPS : Sri Lanka  
**The Path to Deliverance** : A systematic exposition in the words of the Sutta-Pitaka (compiled, translated and explained), BPS : Sri Lanka
3. *Saddhatissa H.* The Sutta-Nipāta (Written in a mixture of prose and verse, it presents a code of conduct and provides the basis for a system of moral philosophy.) Curzon Press Ltd. : London 1985
4. Complete translation of the books of the Pali Canon have been issued by the Pali Text Society, London, in the Translation Series and **Sacred Books of the Buddhist**. Catalogue available from the distributors : Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd. Newton Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon RG 9 1EN, England



## Meditation

1. *Nyānaponika*. The Heart of Buddhist Meditation (A handbook on Mental training based on the Buddha's way of mindfulness), Rider and Co. : London, Samuel Weiser Inc. : New York.
2. *Mahasi Sayadaw*. Practical Insight Meditation: Basic and Progressive Stages, BPS : Sri Lanka

## General

1. *Narada*. The Buddha and His Teachings, The Buddhist Research Society, Singapore  
Buddhism in a Nutshell, Dept. of Religious Affairs, Burma
2. *Nyānatiloka*. Buddhist Dictionary (A manual of Buddhist terms and doctrines), BPS : Sri Lanka
3. *Piyadassi*. The Buddha's Ancient Path, BPS : Sri Lanka
4. *Rahula, Wapola*. What the Buddha Taught, Gordon Frazer : London
5. *Saddhatissa H.* Handbook for Buddhists, Mahabodhi Society of India : Sarnath 1973
6. *Thomas, Edward J.* The History of Buddhist Thought, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., : London 1963

## Buddhist Ethics

1. *Jayatilleke, K.N.* Ethics in Buddhist Perspective, BPS : Sri Lanka
2. *R.L. Soni*. Life's Highest Blessings (The Maha Mangala Sutta), translation and commentary, BPS : Sri Lanka
3. *Saddhatissa H.* Buddhist Ethics : Essence of Buddhism, Allen and Unwin : London 1971

## Rebirth

1. *Stevenson, Ian*. Cases of Reincarnation 3 Vols., University Press of Virginia : U.S.A. 1978
2. *Story, Francis*. Rebirth in Buddhist Perspective, BPS : Sri Lanka  
The Case for Rebirth, BPS : Sri Lanka
3. *Gunaratna V.F.* Rebirth Explained, BPS : Sri Lanka

*“Wherever the Buddha’s teachings have been received, either in cities or countrysides, people would gain inconceivable benefits. The land and people would be enveloped in peace. The sun and moon will shine clear and bright. Wind and rain would appear accordingly, and there will be no disasters. Nations would be prosperous and there would be no use for soldiers or weapons. People would abide by morality and accord with laws. They would be courteous and humble, and everyone would be content without injustices. There would be no thefts or violence. The strong would not dominate the weak and everyone would be settled at their proper place in society.”*

❀ *The Sutra of Amitabha’s Purity, Equality, and Understanding*



With bad advisors forever left behind,  
From paths of evil he departs for eternity,  
Soon to see the Buddha of Limitless Light  
And perfect Samantabhadra's Supreme Vows.

The supreme and endless blessings  
of Samantabhadra's deeds,  
I now universally transfer.  
May every living being, drowning and adrift,  
Soon return to the Land of  
Limitless Light!

### The Vows of Samantabhadra

I vow that when my life approaches its end,  
All obstructions will be swept away;  
I will see Amitabha Buddha,  
And be born in his Land of Ultimate Bliss and Peace.

When reborn in the Western Land,  
I will perfect and completely fulfill  
Without exception these Great Vows,  
To delight and benefit all beings.

### The Vows of Samantabhadra Avatamsaka Sutra

## List of Buddhist Organizations

For enquires or orders, please contact your nearest centre.

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**THE AMITABHA BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND INC. (AUSTRALIA)**  
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May the merit and virtue  
accrued from this work  
adorn the Buddha's Pure Land,  
repay the four great kindnesses above,  
and relieve the suffering of  
those on the three paths below.

May those who see or hear of these efforts  
generate Bodhi-mind,  
spend their lives devoted to the Buddha Dharma,  
and finally be reborn together in  
the Land of Ultimate Bliss.  
Homage to Amita Buddha!

**NAMO AMITABHA**

南無阿彌陀佛

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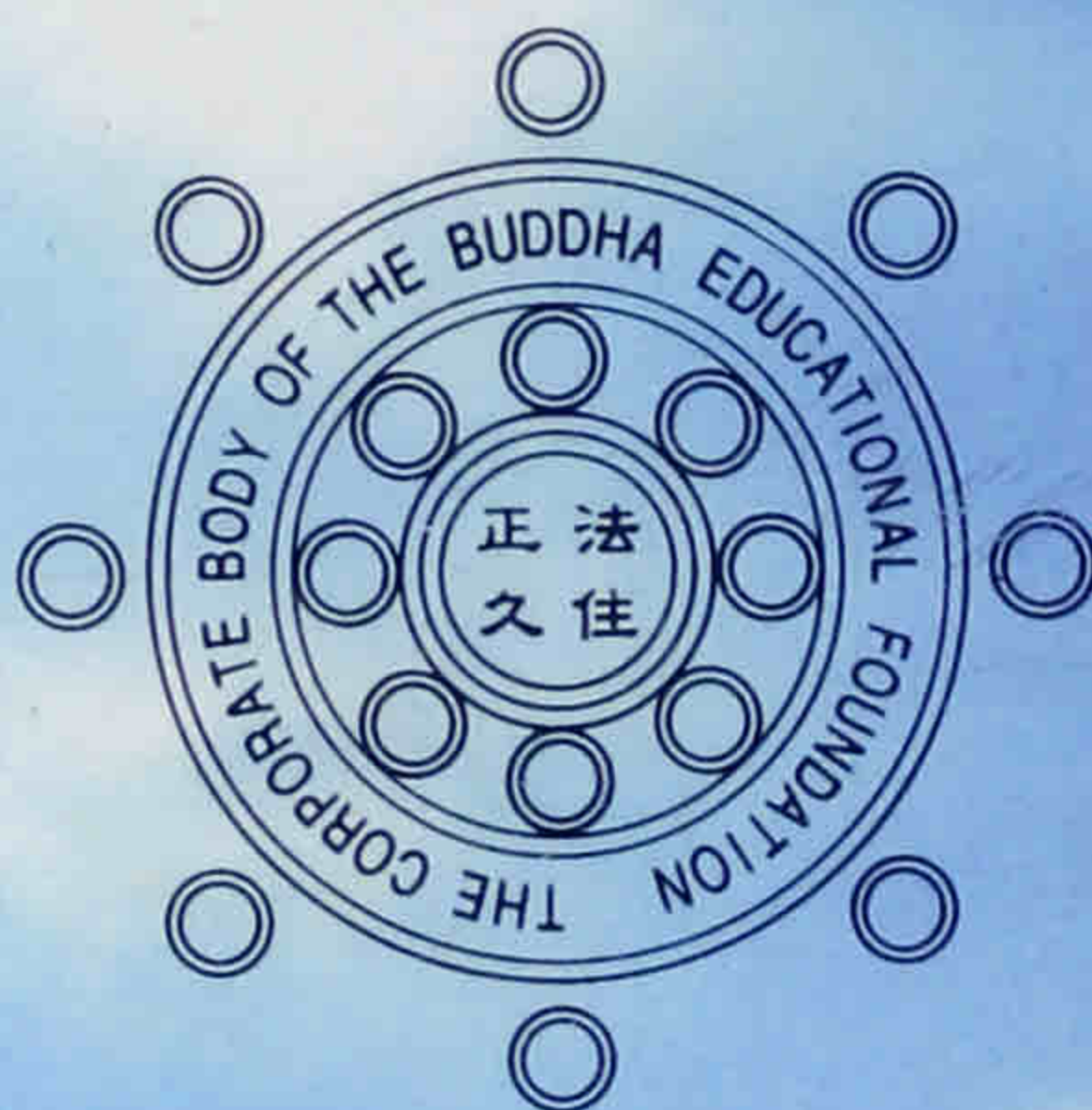


The religion in the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description.

Albert Einstein



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Thanks for your co-operation.  
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