

108
BUDDHIST
PARABLES
AND
STORIES



EDITED BY OLGA GUTSOL

Olga Gutsol

108 Buddhist Parables and Stories

«Издательские решения»

Gutsol O.

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This book is a collection of the most beloved stories, teachings and parables attributed to Gautama Buddha, enlightened teacher and sage who lived and taught in the northeastern part of ancient India. Since the narrative of the Buddha's life was retold across cultures and across times, it is only natural that the facts mingled with various legends and folk stories, thus creating an invaluable source of wisdom that is not only inspirational, but also utterly entertaining.

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INTRODUCTION

You hold in your hands a collection of the most beloved stories, teachings and parables attributed to Gautama Buddha, enlightened teacher and sage who lived and taught in the northeastern part of ancient India. His teachings in the form of Jatakas, stories of previous lifetimes, and Sutras, discourses given to monks, composed the foundation of Buddhism. The fact that these teachings were preserved for approximately twenty five centuries is due mostly to one monk named Ananda, the Buddha's closest disciple and primary attendant. Known for his impeccable memory, Ananda was the first person to recollect all of the Buddha's teachings at the First Buddhist Council which was gathered shortly after the Buddha's passing. The teachings thereafter were passed on orally for many generations of monks and nuns through repetition and communal recitation.

The first Buddhist scriptures written in Pali, Burmese and Sanskrit are dated to the 1st century BCE and most of the Jatakas texts are dated to the 3rd-4th century BCE. Only during the second half of the 19th century the first Buddhist texts were translated and introduced into the Western world. The most traditional translation of Jatakas from Pali into English is attributed to E.B. Cowell in his book *The Jataka; or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births* published in 1895; and the translation of Sutras and Jatakas from Burmese to English is attributed to Captain F. Rogers in his work *Buddhaghosha's Parables* published in 1870. Both of these works were used extensively in putting together this book.

Around the same time, a German-American author and philosopher Paul Carus also collected ancient Buddhist parables in his masterpiece, *The Gospel of Buddha*, published for the first time in 1894. The stories that he discovered and compiled exhibit a more mystical and magical tone describing the Buddha's encounters with demons and celestial devas. Interestingly, some of these stories bear a close resemblance to old Chinese and Indian folk tales, while some even have parallels to the early Christian teachings. For one thing, 'A Widow's Mite' parable is analogous to 'A Lesson of the Widow's Mite' from the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 12:41—44), and is thought to be recorded by Acvaghosha, a Buddhist saint and philosopher living in India around 150 CE.

This mingling of facts and legends is only natural given that the narrative of the Buddha's life was retold across cultures, times, and monasteries, and many details were gradually added. Perhaps, instead of asking how these Buddhist scriptures originated, we should be asking what do the scriptures do once they enter the world. Conceivably, their ability to catalyze transformations seems to be the best measure of their authenticity. It is furthermore believed that the multitude of differences and details in Buddhist scriptures reveals a key to understanding them: the diversity of texts is purposeful and immeasurable because of the Buddha's intention to meet the needs of everyone he anticipated addressing.

From this perspective, the book you are holding is not an exhaustive list of Jatakas and Sutras, but rather a mere scratch on the surface of countless Buddhist scriptures. When selecting and editing the stories, I tried to introduce an overview of different forms of teachings found in Sutras and to present the life story of Gautama Buddha and some of his closest disciples. My hope is that readers will find these stories enriching, and if not inspirational, then at least entertaining.

May these teachings bring you peace, compassion, joy, wisdom and the gift of unshakable inner freedom.

1. SIDDHARTHA

Twenty-five centuries ago, in the royal city of Kapilavatthu, King Suddhodana from the great Sakya dynasty ruled a land near the Himalayan Mountains.

His wife, Queen Maya, gave birth to a son in the beautiful flower garden of Lumbini Park. Shortly after the heir's birth, the king was visited by a great sage Asita who had travelled many miles to behold the child. The baby was brought to him, but on seeing the child Asita immediately burst into tears.

The king, alarmed by this reaction and concerned for what it may mean, bade Asita to tell him why he was saddened. Thus the sage explained, "His future is supreme. Your son shall become an Enlightened One, and free the world from its bonds of illusion. I weep only for myself, for I will not live to hear his teachings. For he will give up the kingdom in his indifference to worldly pleasures, and, through bitter struggles grasping the final truth, he will shine forth as a sun of knowledge in the world to dispel the darkness of delusion. With the mighty boat of knowledge he will bring the world, which is being carried away in affliction, up from the ocean of suffering, which is overspread with the foam of disease and which has old age for its waves and death for its fearsome flood."

Though Suddhodana proceeded with a celebration of his son's birth, concern and anxiety began to creep into his mind. The possibility that his son might renounce all that he, the king, held dear in favour of the homeless life and to pass his days as a wandering sage – this was difficult for Suddhodana to bear. The king called upon eight brahmin priests, all skilled in interpreting astrology signs, and asked them to prophesy for the prince.

When the brahmins had conferred, they said, "According to the signs your son will certainly become either an enlightened seer or the greatest monarch, a chakravartin, on earth. Should he desire earthly sovereignty, then by his might and law he will stand on earth at the head of all kings. Should he desire salvation and renounce his home and family for the life of a seeker, then by his knowledge and truth, he will overcome all creeds and save the world from its ignorance and folly."

The king asked, "What would cause my son to renounce home and family?"

The brahmins replied, "Seeing the four signs."

"And what are the four?"

"An old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a holy man."

"Then none of these shall he see," the king declared. Then he placed guards around the palace to keep all such persons away.

The king desired for his son to inherit the throne and rule in his stead. For Suddhodana, nothing would be better than to see his son become the greatest monarch on earth and to bring the Sakya kingdom to new heights of glory. The king named the boy Siddhartha meaning 'the one who achieves his goals'.

Seven days after giving birth Queen Maya died. The infant prince was nursed and raised by the queen's sister Pajapati, also married to King Suddhodana.

2. THE SWAN

One day Prince Siddhartha was walking in his father's royal garden with his cousin Devadatta, who had brought his bow and arrows with him. Suddenly, Devadatta saw a swan flying and shot at it. The arrow pierced the swan's body and the poor creature fell from the sky. Both the boys ran to get the bird. As Siddhartha could run faster than Devadatta, he reached the swan's injured body first and found that it was still alive. He gently pulled out the arrow from the wing. He then got a little juice from cool leaves, put it on the wound to stop the bleeding and stroked the frightened swan. When Devadatta came to claim the swan, Prince Siddhartha refused to give it to him.

"Give me my bird! I shot it down," shouted Devadatta, angry that his cousin was keeping the swan away from him.

"No, I am not going to give it to you," said the prince. "If you had killed it, it would have been yours. But now, since it is only wounded, it belongs to me."

Devadatta still did not agree and a sharp argument ensued between the two. So both of them decided to go to the king's court where the counsellors argued the merits of each case. In the end, the king referred the case to his wisest ministers, who after examining the pros and cons, declared, "A life certainly must belong to the one who tries to save it, a life cannot belong to the one who is only trying to destroy it. The wounded swan by right belongs to Siddhartha."

But Devadatta was still adamant in his claim. So the wise judge made Siddhartha and Devadatta stand at a distance apart from each other, and then put the bird in the middle. As the swan started walking towards its saviour, Siddhartha became the rightful owner of the bird.

3. THE TIES OF LIFE

The palace which the king had given to the prince was resplendent with all the luxuries of India. All sorrowful sights, all misery, and all knowledge of misery were kept away from Siddhartha, for the king desired that no troubles should come near his son. The prince should not know that there was evil in the world.

As Siddhartha grew to manhood, King Suddhodana sought ways to strengthen the prince's ties to home. The king married him to the lovely Princess Yasodhara, daughter of the king of Koliya. Surrounded with luxury, the prince became a creature of pleasure and seldom left his apartments in the palace's upper stories.

In the wedlock of Siddhartha and Yasodhara was born a son, whom they named Rahula (fetter or tie). King Suddhodana was glad that an heir was born to his son, and said, "The prince having begotten a son will love him as I love the prince. This will be a strong tie to bind Siddhattha's heart to the interests of the world, and the kingdom of the Sakyas will remain under the sceptre of my descendants."

4. FIRST MEDITATION

When Siddhartha was nine, King Suddhodana, his royal family and all his ministers attended the ceremony of the first plowing of the fields. On that day Siddhartha saw the actual plowing; he saw a man naked to the waist prodding a water buffalo to pull a plow. It was very close to noon, and the sun shone relentlessly on the man's bare back. He was sweating profusely and visibly tired from walking up and down in the field making the furrows. Intermittently, he would whip the reluctant buffalo. The buffalo had to pull very hard with the yoke upon its body. The plow turned up the soil exposing the worms that made their homes there. Siddhartha then realized why so many small birds were hovering near the ground. They were eating the live worms and other tiny bugs that laid bare for their easy picking. Just then, a hawk swooped down and caught one of the small birds.

Siddhartha watched in silence. He felt the toil of the man who ploughed the field in the hot sun. He felt the struggle of the water buffalo chained to the plow. He felt the pain of the worms cut by the plow. It was heart wrenching to witness the worms, the insects, and the small bird losing their lives so abruptly.

The noonday sun was extremely hot. Siddhartha took shelter under a rose-apple tree. The leaves provided a much needed shade away from the heat. After sitting quietly for a while, Siddhartha thought about what he saw and recognized that the man, the water buffalo, the birds, and the worms had one thing in common: each of them was tied to the conditions of its life. A worm was tied to the condition that it was a food source for birds. A small bird was bound by the condition that it might fall prey to larger birds. A water buffalo had to live in captivity and work for its captors.

He recognized that life conditions brought fear and pain at times, and enjoyment at others. In one moment, the small bird was enjoying the worms, but in the next moment, it was food for the hawk. Siddhartha observed that the conditions were different for everyone. Some animals enjoyed a greater degree of freedom and safety than others. The peacocks of the royal gardens certainly led a better existence than that of a water buffalo. It was the same with people. One thing stood out above all else: regardless of what conditions they were born with, all living things had a universal wish to live in peace and happiness. All living things wanted to avoid suffering.

King Suddhodana saw Siddhartha sitting under the tree, and in the king's heart his greatest fear was taking shape: Siddhartha would leave him one day in search of the truth.

5. THE THREE WOES

As the chained elephant longs for the wilds of the jungles, so the prince got bored with the royal entertainments and asked his father for permission to see the world outside of the palace. King Suddhodana ordered a jewel-fronted chariot and commanded the roads to be adorned where his son would pass and cleared of the old, sick, dead and holy men. Yet the celestial beings had other plans for Siddhartha.

The houses of the city were decorated with curtains and banners, and spectators arranged themselves on either side, eagerly gazing at the heir to the throne. Thus Siddhartha rode with Channa, his charioteer, through the streets of the city, and into a country watered by rivulets and covered with pleasant trees.

Suddenly, by the wayside an old man appeared with bent frame, wrinkled face and sorrowful brow. The prince asked the charioteer, "Who is this? His head is white, his eyes are bleared, and his body is withered. He can barely walk."

At first the charioteer did not dare to speak the truth. But eventually, much embarrassed, he said, "These are the symptoms of old age. This same man was once a suckling child, and as a youth full of sportive life; but now, as years have passed away, his beauty is gone and the strength of his life is wasted."

Siddhartha was greatly affected by the words of the charioteer, and he sighed because of the pain of old age. "What joy or pleasure can men take," he thought to himself, "when they know they must soon wither and pine away!"

Shortly after they were passing on, a sick man appeared on the way-side, gasping for breath. His body was disfigured, convulsed and groaning with pain. The prince asked his charioteer, "What kind of man is this?"

The charioteer replied, "This man is sick. The four elements of his body are confused and out of order. We are all subject to such conditions: the poor and the rich, the ignorant and the wise, all creatures that have bodies are liable to the same calamity."

And Siddhartha was still more moved. All pleasures appeared stale to him, and he loathed the joys of life.

The charioteer sped the horses on to escape the dreary sight, when out of a sudden they were stopped in their course by four persons passing by and carrying a corpse. The prince, shuddering at the sight of a lifeless body, asked the charioteer, "What is this they carry? There are streamers and flower garlands; but the men that follow are overwhelmed with grief!"

The charioteer replied, "This is a dead man: his life is gone; his thoughts are still; his family and friends now carry his corpse to the burnings grounds."

"Is this the only dead man or does the world contain other instances?" asked Siddhartha filled with awe and terror.

With a heavy heart the charioteer replied, “All over the world it is the same. He who begins life must end it. There is no escape from death.”

With bated breath and stammering accents the prince exclaimed, “O worldly men! How fatal is your delusion! Inevitably your body will crumble to dust, yet carelessly you live on.”

The charioteer observing the deep impression these sights had made on the prince, turned his horses and drove back to the city. Siddhartha having returned home looked with disdain upon the treasures of his palace. His wife welcomed him and entreated him to tell her the cause of his grief. He said, “I see everywhere the impression of change; therefore, my heart is heavy. Men grow old, sicken, and die. That is enough to take away the zest of life.”

The king, hearing that the prince had become estranged from pleasure, was greatly overcome with sorrow.

6. RENUNCIATION

The night after his trip to the city, the prince could not fall asleep. Siddhattha went out into the garden, sat down beneath the great jambu tree and gave himself to thought. Pondering on life and death and the evils of decay, he became free from confusion and saw all the misery and sorrow of the world, the pains of pleasure, and the inevitable certainty of death that hovers over every being. A deep compassion seized his heart.

While the prince was concentrating on the problem of evil, he saw a lofty figure endowed with majesty, calm and dignified. “Who are you?” asked the prince.

The vision responded, “I am a hermit. Troubled at the thought of old age, disease, and death I have left my home to seek the path of salvation. All things hasten to decay; only the truth is forever. Everything changes, and there is no permanency. I long for the happiness that does not decay; the treasure that will never perish; the life that knows of no beginning and no end. Therefore, I have retired to live in solitude and I devoted myself to the search of truth.”

Siddhattha asked, “Can peace be gained in this world of unrest? I am struck with the emptiness of pleasure and have become disgusted with lust. All oppresses me, and existence itself seems intolerable.”

The hermit replied, “Where heat is, there is also a possibility of cold; creatures subject to pain possess the faculty of pleasure; the origin of evil indicates that good can be developed. For these things are correlatives. Thus where there is much suffering, there will be much bliss. A man who has fallen into a heap of filth ought to seek the great pond of water covered with lotuses. If the lake is not sought, it is not the fault of the lake. Even so when there is a blessed road leading the man held fast by wrong to the liberation, if the road is not walked upon, it is not the fault of the road, but of the person.”

A thrill of joy passed through Siddhattha’s heart, and he exclaimed, “Now is the time to seek the truth; now is the time to sever all ties that would prevent me from attaining liberation; now is the time to wander into homelessness to find the path of deliverance.”

The celestial messenger heard the resolution of Siddhattha with approval. “Now, indeed,” he added, “is the time to seek the truth. Go, Siddhattha, and accomplish your purpose. For you are the Buddha; you are destined to enlighten the world. Persevere in your quest for the truth and you shall find what you seek. Pursue your aim diligently, struggle earnestly and you shall conquer.”

Having thus spoken, the vision vanished, and Siddhattha’s heart was filled with peace. He said to himself, “I have awakened to the truth and I am resolved to accomplish my purpose.”

The prince returned to the bedroom of his wife to take a last farewell glance at those whom he dearly loved. There Siddhattha stood gazing at his beautiful wife and his beloved son, and his heart grieved. The pain of parting overcame him powerfully. Although his mind was determined that nothing, be it good or evil, could shake his resolution, the tears flowed from his eyes.

Eventually Siddhattha exited the palace and thus renounced power and worldly pleasures, gave up his kingdom, severed all ties, and went into homelessness. He rode out into the silent night, accompanied only by his faithful charioteer Channa.

7. KING BIMBISARA

Shortly after leaving his kingdom, Siddhartha cut his waving hair and exchanged his royal robe for a simple dress. The prince asked his charioteer Channa to bear a message to King Suddhodana that Siddhartha had left the world to walk with a beggar's bowl in his hand.

Still the majesty of the prince was not well concealed under the poverty of his appearance. His posture exposed his royal birth and his eyes beamed with a fervid zeal for truth. All the people who saw this unusual sight gazed at him in wonder. There was no one who did not pay him homage.

Having entered the city of Rajagraha, the prince went from house to house silently waiting till the people offered him food. Wherever Siddhartha came, people gave him what they had; they bowed before him in humility and were filled with gratitude because he condescended to approach their homes. Old and young people were moved and said, "This is a noble monk! His approach is bliss. What a great joy for us!"

King Bimbisara, noticing the commotion in the city, inquired the cause of it. When he learned the news, he sent one of his attendants to observe the stranger. Having heard that the monk must be a Sakya and of noble family, and that he had retired to the bank of a flowing river in the woods to eat the food in his bowl, the king was moved in his heart. He donned his royal robe and went out in the company of aged and wise counselors to meet his mysterious guest.

The king found Siddhartha seated under a tree. Contemplating the composure of his face and the gentleness of his deportment, Bimbisara greeted him reverently, and said, "O monk, you hands are fit to grasp the reins of an empire and should not hold a beggar's bowl. I am sorry to see you wasting your youth. Believing that you are of royal descent, I invite you to join me in the government of my country and share my royal power. Desire for power and wealth should not be despised by noble-minded. To grow rich and lose religion is not a true gain. But he who possesses all three, power, wealth, and religion, enjoying them in discretion and with wisdom, him I call a great master."

The Blessed One lifted his eyes and replied, "You are known, O King, to be liberal and religious, and your words are prudent. A kind man who makes good use of wealth is rightly said to possess a great treasure; but the miser who hoards up his riches will have no profit. Charity is rich in returns; charity is the greatest wealth, for though it scatters, it brings no repentance.

"I have severed all ties because I seek deliverance. How is it possible for me to return to the world? He who seeks religious truth, which is the highest treasure of all, must leave behind all that can concern him or draw away his attention, and must be bent upon that one goal alone. He must free his soul from greed, lust, and desire for power.

"I recognized the illusory nature of wealth and will not take poison as food. Will a fish that has been baited still covet the hook, or an escaped bird love the net? Would a rabbit rescued from the serpent's mouth go back to be devoured? Would a man who has burnt his hand with a torch take up the torch after he had dropped it to the earth? Would a blind man who has recovered his sight desire to spoil his eyes again?

"The sick man suffering from fever seeks for a cooling medicine. Shall we advise him to drink that which will increase the fever? Shall we quench a fire by heaping fuel upon it? Pity me not, O King.

Rather pity those who are burdened with the cares of royalty and the worry of great riches. They enjoy them in fear and trembling, for they are constantly threatened with a loss of their possessions, and when they die they cannot take along their gold.

“I have put away my royal inheritance and prefer to be free from the burdens of life. Therefore, try not to entangle me in new relationships and duties, nor hinder me from completing the work I have begun. I regret to leave you. But I will go to the sages who can teach me religion. May your country enjoy peace and prosperity, and may wisdom be shed upon your rule like the brightness of the noon-day sun. May your royal power be strong and may righteousness be the scepter in your hand.”

The king, clasping his hands with reverence, bowed down before the prince and said, “May you obtain that which you seek, and when you will obtained it, come back and take me as your disciple.”

The Blessed One parted from the king in friendship and goodwill.

8. URUVELA

Siddhartha continued his search and came to a settlement of five hermits in the jungle of Uruvela. When the prince saw the life of those five men, virtuously keeping in check their senses, subduing their passions, and practising austere self-discipline, he admired their earnestness and joined their company.

With holy zeal and a strong heart, the prince gave himself up to meditative thought and rigorous mortification of the body. Whereas the five sages were severe, the prince was severer still, and they revered him, their junior, as their master.

So Siddhartha continued for six years patiently torturing himself and suppressing the worldly desires. He trained his body and exercised his mind in the modes of the most rigorous ascetic life. At last, he ate each day one hemp-grain only, seeking to cross the ocean of birth and death and to arrive at the shore of deliverance.

And when the prince was on the brink of starvation, Mara, the Evil One, approached him and said, “You are emaciated from fasts, and your death is near. What good is your exertion? Choose to live, and you will be able to do good works.”

The prince responded, “O Evil One, for what purpose did you come? Let the flesh waste away if that leads to the mind becoming more tranquil. What is life in this world? Death in battle is better to me than that I should live defeated.”

And Mara withdrew.

The prince was shrunken and attenuated, and his body was like a withered branch. The fame of his holiness spread in the surrounding countries, and people came from great distances to see him and receive his blessing.

Still the Blessed One was not satisfied. Seeking true wisdom he did not find it, and he came to the conclusion that mortification would not extinguish desire nor afford enlightenment in ecstatic contemplation.

Seated beneath a jambu tree, he considered the state of his mind and the fruits of his mortification. His body had become weaker, but his fasts had not advanced him in his search for salvation. Therefore, he saw that it was not the right path and decided to abandon it. He went to bathe in the Neranjara river, but when he strove to leave the water he could not rise on account of his weakness. Then espying the branch of a tree and taking hold of it, he raised himself and left the stream. But while returning to his abode, he staggered and fell to the ground, and the five hermits thought he was dead.

There was a chief herdsman living near the grove whose eldest daughter was called Nanda; and Nanda happened to pass by the spot where the Blessed One had swooned, and bowing down before him she offered him rice-milk and he accepted the gift. When he had partaken of the rice-milk all his limbs were refreshed, his mind became clear again.

After this happened, the Blessed One again took some food. His disciples, having witnessed the scene of Nanda and observing the change in his mode of living, were filled with suspicion. They were convinced that Siddhattha's religious zeal was flagging and that he had become oblivious of his high purpose.

When the Blessed One saw the hermits turning away from him, he felt sorry for their lack of confidence. Suppressing his grief he wandered on alone.

9. MARA, THE EVIL ONE

Siddhartha directed his steps to that Bodhi tree beneath whose shade he was to accomplish his search. When he sat down the heavens resounded with joy and all living beings were filled with good cheer. Mara alone, lord of the five desires, bringer of death and enemy of truth, was grieved and rejoiced not. With his three daughters, Tanha, Raga and Arati, the tempters, and with his host of evil demons, he went to the place where the prince sat.

But Siddhartha heeded him not. Mara uttered fear-inspiring threats and raised a whirlwind so that the skies were darkened and the ocean roared and trembled. The prince under the Bodhi tree remained calm and feared not. Siddhartha knew that no harm could befall him.

The three daughters of Mara tempted the prince, but he paid no attention to them. When Mara saw that he could not inflate any desire in the heart of the victorious monk, he ordered all the evil spirits at his command to attack him. Again Siddhartha watched them as one would watch the harmless games of children. All the fierce hatred of the evil spirits was of no avail. The flames of hell became wholesome breezes of perfume, and the angry thunderbolts were changed into lotus-blossoms.

When Mara saw this, he fled away with his army from the Bodhi tree.

10. ENLIGHTENMENT

Siddhartha, having put Mara to flight, gave himself up to meditation. All the miseries of the world, the evils produced by evil deeds and the sufferings arising therefrom, passed before his eye, and he uttered, “Surely if living creatures saw the results of all their evil deeds, they would turn away from them in disgust. But selfhood blinds them, and they cling to their desires. They crave pleasure for themselves and they cause pain to others; when death destroys their individuality, they find no peace; their thirst for existence abides and their selfhood reappears in new births. Thus they continue to move in the coil and can find no escape from the hell of their own making. And how empty are their pleasures, how vain are their endeavors! Men go astray because they think that delusion is better than truth.”

And he began to expound the Dharma, the universal law of nature. Pondering on the origin of birth and death, the prince recognized that ignorance was the root of all evil; and there are the links in the development of life, called the twelve nidanas: In the beginning there is existence blind and without knowledge; and in this sea of ignorance there are stirrings formative and organizing. From stirrings, formative and organizing, rises awareness or feelings. Feelings beget organisms that live as individual beings. These organisms develop the six fields, that is, the five senses and the mind. The six fields come in contact with things. Contact begets sensation. Sensation creates the thirst of individualized being. The thirst of being creates a cleaving to things. The cleaving produces the growth and continuation of selfhood. Selfhood continues in renewed birth. The renewed births of selfhood are the causes of sufferings, old age, sickness, and death. They produce lamentation, anxiety, and despair.

Remove ignorance, the cause of sorrows, and you will destroy the wrong desires that rise from ignorance; destroy these desires and you will wipe out the wrong perception that rises from them. Destroy wrong perception and there is an end of errors in individualized beings. Destroy the errors in individualized beings and the illusions of the six fields will disappear. Destroy illusions and the contact with things will cease to beget misconception. Destroy misconception and you do away with thirst. Destroy thirst and you will be free of all morbid cleaving. Remove the cleaving and you destroy the selfishness of selfhood. If the selfishness of selfhood is destroyed you will be above birth, old age, disease, and death, and you will escape all suffering.

Then Siddhartha saw the four noble truths which point out the path to liberation and uttered this verse:

*Through many births I sought in vain
The Builder of this House of Pain.
Now, Builder, You are plain to see,
And from this House at last I'm free;
I burst the rafters, roof and wall,
And dwell in the Peace beyond them all.*

Blessed is he who understood the Dharma. Blessed is he who does no harm to his fellow-beings and conquered all selfishness and vanity.

Thus Siddhartha has become the Buddha, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One, and he uttered, “I have recognized the deepest truth, which is sublime and peace-giving, but difficult

to understand; as most men move in a sphere of worldly interests and find their delight in worldly desires. There is self and there is truth. Where self is, truth is not. Where truth is, self is not. The attainment of truth is possible only when self is recognized as an illusion. Righteousness can be practiced only when the mind is freed from passions. Perfect peace can dwell only where all vanity has disappeared. The task is impossible for the ones who search happiness in selfhood only. The bliss that lies in a complete surrender to truth. The truth remains hidden from the ones who are blinded by craving and aversion. Liberation remains incomprehensible and mysterious to the vulgar minds clouded with worldly interests. Should I preach the doctrine of Dharma and mankind not comprehend it, it would bring me trouble.”

On hearing these words of the Blessed One, Mara approached and said, “Be greeted, the Enlightened One. You have attained the highest bliss and it is time for you to enter into the final stage of liberation.”

Suddenly, Brahma Sahampati descended from the heavens and said, “Alas! The world must perish, should the Blessed One decide not to teach the Dharma. Be merciful to those who struggle; have compassion upon the sufferers; pity the creatures who are hopelessly entangled in the snares of sorrow. There are some beings that are almost free from the dust of worldliness. If they do not hear the doctrine preached, they will be lost.”

The Blessed One, full of compassion, looked upon all sentient creatures with his spiritual eye, and saw among them beings whose minds were but scarcely covered by the dust of worldliness. He saw some who were conscious of the dangers of lust and wrong doing, and replied to Brahma Sahampati, “Wide open be the door of immortality to all who have ears to hear. May they receive the Dharma.”

Then the Buddha turned to Mara, saying, “I shall not pass into the final stage of liberation, O Evil One, until the knowledge of truth becomes successful, prosperous, widespread, and popular among men!”

Brahma Sahampati understood that the Blessed One had granted his request to preach the doctrine.

11. FIRST CONVERTS

The Blessed One stayed in solitude for seven days, enjoying the bliss of liberation.

At that time Tapussa and Bhallika, two merchants, came traveling on the road near by. When they saw the great monk, majestic and full of peace, they approached him respectfully and offered him rice cakes and honey. This was the first food that the Blessed One ate after he became the Buddha.

And the Buddha addressed them and explained them the path of liberation. The two merchants, conceiving in their minds the holiness of the conqueror of Mara, bowed down in reverence and said, “We take our refuge, O Master, in the Blessed One and in the Dharma.”

Tapussa and Bhallika became the first followers of the Buddha and they were lay disciples.

Then Buddha had decided to go and pay homage to the hermits in Uruvela, his former teachers, for sharing their knowledge. But these ascetics were jealous of the Buddha’s enlightenment and had conspired to ignore his presence when he arrived.

And even though they decided not to welcome him, when the Buddha approached, they all stood up and fell to his feet. His persona was such that it just brought it out in them.

12. THE KING'S GIFT

King Bimbisara, having taken his refuge in the Buddha, invited the Blessed One with his monks to his palace for a meal.

The Blessed One having donned his robes, took his alms-bowl and, together with a great number of disciples, entered the city of Rajagraha. Sakka, the king of the Devas, assuming the appearance of a young brahmin, walked in front and said, "He who teaches self-control with those who have learned self-control; the redeemer with those whom he has redeemed; the Blessed One with those to whom he has given peace, is entering Rajagraha! Hail to the Buddha! Honor to his name and blessings to all who take refuge in him." Then Sakka intoned this verse:

*Blessed is the place in which the Buddha walks,
And blessed the ears which hear his talks;
Blessed his disciples, for they are
The tellers of his truth both near and far.
If all could hear this truth so good
Then all men's minds would eat rich food,
And strong would grow men's brotherhood.*

When the Blessed One had finished his meal, the king sat down near him and thought, "Where may I find a place for the Blessed One to live in, not too far from the town and not too near, suitable for going and coming, easily accessible to all people who want to see him, a place that is by day not too crowded and by night not exposed to noise, wholesome and well fitted for a retired life? There is my garden, the bamboo grove Veluvana, fulfilling all these conditions. I shall offer it to the order of monks, to the Sangha, led by the Buddha."

Thus the king dedicated his garden to the order of monks.

13. THE RETURN

After nearly seven years of having heard nothing of his son, Suddhodana came to know that Siddhartha was staying at Rajagraha, and that he was claiming to be enlightened. Overjoyed to know that his son was still alive, Suddhodana sent a messenger to ask him to return home.

The messenger met the Buddha at the Bamboo Grove in Rajagraha. He was so enthralled on hearing the words of Dharma that there and then the messenger decided to become a monk, completely forgetting to pass Suddhodana's message. More messengers were sent and the same thing happened.

Finally, in exasperation, Suddhodana commissioned his close adviser to take the message, but only permitted him to become a monk on condition that he passed the message to the Buddha.

And so the Buddha came to know of his father's desire to see him. The Blessed One consented to the request of his father and set out on his journey to Kapilavatthu. Soon the news spread in the native country of the Buddha that Prince Siddhartha, the one who wandered forth from home into homelessness to obtain enlightenment, is coming back.

Shortly after, the Buddha set out for Kapilavatthu, accompanied by a large number of monks. Upon arrival, they stayed outside the town in a park and in the morning entered the town to beg for alms. Only then Suddhodana learned that the Buddha had arrived and was shocked that his son would sleep under a tree rather than in the palace, and beg in the streets rather than feast at the banquet table.

Suddhodana went out with his relatives and ministers to meet the prince. When the king saw Siddhartha, he was struck with his son's beauty and dignity but, unable to contain his anger, he uttered, "You are degrading your family's dignity."

The Buddha replied, "You are speaking to your son, the prince, the person who no longer exists. O Suddhodana, on becoming enlightened one becomes a member of the family of the Noble Ones and their dignity depends only on wisdom and compassion."

The king realized that the noble monk, his son, was no longer Siddhattha – he was the Buddha, the Blessed One, the Enlightened One, and the Teacher of mankind.

Then the Buddha took a seat opposite his father, and the king gazed eagerly at his son. He longed to call him by his name, but he dared not. "Siddhartha," he exclaimed silently in his heart, "Siddhartha, come back to your aged father and be his son again!" But seeing the determination of his son, he suppressed his sentiments. Sadness overcame him.

"I would offer you my kingdom," the king said, "but if I did, you would treat it as mere ashes."

And the Buddha replied, "I know that the king's heart is full of love and that for his son's sake he feels deep grief. But let go of the ties of love that bind him to the son whom he lost embrace with, and he will receive in his place a greater one than Siddhartha; he will receive the Buddha, and the truth will enter into his heart."

Suddhodana trembled with joy when he heard the words of his son, the Buddha, and exclaimed with tears in his eyes, “Alas! The overwhelming sorrow has passed away. At first my heart was heavy, but now I reap the fruit of your great renunciation.”

14. YASODHARA

The king conducted the Buddha into the palace, and the ministers and all the members of the royal family greeted him with great reverence. Yet, Yasodhara, the prince's wife, did not make her appearance. The king sent for Yasodhara, but she replied, "Surely, if I am deserving of any regard, Siddhattha will come and see me."

The Blessed One, having greeted all his relatives and friends, asked, "Where is Yasodhara?" And on being informed that she had refused to come, he rose straightway and went to her apartments.

"I am free," the Blessed One said to his disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, whom he had asked to accompany him to the princess' chamber. "But the princess, however, is not yet free. Not having seen me for a long time, she is exceedingly sorrowful. Unless her grief be allowed its course, her heart will cleave."

Yasodhara sat in her room, dressed in simple garments, and with her hair cut. When Prince Siddhattha entered, she was, from the abundance of her affection, like an overflowing vessel, unable to contain her love. Forgetting that the man whom she loved was the Buddha, she held him by his feet and wept bitterly.

Remembering, however, that King Suddhodana was present, she felt ashamed, and seated herself reverently at a little distance.

The king apologized for the princess, saying, "This arises from her deep affection, and is not a temporary emotion. During the seven years that she has lost her husband, when she heard that Siddhattha had shaved his head, she did likewise; when she heard that he had left off the use of perfumes and ornaments, she also refused their use. Like her husband she had eaten at appointed times from an earthen bowl only. Like him she had renounced high beds with splendid coverings, and when other princes asked her in marriage, she replied that she was still his. Therefore, grant her forgiveness."

And the Blessed One spoke kindly to Yasodhara, telling of her great merits inherited from former lives. She had indeed been again and again of great assistance to him. Her purity, her gentleness, her devotion had been invaluable to the Blessed One when he aspired to attain enlightenment. And so holy had she been that she desired to become the wife of a Buddha. This karma was a result of great merits.

Later, Yasodhara took a threefold refuge and, ordained as a nun, became one of the first women to enter the Sangha.

15. RAHULA, THE SON

When the Buddha returned to Kapilavatthu, Yasodhara took little Rahula to listen to the Buddha's preaching. When they arrived, she said to her son, "This is your father, Rahula. Go and ask him for your inheritance." The child walked through the assembly and stood before the Buddha, saying without fear and with much affection, "How pleasant is your shadow, O Monk." When the talk had finished and the Buddha left, Rahula followed him, and as they walked along Rahula said, "Give me my inheritance, O Monk."

The Buddha had nothing to give except the doctrine of Dharma, so he turned to Sariputta and said, "My son asks for his inheritance. I cannot give him perishable treasures that will bring cares and sorrows, but I can give him the inheritance of a holy life, which is a treasure that will not perish."

When King Suddhodana heard that Rahula had joined the brotherhood of monks, he was grieved. He had lost his son, Siddhattha, and now he had lost his only grandson. And the Blessed One promised that from that time forward he would not ordain any minor without the consent of his parents or guardians.

As if to make up for the seven years the boy was without a father, the Buddha took great interest in Rahula's moral and spiritual education, teaching him many times himself. Rahula was an eager and attentive student and it is said that each morning as he awoke, he would take a handful of sand and say, "May I have today, as many words of counsel from my teacher as there are here grains of sand." As a result of this enthusiasm, the Buddha said that of all his disciples Rahula had the most zeal for training.

The conduct of Rahula, however, was not always marked by a love of truth, and so the Blessed One ordered his son to bring him a basin of water and to wash his feet, to which Rahula obeyed.

When Rahula had washed his father's feet, the Blessed One asked, "Is the water now fit for drinking?"

"No, Master," replied Rahula, "the water is unclean."

Said the Blessed One, "Now consider your own case, Rahula. You are unable to guard your tongue from untruth and thus your mind is unclean."

And when the water had been poured away, the Buddha asked again, "Is this vessel now fit for holding water to drink?"

"No, Master," replied Rahula, "the vessel, too, has become unclean."

"Now consider your own case, Rahula. Are you fit for any high purpose when you have become unclean like the vessel?"

Then the Blessed One lifting up the empty basin and whirling it round asked Rahula, saying, "Are you not afraid that it might fall and break?"

"No, Master," replied Rahula, "it is cheap, its loss will not amount to much."

“Now consider your own case, Rahula. Your mind is whirled about in endless thoughts and your body is made of the same substance as other material things that will crumble to dust. There is no loss if it to be broken.”

The Buddha then impressed upon his son the importance of speaking the truth, saying, “Rahula, for anyone who has no shame at intentional lying, there is no evil that that person cannot do. Therefore, you should train yourself to never tell a lie.”

Having explained what has to be done, the Buddha went on to explain to Rahula how it could be done.

“Rahula, what is the purpose of a mirror?”

“The purpose of a mirror is to look at yourself.”

“Even so, Rahula, one should act with body, speech or mind only after first looking at oneself. Before acting with body, speech or mind, one should think, What I am about to do, will it harm me or others?” If you can answer, “Yes, it will,” then you should not act. But if you can answer, “No, it will not,” then you should act. You should reflect in the same way while acting and after having acted. Therefore, Rahula, you should train yourself to act only after repeatedly looking at and reflecting on yourself.”

Rahula was trained in the Ten Precepts and monastic discipline and when he was eighteen, the Buddha decided that he was ready for meditation. The Blessed One then gave Rahula an advice on how to practice, saying, “Develop a mind that is like the four great elements (earth, water, fire and air) because if you do this, pleasant or unpleasant sensory impressions that have arisen and taken hold of the mind will not persist. Develop love, Rahula, for by doing so you will get rid of ill-will. Develop compassion, for by doing so you will get rid of violence. Develop sympathetic joy, for by doing so you will get rid of animosity. Develop equanimity, for by doing so you will get rid of uncontrolled reaction. Develop the perception of the foul, for by doing so you will get rid of attachment. Develop the perception of impermanence, for by doing so you will get rid of the conceit of selfhood. Develop mindfulness of breathing for it is of great benefit and advantage.”

Following his father’s advice and guidance on meditation, Rahula finally attained enlightenment. He was eighteen at the time. After that everyone always referred to him as Rahulabhadra (Rahula the Lucky).

16. ANANDA

Many people in Kapilavatthu listened to the Buddha's teachings and took refuge in his doctrine, among them Nanda, Siddhattha's half-brother; Devadatta, his cousin; Upali the barber; and Anuruddha the philosopher. Some years later Ananda, another cousin of the Blessed One, also joined the Sangha.

The Buddha was always accompanied by an attendant whose job was to run messages for him, prepare his seat and to attend to his personal needs. For the first twenty years of his ministry, he had several attendants, Nagasamala, Upavana, Nagita, Cunda, Radha and others, but none of them proved to be suitable. One day, when he decided to replace his present attendant, he called all the monks together and addressed them, "I am now getting old and wish to have someone as a permanent attendant. Which of you would like to be my attendant?"

All the monks enthusiastically offered their services, except Ananda, who modestly sat at the back in silence. Later, when asked why he had not volunteered he replied that the Buddha knew best who to pick. When the Buddha indicated that he would like Ananda to be his personal attendant, Ananda said he would accept the position, but only on eight conditions.

The first four conditions were that the Buddha should never give him any of the food that he received, nor any of the robes, that he should not be given any special accommodation, and that he would not have to accompany the Buddha when he accepted invitations to people's homes. Ananda insisted on these four conditions because he did not want people to think that he was serving the Buddha out of desire for a material gain.

The last four conditions were related to Ananda's desire to help in the promotion of the Dharma. These conditions were: that if he was invited to a meal, he could transfer the invitation to the Buddha; that if people came from outlying areas to see the Buddha, he would have the privilege of introducing them; that if he had any doubts about the Dharma, he should be able to talk to the Buddha about them at any time and that if the Buddha gave a discourse in his absence, he would later repeat it in his presence. The Buddha smilingly accepted these conditions. Ananda was a man after the heart of the Blessed One; he was his most beloved disciple, profound in comprehension and gentle in spirit. He remained always near the Buddha until the death parted them.

17. KASSAPA

As soon as he had 60 disciples, the Buddha sent them away to teach people in other regions. He left the Deer Park and turned southwards towards the Magadha country.

Along the way, on the banks of a river lived three brothers whose names were Uruvela Kassapa, Nadi Kassapa and Gaya Kassapa. Each lived with 500, 300 and 200 followers respectively. These were brahmin hermits with matted hair, worshiping the fire and keeping a fire-dragon. They were renowned throughout India, and their names were honored as some of the wisest men.

The Blessed One paid a visit to Uruvela Kassapa and said, “Let me stay a night in the room where you keep your sacred fire.”

Kassapa, seeing the Blessed One in his majesty and beauty, thought, “This is a great monk and a noble teacher. Should he stay overnight in the room where the sacred fire is kept, the fire-dragon will bite him and he will die.” Kassapa then warned the Buddha, saying, “I do not object to you staying overnight in the room where the sacred fire is kept, but the dragon lives there; he will harm you.”

Still, the Buddha insisted and Kassapa admitted him to the room where the sacred fire was kept. And the Blessed One sat down with body erect, surrounding himself with mindfulness. In the night the dragon came, belching forth in rage his fiery poison, and filling the air with burning vapor, but could do the Buddha no harm. The fire consumed itself while the Blessed One remained composed. In the end, the venomous serpent became so wroth that he died in his anger.

In the morning the Blessed One showed the dead body of the dragon to Kassapa, saying, “His fire has been conquered by my fire.” And Kassapa thought, “He is a great monk and possesses high powers, but he is not holy like me.”

There was in those days a festival and Kassapa thought, “The people will come from all parts of the country and will see the great Buddha. When he speaks to them, they will believe him and abandon me.” And he grew envious. When the day of the festival arrived, the Blessed One retired and did not come to Kassapa.

Kassapa went to the Buddha on the next morning and said, “Why did you not come?”

The Buddha replied, “Did not you think, Kassapa, that it would be better if I stayed away from the festival?”

Kassapa was astonished and thought, “Great is this monk; he can read my most secret thoughts, but he is not holy like me.”

Then the Blessed One addressed Kassapa and said, “You see the truth, but do not accept it because of the envy that dwells in your heart. Is this envy wholesome? Envy is the last remnant of self that has remained in your mind.”

And Kassapa gave up his resistance. His envy disappeared, and, bowing down, he said, “O Master, let me receive the ordination from the Blessed One.”

Then Kassapa went to his followers saying, “I am anxious to lead a religious life under the direction of the great Buddha, who is the Enlightened One. Do what you think is best.”

Kassapa’s followers replied, “We have conceived a profound affection for the great Buddha, and if you are joining his Sangha, we will do likewise.” And all of them took refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. This is how the following of Buddha grew by another thousand devotees.

18. SARIPUTTA AND MOGGALLANA

At that time Sariputta and Moggallana, two brahmin priests, led a very religious life. They had promised each other that the one who first attains enlightenment shall tell the other one.

Once Sariputta saw monk Assaji begging for alms who was modestly keeping his eyes to the ground and was dignified in manners. Sariputta exclaimed, “Truly this monk has entered the right path; I will ask him in whose name he has retired from the world and what doctrine he professes.”

Being addressed by Sariputta, Assaji replied, “I am a follower of the Buddha, the Blessed One, but being a novice I can tell you the substance only of the doctrine.”

Sariputta exclaimed, “Tell me! It is the substance I want.”

Then Assaji recited this stanza:

*Nothing we seek to touch or see
Can represent Eternity.
They spoil and die: then let us find
Eternal Truth within the mind.*

Having heard this stanza, Sariputta said, “Now I see clearly, whatsoever is subject to origination is also subject to cessation. If this is the doctrine, I have reached the state to enter the path of liberation which before has remained hidden from me.”

Then Sariputta went to Moggallana and told him about the Buddha’s teachings, and both decided to go to the Blessed One.

When the Buddha saw Sariputta and Moggallana coming from afar, he said to his disciples, “These two monks are highly auspicious.” The two friends had taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha and became loyal and virtuous disciples.

19. ANATHAPINDIKA

One of the Buddha's most devout followers was a wealthy merchant named Sudatta. He was famous for his donations to the hungry and homeless and became known as Anathapindika (friend of the poor).

Anathapindika lived in Sravasthi and one day he traveled to Rajagaha to visit his brother-in-law. The household was so busy with preparations for a feast that Anathapindika failed to get his usual warm welcome.

"What is the big occasion?" Anathapindika asked his brother-in-law, "Are you preparing for a great wedding or perhaps a visit from the king?"

"No," his brother-in-law responded. "The Buddha and his monks are coming for a meal tomorrow."

Just hearing the word "Buddha" filled Anathapindika with such joy that he could hardly contain himself and said, "You mean that a fully enlightened being has arisen in the world? How wonderful! Take me to meet him".

Anathapindika wanted to go straight away but he was persuaded that it was too late and that it would be better to do so the next morning. That night Anathapindika was so excited that he could hardly sleep. Eventually, thinking that the sun would be rising soon, Anathapindika set off to meet the Buddha, but as he entered the outskirts of the city and it was still dark, he became frightened and decided to turn back. Suddenly, a friendly spirit appeared illuminating the whole area and urged him to continue, "Walk on! To move forward is better for you than to turn back."

Encouraged by these words, Anathapindika continued and soon came across the Buddha walking up and down in the early morning light. The Buddha saw Anathapindika hesitating to come closer and he beckoned him, "Come forward, Sudatta." Astonished that the Buddha would know his real name and awed by the great man's presence, Anathapindika hurried forward and bowed at the Buddha's feet. The two men talked together for a while and as the sun came up; Anathapindika understood the essence of the Dharma.

Anathapindika then asked the Buddha if he could offer him a meal the next day and the Buddha accepted. All during the day he thought how wonderful it would be if the Buddha could come to Savatthi and how many people would benefit from this visit. Consequently, the next day, after the Buddha had finished his meal, Anathapindika asked him if he would come and visit Sravasthi. The Buddha agreed, adding, "Enlightened ones prefer to stay in peaceful places". Anathapindika responded, "I fully understand, Master."

When Anathapindika finished his business in Rajagaha, he set out for Sravasthi. And as soon as he arrived he began to make preparations for the Buddha's arrival. To start, he had to find a suitable place for the Buddha and his monks to stay, near the city but not too noisy. The best place proved to be a park about one kilometre south-west from the walls of Sravasthi, owned by Prince Jeta. Anathapindika approached the prince and asked him if he wanted to sell his park. The prince declined. Anathapindika insisted, but Prince Jeta reiterated that he was not interested in selling.

“I will pay you any price you choose,” Anathapindika said.

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