



Buddhism **for Beginners**



Buddhism for Beginners

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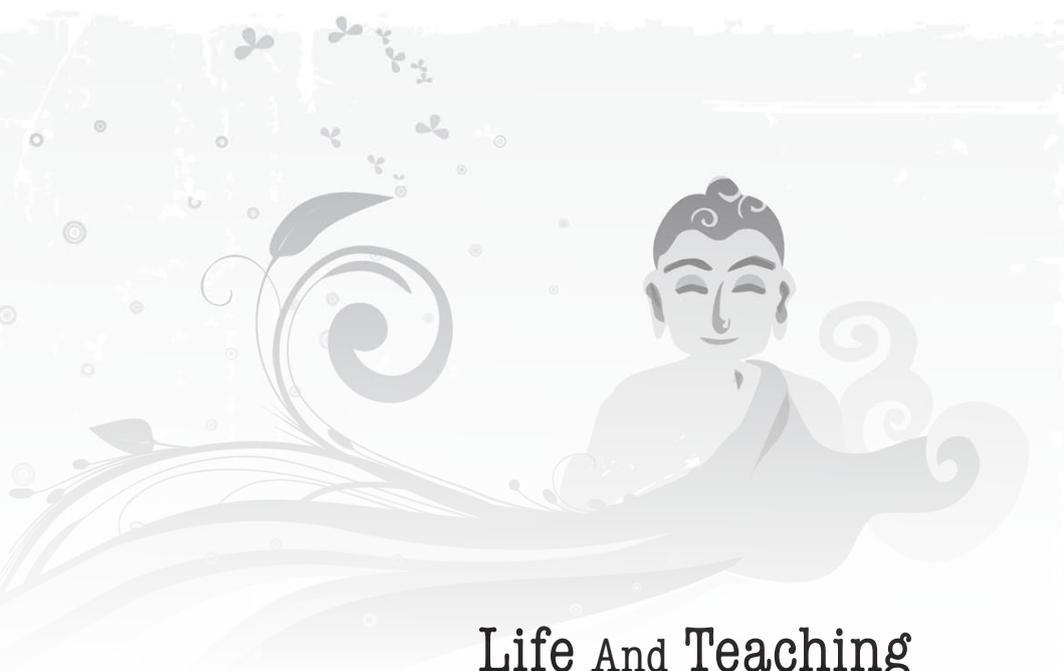
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Life And Teaching of The Buddha





Buddhism For Today

It is a fact that frequently those who live closest to the wonders of the world, like the Taj Mahal of India or the Great Wall of China, fail to take an interest in them. They are too familiar; they seem too easily accessible. One thinks one can learn about them at any time, and so one never bothers to make a start. So too, in Singapore, one may have often heard the name of the Buddha, and have visited Buddhist temples, or call oneself a Buddhist and yet may not really know what Buddhism is.

The Relevance of Buddhism

Some people may think that Buddhism is something which belongs to the past and can have no place in the modern world. But this is not so, because Buddhism is as relevant now as it was in the past. As a way of life, Buddhism shows people how to grow in maturity and wisdom so as to understand themselves and the world in which they live.

When people begin to learn what Buddhism is, they will see that it can benefit them in many ways. At one level, Buddhism teaches the individual to cope with the events and circumstances of daily life. One develops such good attitudes towards life that one's relationships with one's family and with the members of the community improves. At a higher level, Buddhism teaches one to develop one's mind so that one finally sees life as it really is. From His own experience, the Buddha has shown that there is a way to end suffering and attain

supreme happiness. Thus the Buddha's Teaching offers hope and gives a meaning to life.

The Spirit of Free Enquiry

The spirit of free enquiry is an important feature of Buddhism. The Buddha encouraged people to investigate the truth of His Teaching for themselves before accepting it. He never expected people to practise His Teaching out of blind faith and superstition. People should only practise what they find to be beneficial physically and mentally.

Self-reliance

Buddhism stresses the need for self-reliance and individual effort. Each person must work out for himself, the way to end suffering and attain happiness. It is his own actions that determine his future. His destiny is not determined by any external power or agent. This means that each man is responsible for his own actions. A person can progress or develop as much as his own efforts allow. Through dedication, self-discipline and wise judgment, he can reach the highest goals of life.

Tolerance

Because Buddhism respects the right of people to enquire freely and to choose for themselves, it is tolerant towards other faiths. Buddhism teaches one to live in harmony with all, regardless of race or religion. This attitude of tolerance is particularly important in a society like Singapore where many races and religions co-exist.



*Shakyamuni
Buddha's image
in Mahabodhi
temple in
Bodhgaya where
he attained
enlightenment.*

Loving-kindness and Compassion

Buddhism recognises that all living beings are equal. It teaches universal loving-kindness and compassion not only to all men but also to all other creatures. All living beings, men and animals alike, share a common environment. If men want to live happily in this world, they must have concern for the welfare of others.

Buddhism and Science

There is no conflict between modern scientific discoveries of today and the Buddha's Teaching. Many things that the Buddha taught about 2500 years ago have been proven true by modern science.

The importance and power of the mind, the impermanence of things, the divisibility of the atom, the relativity of matter and energy, and even the structure of the universe — all these are contained in the Buddha's Teaching. So a Buddhist does not have to ignore the facts about man and the universe that are gradually being revealed by science.

The Buddha's life and His Teachings, as explained in the following chapters, will inspire one to develop self-reliance, moral responsibility, tolerance, compassion and wisdom and other moral qualities. These qualities will enrich one's life and make it more meaningful in today's world.

Summary

Buddhism is as relevant to life now, as it was in the past. Buddhism enables people to develop maturity and wisdom so as to understand themselves and see life as it really is. The benefits of practising Buddhism can be seen in one's improved relations with members of the family and the community. There is hope of happiness for all, because the Buddha's Teaching shows the way to end all suffering. People are encouraged to investigate the truth of the Buddha's Teaching for themselves before accepting it. Buddhism stresses the importance of relying on one's own efforts in order to achieve one's goals. It also teaches people to be tolerant towards other faiths, and to show loving-kindness and compassion to all living beings. Many things that the Buddha taught have been proven true by modern science.



Birth of Prince Siddhartha

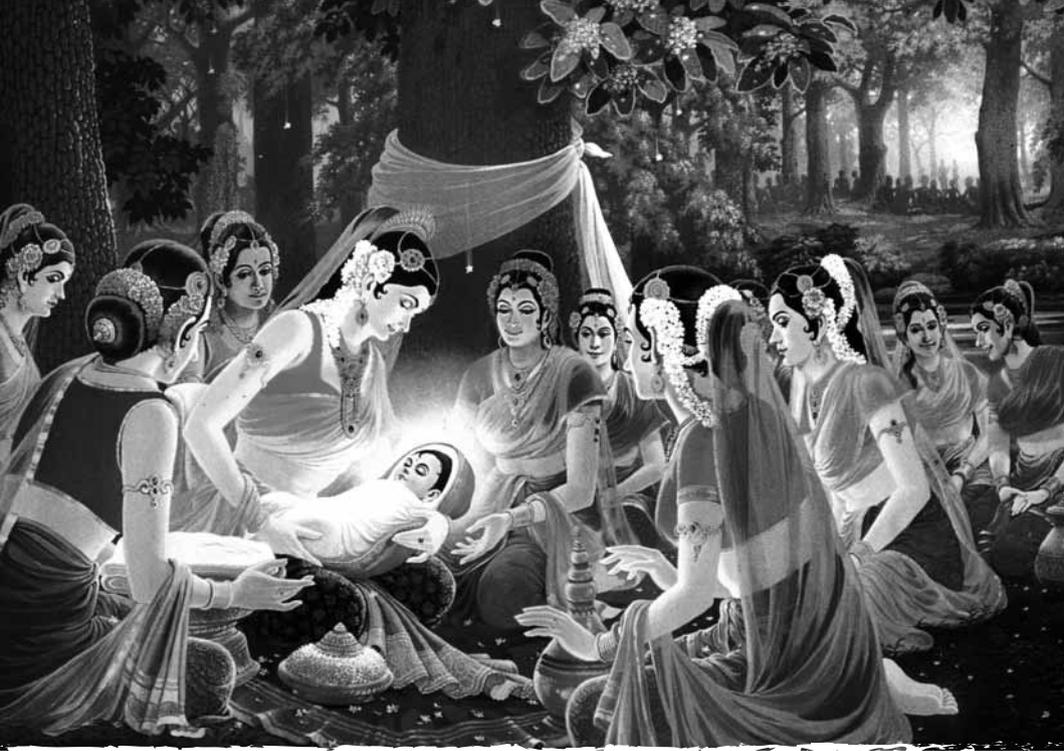
About 2,500 years ago, on the Nepalese border of northern India, there lived a benevolent king of the Shakyan clan by the name of Shuddhodana Gautama. He ruled over the Shakyans from his palace in Kapilavastu.

Queen Maya's Dream

The king had a beautiful queen called Maya who was loved by the people. One night, Queen Maya had a strange dream in which she saw a white elephant entering her womb through the right side of her body. It was an auspicious sign to her for the white elephant was the symbol of greatness. Then, she knew that she had conceived a child who would be unique. During her pregnancy, she was happy and healthy, and led a pure life befitting one who was to bear such a baby.

Birth of the Prince

The king and his subjects eagerly awaited the birth of the royal child. It was an ancient Indian custom for a woman to return to her parents' home for the birth of her child. So when the time came, Queen Maya obtained the king's consent to leave the palace for her parent's home. A royal party accompanied the queen's sedan-chair on the long journey. On the way, she stopped at a garden called Lumbini Park, where big, shady trees grew. It was spring and all the flowers were blooming in the park. With her maids around her, she



strolled in the grounds, enjoying the beauty of nature. While resting under the shade of a Sala tree, she gave birth to a boy. Everyone around her was delighted at the event.

After the birth of the prince, which took place on the day of the full moon in the fifth month of the year, the royal party returned to the palace. King Shuddhodana was filled with joy and there was rejoicing in the palace and throughout the country.

Asita's Prediction

There was then an old sage called Asita who had retired to the mountains not far from the palace. The sage Asita noticed a radiance about the palace and realised that a prince had been born. Immediately, he went to the palace to look at the royal baby.

On reaching the palace, he was greeted by the king who said, "Your reverence, what is the reason for your coming?"



In great eagerness, Asita replied, "Where is the prince? I wish to see him."

The proud and happy king quickly brought the baby and showed him to Asita. When he looked at the baby, Asita was delighted. At first he smiled, overwhelmed with joy. Then he began to shed tears of sorrow. Seeing such a sudden change of feelings in the sage, the king was puzzled and anxiously questioned him. He was afraid that the old sage foresaw trouble for the prince.

"Will some misfortune befall the child?" asked the king.

Asita answered, "Among men, he is unique. I foresee no harm for the boy. He will achieve the highest knowledge. He will become a Buddha, a sage of unequalled purity. Through compassion for the many, he will spread his Teaching. Little of my lifespan now remains and I shall die soon. I shall not hear his good Teaching. This is what saddens me."

After making this prediction, Asita paid homage to the royal baby and left the palace.

The Naming Ceremony

On the fifth day after the birth of the prince, many priests were invited to the palace for the naming ceremony. Among them were eight who carefully observed the features of the child in order to predict his future. After studying him, seven of them raised two fingers each, indicating that the prince would either become the king of kings if he succeeded to his father's throne, or become a Buddha if he chose to renounce the kingdom. However, the youngest among the eight was more certain. He put up only one finger to predict that the prince would definitely become a Buddha. After the prediction, the prince was given the name Siddhartha which means "wish fulfilled".

The Passing Away of Queen Maya

The happiness over the birth of Prince Siddhartha was, however quickly followed by sorrow because seven days after his birth, Queen Maya passed away. The queen's sister Prajapati took over the responsibility of being a mother to the prince and brought him up with loving care.

Summary

Prince Siddhartha was born about 2,500 years ago into the royal family of the Shakyans. The prince's father was Shuddhodana and his mother, Maya. He was born in Lumbini Park, and was named Siddhartha which means "wish fulfilled". The prince's mother passed away seven days after his birth and thereafter, he was cared for by his aunt, Prajapati.



Childhood and Education

The Ploughing Ceremony

As a child, Prince Siddhartha was kind, compassionate and thoughtful. One day, at the age of seven, the prince followed his father to witness the annual ploughing ceremony at the beginning of the sowing season. While the king was busily engaged in the ceremony, the prince was left in the care of his maids under a shady rose-apple (jambu) tree. He was left alone when his maids wandered off to watch the ceremony.

The prince, not particularly attracted by the events, noticed a bird swooping to the ground and carrying off a small worm which had been dug up from the earth by the farmer's plough. The prince was greatly disturbed by what he had seen. "Alas! Do all living creatures kill each other?" he thought to himself. He realised that killing is suffering. Sitting alone under the big tree, he began to ponder in sorrow, over what he had seen. As he concentrated his mind, he began to experience the joy of meditation.

When his father and maids noticed that he was not among the crowd who were watching the ploughing ceremony, they went to look for him. Under the tree, the king found his seven-year old child in meditation. The king was deeply moved at the sight.

The Incident of the Wounded Swan

In another incident in his childhood, Prince Siddhartha showed that he was kind and compassionate, and was sensitive to the sufferings of all living creatures. He was twelve years old then. He and his cousin, Devadatta, were walking in the woods when, suddenly, they saw a swan flying in the air. His cousin took his bow and arrow and shot the swan down. Both boys ran to pick it up but the prince, being the faster runner, reached the spot first and picked up the poor wounded creature. He pulled out the arrow and held the bird in his arms. Soon his cousin caught up with him and insisted that he should have the swan since he had shot it down. The prince refused to let his cousin have the swan, knowing that he would kill it. Unable to settle the matter between the two of them, they referred it to the wise man of the court.

After some thought, the wise man remarked, "A life certainly must belong to him who tries to save it; a life cannot belong to one who is only trying to destroy it. The wounded swan by right, belongs to Prince Siddhartha." So the prince brought the swan to his garden to have the wound treated, leaving his cousin disappointed and dejected.

The Education of the Prince

As a young boy, Prince Siddhartha was given a good education that would prepare him to be a strong and learned king, one who could rule his country wisely. The most well-known teachers in the country were appointed to be his tutors. His education was based on a syllabus consisting of five main areas of study according to the ancient way of learning. The five main areas were Grammar (Language and Composition), Art and Crafts, Medicine, Logic and Religion.

In addition to the academic subjects, the prince was trained to be a warrior so that he could defend his country when he himself became a king. During his time, wars were fought on horses and elephants so the prince had to learn the art of riding them. And since bows and arrows were the main weapons used in wars, he was taught archery. To make him physically fit and strong, he was coached in athletics and wrestling. He was also taught how to use weapons such as swords, lances and clubs.

The prince was a perfect student. Being intelligent, skilful and strong, he excelled in all fields, whether it was academic learning, the art of warfare, sports or games.

summary

When still in his early years, Prince Siddhartha witnessed a bird carrying off a worm that had been turned up by the farmer's plough. This sight caused him to think about the unhappy situation of creatures which were killed by other creatures for food. Seated under a rose-apple tree, the young prince experienced the joy of meditation. In another incident, the compassionate prince saved the life of a swan which had been wounded by Devadatta's arrow. As a prince, young Siddhartha received a comprehensive education in the arts and sciences and mastered the art of war and the royal sports of his time.



Youth and Marriage

A Life of Luxury

The king became worried whenever he recalled Asita's prediction. He tried every possible way to entertain the prince with a life of luxury and comfort, so that life would appear happy to the prince. He wanted the prince to remain in the palace to inherit the kingdom instead of leaving the royal family to become an ascetic. Thus the king built three different palaces for the prince to live in — one for the winter, one for the summer, and one for the rainy season. In this way, the prince would be well protected from the heat of summer,



the cold of winter, or the heavy rain and did not have to suffer any form of discomfort.

To make life seem always pleasant to the prince, the king built beautiful gardens and extensive parks with lovely ponds in which lotuses of different colours grew and swans and beautiful fish were bred. In the gardens, all withered flowers and leaves were cleared away immediately so that the prince would not see anything dead or unsightly.

The prince wore the finest clothes and ate the choicest foods. Even the servants and attendants who waited upon the prince were well-treated. No one was allowed to talk about old age, sickness or death, for these topics would make the prince think about the problems of life and feel sad. There was no mention of asceticism for fear the idea of renunciation would occur to the prince. In the palace, he was entertained with music and dance all day long.

Marriage of the Prince

All these things were part of the king's plans to hide the miseries of life from the prince so that he would not feel inclined to leave the palace and choose the life of an ascetic. Next, the king decided that the prince should get married so that, having a family, he would not think of leaving the palace. He summoned the prince and put forward the idea of marriage. After some hesitation, the prince replied that the maiden he would marry must be a woman endowed with certain virtues. She had to be compassionate, truthful, faithful, kind and considerate. In short, she had to be pure in body, speech and mind.

The king made a proclamation that on a certain day, Prince Siddhartha would distribute gifts to the young girls in the region, who were of royal birth. They were permitted to enter the palace

and present themselves before the prince. When the day came, a large number of young maidens turned up at the palace, dressed in their best clothes. All of them were so filled with wonder at his handsome appearance that they became very agitated and nervous when they went forward to receive the gifts of jewels from him. Eventually all the gifts were distributed, but none of the recipients managed to impress the prince. Then there came a young maiden who walked calmly and steadily towards the prince and her manner impressed him greatly. Her name was Yashodhara. She bowed to the prince and looked at him calmly. He gazed at her and gave her the necklace he was wearing. With a smile, she said, "Is this all that I am worth?" Then the prince gave her his own ring.

The king heard of the incident and decided that Yashodhara was the right match for Prince Siddhartha. He invited her father to make a proposal for the marriage between the prince and Yashodhara. Yashodhara's father, a king, did not accept the proposal at once. He felt that the prince had been living too much of a life of luxury and indolence, and doubted his physical and intellectual abilities.

To prove that the prince was superior in strength and intelligence to any other eligible young man in the country, King Shuddhodana proclaimed that a public contest would be held in academic studies as well as in the royal sports. A day was fixed for the great event in which many young men, skilled in sports and of great learning, took part. A large gathering of people came to watch the contest.

The prince was tested on his knowledge of Ancient Literature and Writing as well as his ability to solve complicated problems in Mathematics. He also had to compete with other able-bodied young men in athletic events including archery. In every contest, the prince was proclaimed the champion amid thunderous applause and cheers from the spectators. None of the contestants could beat him.

When the contest was over, Yashodhara's father, pleased that his daughter would be marrying a prince of excellence, agreed to the marriage. Soon, a grand royal wedding party was held in the palace. The king felt relieved. He thought that Prince Siddhartha and Princess Yashodhara would live contentedly in the palace for the rest of their lives and that Prince Siddhartha would succeed him as the future ruler of his kingdom.

summary

Prince Siddhartha lived a life of luxury in his father's house. At his father's request, he chose a maiden, Yashodhara, to be his bride. He impressed her father in a public contest and won her hand in marriage.



The Four Sights

The Prince's Request

All this while, the prince had been living in his palaces, still unaware of the realities of life outside the gates. One day, however, he heard of a beautiful park and begged his father's permission to go out of the palace to visit it. The king allowed him to do so but made extensive preparations to decorate the route along which the prince would travel. The way from the royal palace to the park was made fragrant with incense and strewn with flowers. Crowds of people were stationed along the route to welcome him. All the beggars, the very old and the sick were kept away. The prince was only presented with pleasant sights.

The First Sight: Old Age

For this rare and important outing, Prince Siddhartha had a faithful charioteer, Chandaka, to accompany him. As he was riding through the city, he saw before him, in the middle of the road, a grey-haired man with wrinkled skin, who was dressed in rags and was almost blind. He looked very weak as his legs could hardly support his body. Prince Siddhartha was stunned for he had never seen a very old man before. At once, he asked Chandaka for an explanation. "What has happened to this man? Why can't he walk upright? Why is his hair grey? Why isn't it black like ours? Why has he no teeth? Tell me, Chandaka," said the prince.

“He is a man — an old man! Once he was young and strong, with black hair and strong white teeth. Now he is old. One day, we will be like him too!” answered Chandaka.

“Is there no way to stop old age?” asked the prince.

“No, everyone, even the beautiful, the strong and the courageous, will become old one day,” came Chandaka’s reply.

“So old age destroys memory, beauty and courage, and yet with such a sight before their eyes, people are not disturbed!” the prince exclaimed. Deeply moved by such a sight of suffering, he ordered that they return to the palace immediately for he was full of sorrow after discovering the nature of old age.

The Second Sight: Sickness

On another occasion, Prince Siddhartha wanted to visit the park again. The king reluctantly agreed to let him go. However, this time there were no special decorations and no crowds to welcome him. The city was to be seen as it was, with the common people carrying out their daily routine. On this trip, the prince found the scene vastly different from that in the royal palace. Suddenly, the moan of a man lying on the ground attracted his attention. The prince just could not understand what was happening and so he turned to Chandaka for an explanation, “What’s wrong with him, Chandaka? He is crying; he is panting; he can hardly talk!”

“This is a sick man. He is groaning in pain. He cannot even speak,” explained Chandaka.

“Why is he sick?” the prince asked.

“Sickness comes to any man at any time. We too can become sick. No one is continuously in good health. It is natural to be sick,” replied Chandaka.

“Is there no cure?”

“A cure is possible, but a man may become sick again and again,”

“This is the suffering of sickness before their eyes and yet people are not disturbed. How ignorant are men who can enjoy themselves in the shadow of sickness!” the prince exclaimed in despair. He had never known before that man could get so seriously ill. He himself was strong and healthy, and so were those around him in the palace. This was the first time he saw what sickness was like. Deeply moved, he discontinued his journey to the park and returned to the palace in a confused and unhappy state of mind.

The Third and the Fourth Sights: Death and Renunciation

All this did not deter the prince from wanting to visit the park again. For the third time, he sought permission from the king to go out of the palace. The king agreed and arranged for some entertainment in the park. On the way, the prince saw a funeral procession in the city. The people were crying as they followed the men who were carrying the body of a man that laid stiff on a plank.

It was a sight which left the prince puzzled. Again he turned to Chandaka for an answer, “Those men, Chandaka, what are they doing? Why is that man lying on the plank so stiff and unmoving?”

“That man cannot move. He cannot speak, nor cry, nor breathe. He is dead.”

“Is this death? Can it also happen to everyone?” asked the very perplexed prince.

“Yes, my lord, everyone must die one day. We will die too!” replied Chandaka.

Prince Siddhartha was surprised, confused and sad. He had never known that death could happen to everyone. “Can we stop death?” asked the prince.

“No,” was the reply from Chandaka.

“This is the end for all men, and yet people are not afraid and take no notice of death!” exclaimed the prince.

The prince, filled with deep sorrow, ordered Chandaka to turn back as before. However, the charioteer continued the journey to the park because the king had already arranged for music and dance to be performed. At the park, the prince was unimpressed by the performance for his mind was occupied with the problems of old age, sickness and death.

While absorbed in thought, he suddenly saw an ascetic in a yellow robe, who appeared very serene and happy. “Who are you?” the prince asked the man.

“I am an ascetic who has left home in search of the solution to the problems of old age, sickness and death. Now I have no permanent home. I take shelter under a tree or in a deserted temple. I live on food given by the people,” the ascetic replied.

The prince remained quiet but in his mind was the wish to be like this happy ascetic. Prince Siddhartha had seen the unavoidable sufferings of life, that is, old age, sickness and death. He had also

seen a happy man with a calm mind, that is, an ascetic who led a free life without being confined in any place. These four sights had given him a new insight into the meaning of life. He thought, "The luxuries of the palace, this healthy body, this rejoicing youth! What do they mean to me? Someday, we may be sick; we shall become old; from death there is no escape. Pride of youth, pride of life, all thoughtful people should cast them aside."

"A man searching for the true meaning of life should look for a solution. There are two ways of trying to solve the problems of life. One way is to see the problems of old age, sickness and death and to forget them by indulging in pleasures which are not lasting. This is the wrong way. The right way is to recognise that old age, sickness and death are unavoidable and look for a means of overcoming them permanently. By living a life of pleasure in the palace, I seem to be following the wrong way."

The luxuries of the palace did not attract him anymore. He knew that he would have to leave the palace in order to find the Truth.

summary

Prince Siddhartha saw the four sights — an old man, a sick man, a corpse and an ascetic. They caused him to reflect on the problems of suffering. He knew that he would have to leave his life of luxury in the palace in order to find the solution.



Renunciation

Birth of Rahula

During the time when the prince was deeply disturbed by the sufferings of life and the need to look for a solution, he was informed that his wife, Yashodhara, had given birth to a fine healthy son. Instead of being overjoyed like any ordinary father would have been, he exclaimed, "A bond has come into being!" This was because he had already considered leaving the palace, but with the birth of his son, the bonds of family life became even greater. King Shuddhodana heard of the prince's remark and named his grandson Rahula meaning "bond".

Night of His Departure

King Shuddhodana was aware of the thoughts of the prince, so that night, he invited musicians, dancers and singers to the palace to keep the prince entertained. However, the prince was not easily distracted. He was more and more concerned with the sufferings of mankind and the search for a solution. Finally, he fell asleep. The court musicians, singers and dancers were tired and they too fell asleep. The prince soon woke up for he was unhappy and troubled in his thoughts. When he looked around him, he saw the ugly sight of the women sleeping in a disorderly manner. Some had saliva dripping from their mouths, some were grinding their teeth, some were talking in their sleep, some had their mouths wide open while some had their clothes in disarray. These sleeping women, who had

looked so beautiful earlier on when they were entertaining him, now appeared like corpses lying in a graveyard. He realised that beauty is not ever-lasting. This, together with the earlier insights that the young become old, the healthy become sick, and that man dies, made him more determined to find the solution to the problems of life. He knew that he could not find the Truth by remaining in the palace. He had to leave behind his beloved wife and child and his kingdom, even though the pain of separation was great. However, greater still was his compassion for the many and the need to search for the Truth that would relieve mankind from suffering. He turned to Chandaka his loyal charioteer and ordered him to prepare the royal horse for his departure from the palace.

Before he left, he went to the royal chamber to look at his wife and his newborn baby. He found his son sleeping comfortably in the arms of Yashodhara. He wanted to bid farewell to her but finally decided not to wake her, for fear that her pleas might make it more difficult for him to leave the palace.

While he was sure that his wife and child would be well taken care of and provided with the material comforts and protection of the palace, he felt sorry for Yashodhara who had to bear the sorrow of parting. However, he knew that she would come to understand his mission. With all these thoughts in mind, he quietly slipped away from the royal chamber in the silence of the night, accompanied by Chandaka and his horse. Once out of the city gate, he stopped and took a last look at the city and exclaimed with determination, "I shall not enter this city until I have seen the further shore of life and death." Then he started his long journey, riding faster and faster and further and further away from Kapilavastu.

The Renunciation

After miles of travelling towards the south, they came to the bank of a river. The prince, trusting in the strength of his horse, spurred it on to leap across the river. Once across the river, they stopped to rest. Then in the presence of his charioteer, Prince Siddhartha cut off his long black hair with his sword and gave his royal garments to a hunter in exchange for his tattered robe. He then handed his ornaments to Chandaka and instructed him to return to the palace with the ornaments and his horse, and to inform King Shuddhodana of his silent departure and his renunciation of worldly life. With a heavy heart, Chandaka brought the sad news back to the palace. Meanwhile, Prince Siddhartha, adopting the homeless life of an ascetic, moved on, alone but determined. He was then twenty-nine years old.

When the news was broken to King Shuddhodana, he was filled with sorrow. A minister suggested that a mission be sent to dissuade the prince from renouncing the royal life. His suggestion was accepted



and two ministers, accompanied by a retinue, were assigned the task of bringing the prince back to the palace. They searched for him all along the way and finally spotted him on a highway. They begged the prince to return with them but he firmly rejected their request. Feeling very disappointed, they returned to the palace except for five who decided to follow the prince in his search for the Truth. Together they headed for Rajagriha.

The First Meeting with King Bimbisara

Since Prince Siddhartha had renounced his princely title and other worldly ties, he became known among the people simply as the ascetic Gautama. In Rajagriha, the capital of Magadha, his majestic appearance and gentleness caught the attention of the people who were deeply impressed by his presence.

When the ascetic Gautama, with a bowl in his hands, went around the city collecting gifts of food, he was spotted by Bimbisara, the king of Magadha. The king, looking out from his palace, noticed that Gautama looked handsome, stately and calm. Eager to know about him, the king summoned his messengers and ordered them to follow the ascetic.

The messengers saw Gautama going to a hill outside the city. There, after eating his meal, he sat under a tree and began to meditate. On seeing this, the messengers quickly returned to King Bimbisara. Being very keen to meet the ascetic Gautama, the king at once set out for the hill. Accompanied by his retinue, he rode in his royal chariot as far as it could be driven on the uneven ground. Then, he stopped his chariot and walked on until he saw the ascetic Gautama.

After greeting Gautama, King Bimbisara said, "You are still young, a youth in the first phase of life. You have the build of a warrior, one fit to lead a first-rate army. Stay in my country and I will offer you half of my kingdom."

Gautama answered, “O King, my own country is on the slopes of the Himalayas endowed with wealth. I have renounced my home and my kingdom not to seek pleasure but to seek the Truth. That is my aim in life. I beg you not to try and persuade me to stay. Wealth and royalty do not last. They may be taken from one at any time.”

“My heart thinks of no profit, so I have put away my royal inheritance. I prefer to be freed from the burdens of life. Therefore, try not to involve me in new relationships and duties, nor hinder me from completing the work I have begun.”

“May your country enjoy peace and prosperity and may wisdom shine upon your rule like the brightness of the noonday sun. May your royal power be strong and may righteousness reign in your kingdom.”

Deeply touched, the king said, “May you get what you are seeking for and when you have got it, I beg of you, to come back and receive me as your disciple.”

The ascetic Gautama agreed to this request, so King Bimbisara returned happily to his palace.

summary

A son was born to Prince Siddhartha and was named Rahula (bond). The prince renounced the household life in his twenty-ninth year and began his life as an ascetic. Upon reaching Rajagriha, the ascetic Gautama met King Bimbisara who offered him a position of importance in his kingdom but he refused because of his determination to seek the Truth.



Search for Truth

The First Two Religious Teachers

Arada and Udraka were two famous religious teachers who were supposed to be able to teach the best methods of ending suffering through meditation.

The ascetic Gautama first approached Arada and was readily accepted as his disciple. As the most distinguished of the disciples, he mastered within a short time, all of Arada's teachings. In great admiration, Arada declared Gautama to be on the same level as he and invited him to lead the other disciples.

Still finding no solution to suffering and becoming dissatisfied with Arada's teachings, Gautama left him and sought Udraka who was believed to be more capable. Once again, the ascetic Gautama proved himself to be the most distinguished disciple for he learnt quickly everything that Udraka could teach him.

However, he still could not find a solution to the problem of suffering. He turned away from Udraka's teachings and decided to find the Truth in his own way. Accompanied by his five companions, he walked from place to place throughout Magadha.



Six Years of Extreme Asceticism

In due course, they arrived at the village of Uruvilva, south west of Rajagriha. They saw a delightful stretch of land, a lovely woodland grove and a clear flowing river with an easy crossing place. It was there that they practised asceticism in the belief that they could realise the Truth through tortures of the body. As Gautama's determination became stronger, he practised the most severe forms of asceticism. Sometimes, he would stand on a spot for days without food even though this practice gave rise to severe muscle pain and extreme hunger. He would also sleep on a bed of thorns in order to experience the torture of severe pain.

As a prince, Gautama had been both strong and handsome with a radiant complexion. But after having practised extreme asceticism, his body became thinner and thinner and his complexion also suffered. Later, he described his condition at this time as follows:

“Because I ate so little, all my limbs became like the joints of withered creepers, my protruding backbone like the crazy rafters of shabby shed, the pupils of my eyes appeared lying low and deep. My scalp became dry. If I touched my belly skin, I took hold of my backbone. If I touched my backbone, I took hold of my belly. Because I ate so little, the skin of my belly came to touch my backbone.”

Undeterred by failing health and great pain, he and his five companions continued practising extreme asceticism in Uruvilva for six years.

Deciding on the Way to Enlightenment

One day, while having a bath in the river, the ascetic Gautama suddenly lost consciousness due to extreme hunger and was nearly drowned. But he was rescued just in time by his companions. After having regained his senses, he reflected on his condition.

He thought to himself, “Whatever forms of pain that any ascetic in the past has experienced, and that any ascetic in the future will experience, none can experience them more intensely than I do. Yet, by this extreme asceticism, I have not gained Enlightenment. Might there be another way to Enlightenment?”

While he was thinking about these matters, the event which happened at the ploughing ceremony when he was a young boy came back to his mind. On that occasion, he had experienced the joy of meditating in the cool shade of the rose-apple tree. He thought that this method of mental development instead of physical torture might be a way to Enlightenment. When he put the method into practice, he discovered that it could lead to Enlightenment. It was the way which avoided the extremes of a life of luxury and a life of extreme asceticism.

The Offerings Before the Enlightenment

It so happened that when Gautama decided to abandon extreme asceticism, a lady by the name of Sujata came to offer him a bowl of milk-rice. He accepted her offer. His five companions, on seeing him



accepting the milk-rice, felt disgusted and said, "The ascetic Gautama is wavering in his effort. He has gone back to a life of ease." Then, in contempt, they left him and set off for the Deer Park near Varanasi. However, he remained firm in his conviction that he had found the proper method to achieve Enlightenment.

After eating, Gautama gained some strength and walked towards a

shady tree. Before starting on his meditation he was offered a bundle of grass for his seat by Svastika, the grass-cutter. He accepted the grass and spread it to form his seat under the tree, which later came to be known as the Bodhi tree.

The Struggle for Enlightenment

Gautama went around the tree three times as a sign of his determination and then sat facing the east. It was under this tree that he made the firm resolution:

“ My skin and bones may dry up,
My flesh and blood may dry up in my body,
But until I attain Enlightenment,
I will not leave this seat.”

Thus he expressed his determination to attain Enlightenment. One who is determined to attain this highest goal for the sake of all is called a Bodhisattva. While meditating under the Bodhi tree, the Bodhisattva was approached by Mara, the tempter, who urged him to give up the struggle for Enlightenment.

Mara said, “How thin and pale you look. You are so close to death. The path of struggle is rough, difficult and hard to bear. Live, and enjoy yourself!”

To this, the Bodhisattva replied, “O! You, friend of the indolent, the wicked one. Why do you come to tempt me? I have faith, power and understanding. While I am exerting myself, why do you speak to me of enjoyment? While the body is wasting away, the mind gets more



tranquil, meditation gets more steadfast, and understanding deeper. I no longer look for sensual pleasures.”

“Desire, discontent, hunger and thirst, craving, laziness and drowsiness, cowardice, doubt, hypocrisy and dullness, gain, fame, honour, celebrity and conceit — these are your armies. None but the brave will conquer them.”

“Death in battle is better for me than living defeated. Seeing on all sides an army, I am going to fight. I will shatter your armies with understanding, just as one shatters a claypot with a stone.”

“Having my thoughts under control, and my attention firm, I shall go from kingdom to kingdom, training many disciples. They will be determined and energetic.”

Mara was shaken and, admitting defeat, retreated submissively.

Summary

Gautama learned meditation from two teachers, but found that it alone could not lead him to the Truth. He practised extreme asceticism for six years. When he realised that it only unsettled the mind and weakened the body, he decided to give it up. After receiving offerings of food and grass, he seated himself under the Bodhi tree, determined to realise the Truth. Then he overcame the temptation of Mara.



Enlightenment

Attaining Full Enlightenment

On the night of the full moon in the fifth month of the year, the Bodhisattva attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya. That night, he was in deep meditation. In that calm and purified state, he was able to focus his mind on a single point.

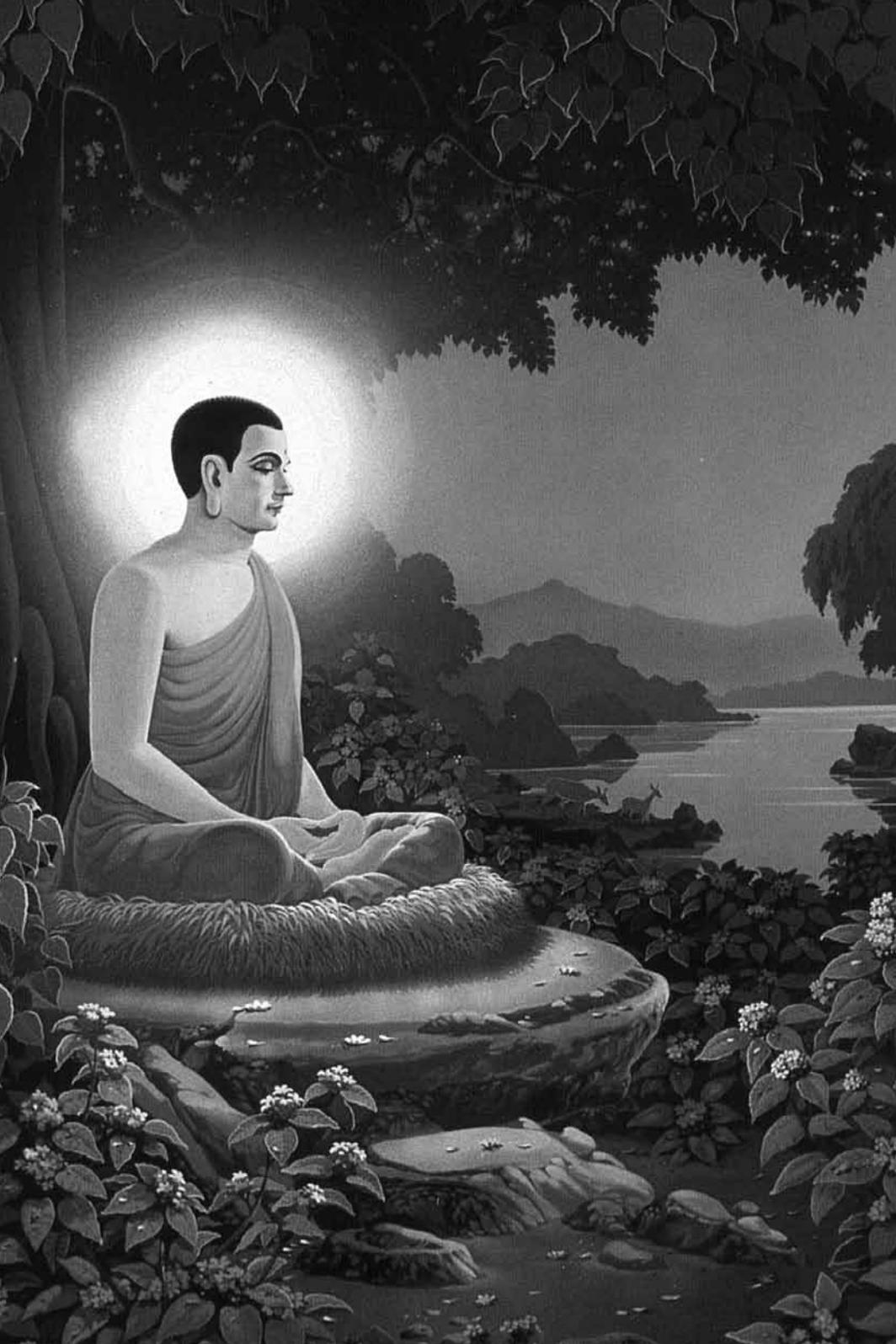
In the first part of the night, he developed the mental power by which he recollected his past lives in detail. He recalled the type of life he had led, the place he had lived in, and the occupation he had followed, in each of these lives.

In the middle of the night, he developed the mental power to see the past lives of others. He saw the evil-doers being born in the state of suffering, and the good ones in the state of happiness.

Finally, just before dawn, the Buddha realised that all things arise dependent upon causes. Suffering is caused by desire and ignorance. Therefore, when these are removed, suffering does not arise. After this realisation, he was freed from desire and ignorance, and rebirth. He acquired perfect wisdom and attained Enlightenment.

Reflecting upon His victory over ignorance, he thought with joy:

*“ Truly, when things are revealed
To one who earnestly meditates,*



*Then his doubts disappear completely,
For he understands things and their causes.*

He has destroyed the causes of suffering

*He stands and conquers the army of Mara,
Even as the sun lights up the sky.”*

At the age of thirty-five, after six years of struggle, he had become a Buddha.

After the Enlightenment

After the Enlightenment, the Buddha remained seated in deep meditation under the Bodhi tree for seven days, experiencing the bliss of freedom. For the next seven days, He stood gazing at the Bodhi tree and reflected upon the usefulness of the tree during the crucial period before the Enlightenment.

Then the Buddha was approached by a proud youth of the priestly class who wanted to know the qualities that made a man worthy of respect. In answer, the Buddha explained that a man's worthiness does not depend upon the class in which he is born. Rather, the man worthy of respect is the one who has rid himself of all evil, is humble, pure and has self-control and is perfect in knowledge. The youth left the Buddha feeling humbled and satisfied with the answer.

On another occasion, a young man approached the Buddha, wishing to know the meaning of happiness. So the Buddha explained:

*“Solitude is happiness for one who is content,
Has learnt the Teaching and has seen the Truth.
In the world, happiness is goodwill
And restraint towards living creatures.*

*The overcoming of desire,
Detachment in the world is happiness.
But to be free of conceit
Is the greatest happiness of all ”*

One day, two merchants came by. Seeing the Buddha seated under the Bodhi tree, they approached and greeted Him. Then they offered Him a meal of rice cakes and honey. As they offered it, they expressed the desire that they might be blessed for this act. In response, the Buddha bestowed a blessing upon them so that they might enjoy happiness and prosperity in the future. After having served the Buddha, they formally requested Him to accept them as His followers. The Buddha agreed and so they took refuge in the Buddha and His Teaching.

The Decision to Teach

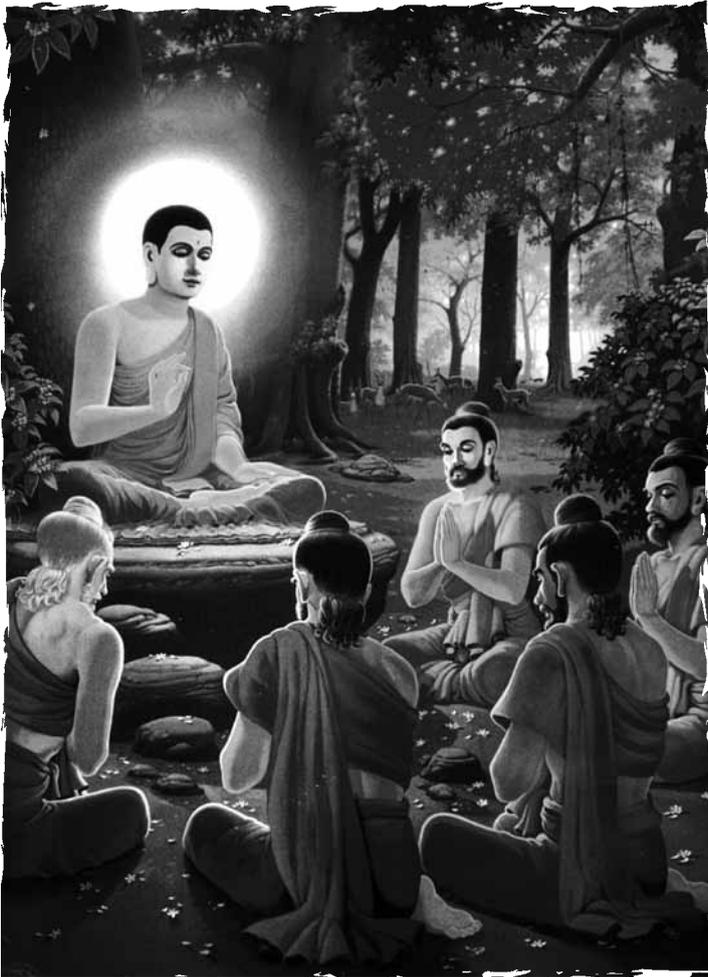
Out of compassion for mankind, the Buddha was then ready to spread His Teaching to all who could benefit from it. First, He had to find out who were the wise and learned ones who would most quickly understand His Teaching. He recalled His former teachers, Arada and Udraka, but both men were no longer alive. Then he thought about the five ascetics who had, earlier on, been practising extreme asceticism together with him. They were staying at the Deer Park near Varanasi, about 100 miles away, and He set out to meet them.

On His way, He met an ascetic called Upaka, who greeted Him respectfully and said, “You look serene and radiant. Who is your teacher? Whose teaching do you follow?”

With great assurance, the Buddha replied that He had attained Enlightenment by His own efforts, and that He was going to Varanasi to set the Wheel of Truth in motion. After that they parted company.

The First Five Monks

After many days of walking, the Buddha arrived at the Deer Park (Now known as Sarnath). When the five ascetics saw the Buddha coming towards them, they decided to ignore Him. They thought that He had given up the struggle for Enlightenment when He accepted Sujata's offering of food.



However, as the Buddha approached them, they sensed that He has somehow changed. His majestic air impressed them greatly, and they found it impossible not to respect Him. One of them went up willingly to meet Him and took His bowl and outer robe while another prepared a seat for Him. The third ascetic placed a basin of water for Him to wash His feet and the fourth arranged a foot-stool while the fifth one presented Him with a towel.

Then the Buddha told them that He had not given up the struggle and had not gone back to a life of luxury. He said, “Nirvana has been attained. I shall instruct you in the Teaching. If you practise what I teach, you will attain Enlightenment here and now.”

The five ascetics, though at first doubtful of His achievements, were finally convinced that He had attained Enlightenment. That evening, the Buddha delivered His first sermon which is known as *The Turning of The Wheel of the Dharma*, which means “Spreading the Teaching of the Buddha”.

The first to understand the Buddha’s Teaching was Kaundinya, who requested the Buddha to ordain him. The Buddha agreed and ordained him by declaring, “Come, monk! Lead a religious life to make a complete end of suffering.” When the other four ascetics had fully understood the Teaching, they too, asked for and received ordination. Thus the Order of Monks was formed.

summary

On the night of the full moon in the fifth month of the year, the Buddha attained Enlightenment. He understood that desire and ignorance are the causes of suffering and rebirth, and He realised that when the causes are removed, suffering ends. Later, He decided to teach the Truth to the five ascetics who had been His companions. At the Deer Park, the Buddha taught the five ascetics who became the first five monks of the Order.



The Four Noble Truths: (I) Suffering

The First Sermon — The Four Noble Truths

In His first sermon to the five ascetics in the Deer Park near Varanasi, the Buddha spoke of the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths sum up, in a systematic formula, the central teachings of the Buddha.

They are:

- (1) The Truth of Suffering;
- (2) The Truth of the Cause of Suffering;
- (3) The Truth of the End of Suffering;
- (4) The Truth of the Path leading to the End of Suffering.

The Truth of Suffering

The Buddha's discovery of the solution to the problem of suffering began with the recognition that life is suffering. This is the first of the Four Noble Truths. If people examine their own experiences or look at the world around them, they will see that life is full of suffering. Suffering may be physical or mental.

Physical Suffering

Physical suffering takes many forms. People must have observed at one time or another, how their aged relatives suffer. Most of these aged suffer aches and pains in their joints and many find it hard to move about by themselves. With advancing age, the elderly find life

difficult because they cannot see, hear or eat properly. The pain of disease, which strikes young and old alike, is unbearable, and the pain of death brings much grief and suffering. Even the moment of birth gives pain both to the mother and the child that is born.

The truth is that the suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death are unavoidable. Some fortunate people may now be enjoying relatively happy and carefree lives, but it is only a matter of time before they, too, will experience suffering. What is worse, this suffering must be borne alone. For example, a man may be very concerned that his mother is growing old. Yet he cannot take her place and suffer the pains of ageing on her behalf. Similarly, if a boy falls very ill, his mother cannot experience the pains of his illness for him. Finally, neither mother nor son can help each other when the moment of death comes.

The Buddha taught people to recognise that suffering is a part of life and that one cannot avoid it. There is a well-known story of Kisa Gotami which illustrates this point very well.

Story of Kisa Gotami

Kisa Gotami was a young woman from a well-to-do family and was married to a wealthy merchant. When her only son was about a year old, he fell ill and suddenly died. Overcome with grief, Kisa Gotami took the dead child in her arms and went from house to house asking people if they knew of a medicine that would restore her child to life. Of course, no one was able to help her. Finally she met a follower of the Buddha, who advised her to see Him.

When she carried the dead child to the Buddha and told Him her sad story, He listened with patience and compassion, and then said to her, "There is only one way to solve your problem. Go and get me four or five mustard seeds from any family in which there has never been a death."

Kisa Gotami set off to look for such a household, but without success. Every family she visited had experienced the death of some person or other. At last, she understood what the Buddha had wanted her to find out herself — that death comes to all. Accepting the fact that death is inevitable, she no longer grieved. She took the child's body away and later returned to the Buddha to become one of His followers.

Mental Suffering

Besides physical suffering, there are also various forms of mental suffering. People feel sad, lonely or depressed when they lose someone they love through separation or death. They feel irritated or uncomfortable when they are forced to be in the company of those whom they dislike or those who are unpleasant. People also suffer when they are unable to satisfy their limitless needs and wants. Teenagers, for example, may feel utterly frustrated and dejected if their parents refuse to let them participate in a late-night party or spend large sums of money on expensive fashionable clothing. Adults, on the other hand, may be extremely unhappy if they are unable to gain wealth, power or prestige. These are the mental sufferings that can arise from being separated from the people one likes, being together with people one dislikes, or just not getting what one desires.

Happiness in Life

When the Buddha said that there is suffering in life, He did not deny that there is happiness also. On the contrary, He spoke of various kinds of happiness, such as the happiness of friendship, the happiness of family life, the happiness of having a healthy body and mind, and so on. But all these kinds of happiness are impermanent and when one loses them, one suffers. For example, one may like a pleasant and charming person and enjoy his or her company. But

when one is separated from that person, the happiness turns into suffering. One suffers because of one's attachment to pleasures that do not last.

People often remain unaware of the inevitable sufferings of life because they are distracted by temporary pleasures. Imagine a man enjoying himself, rowing a boat down a swift but treacherous river. He becomes so involved in enjoying the ride on the sparkling water in the warm sunshine that he does not bother to think of any trouble that may be ahead. He is unaware of the fact that, just around the next bend in the river, there are wild rapids and whirlpools that will smash his boat against the jagged rocks lurking just below the surface. Fortunately, someone on the shore calls out to warn him of the dangers ahead. Being a sensible person, he heeds the timely advice.

In the same way, the Buddha taught people not to be distracted by momentary pleasures, but to recognise the fact that these do not last forever. Therefore, people should learn from Him the way to solve the problem of suffering.

Summary

Suffering is a fact of life. There are four unavoidable physical sufferings — birth, old age, sickness and death. There are also three forms of mental suffering — separation from the people one loves, contact with people one dislikes and the frustration of desires. The truths of suffering must first be recognised before the solution to the real problems of life can be found.



The Four Noble Truths: (II) Cause of Suffering

Children, even at the young age of four or five, may experience the sharp agonising pain of toothache. As long as they do not know the cause of their suffering, they will continue to eat as many sweets and chocolates bars as before and make their problem worse. Only when they learn from their parents or the dentist, will they understand how tooth decay comes about. If they do not want to suffer any more pain, they will control their craving for sweets and also learn to brush their teeth regularly. In the same way, people have to identify the cause of their problem first, before they are able to act intelligently to avoid the suffering arising from the problem.

The Cause of Suffering

The Buddha had observed that life is suffering. Before He could find a solution to the problem of suffering in life, He had first to look for the cause of suffering. The Buddha was just like a good doctor who first observes a patient's symptoms and identifies the cause of the illness before prescribing a cure. The Buddha discovered that the direct causes of suffering are desire or craving, and ignorance. This is the truth of the cause of suffering, which is the Second Noble Truth.

Craving

Craving is the deep-seated desire that all living beings have for the pleasures of the senses, and for life itself. For instance, people always

seek to enjoy good food, entertainment and pleasant company. Yet none of these pleasures can give them complete and lasting satisfaction. After the fine meal has been eaten, the beautiful music heard and the pleasant company shared, one is still not fully content. One will want to enjoy these pleasures again and again, and for as long as possible.

However, even if these experiences are repeated, dissatisfaction can still result. Imagine eating one's favourite food for every meal, day after day. There will come a day when one simply feels disgusted and will not enjoy that food anymore. And so it is the same with the other pleasures of the senses.

People are always looking out for new kinds of enjoyment. When they are tired of relatively harmless enjoyments like fine food, music and pleasant company, they begin to look for satisfaction elsewhere. Some people may even crave for more destructive experiences like taking alcohol or drugs. Such desires will only bring about more suffering. Enjoying such pleasures of the senses is like licking honey from the blade of a knife or carrying a firebrand against the wind. In so doing, one is likely to cut or burn oneself.

People who desire to own many things can never be fully satisfied too. Like children in a toyshop, they crave for all the attractive things they see around them. But like children too, they soon become dissatisfied with what they already have and desire for more. Sometimes, they can hardly eat or sleep until they get what they want. Restless and dissatisfied, they will do anything to possess something they desire very much. Yet when they have succeeded in getting what they want, they may still find their happiness short-lived. Many will be too worried for the safety and condition of their new possessions to enjoy it. Then when the object they possess eventually breaks into pieces and has to be thrown away, they will suffer its loss even more.

When we have obtained something that we desire, we may want more and more of it, and so greed arises. Because of desire and greed, people will lie, cheat and steal to get what they want. Uncontrolled desires can also lead to addiction, for example, to smoking, drinking and overeating, all of which lead to suffering and cause mental and physical harm.

If one is prevented by another person from getting what one desires, one may feel angry with that person. Desire when obstructed can lead to ill will and anger. This in turn can lead to harsh words, violent quarrels and even fights or killings. All this is suffering.

Most people crave life more than anything else in the world, despite its frustrations and the inevitable sufferings of old age, sickness and death. If one feels that one's life is in danger, one instinctively fights to preserve it. It is this deep-seated craving for life that leads one to suffer birth and death, again and again.

Ignorance

Craving or desire is like a great tree having many branches. There are branches of greed, of ill will and of anger. The fruit of this tree is suffering, but how does the tree of craving arise? Where does it grow? The answer is that the tree of craving is rooted in ignorance. It grows out of ignorance.

Ignorance is the inability to see the truth about things, to see things as they really are. There are many truths about the world which people are ignorant of because of the limitations of their understanding.

Science has shown, for instance, that there are sounds that people are unable to hear and waves of light which they are unable to see. People would be totally unaware of radio waves, or ultra-violet light rays if special instruments had not been developed to enable them

to observe these things. So long as people remain ignorant of things about the world in which they live, they suffer from all kinds of misunderstandings and delusions.

When people develop their minds and acquire wisdom through study, careful thought and meditation, they will see the Truth. They will see things as they really are. They will understand the suffering and impermanence of life, the Law of Cause and Effect and the Four Noble Truths. By overcoming craving and ignorance, they will attain true happiness and Enlightenment just as the Buddha did about 2,500 years ago.

summary

In order to remove suffering, people must know its causes. Craving and ignorance are the two main causes of suffering. People crave for the pleasures of the senses, like enjoying good food, beautiful music and pleasant company. But these pleasures do not last and people become restless and dissatisfied. They may even turn to violence to satisfy their uncontrolled desires. All these lead to suffering. People also crave life and this leads to birth and death, again and again. Craving is rooted in ignorance, which means not knowing the truth about things. When wisdom is acquired, ignorance is removed and suffering ends.



The Four Noble Truths: (III) End of Suffering

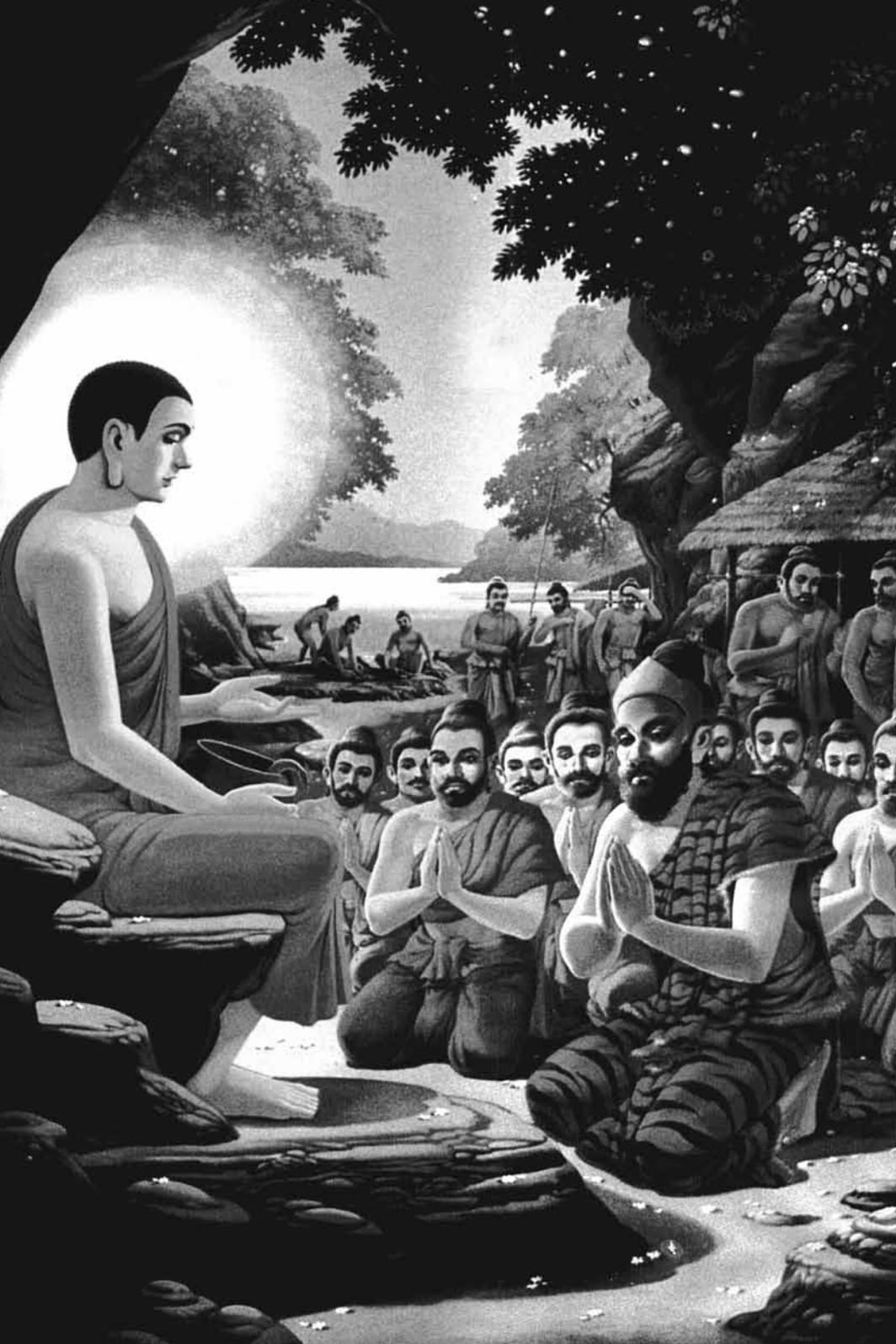
The Buddha's realisation of the end of suffering and His attainment of Nirvana at the age of thirty-five, crowned His search for Truth with success. For six years, the Bodhisattva had spared no effort to find a solution to the problems of suffering. He had tried the principal methods of ending suffering and had found them wanting. Eventually He found His own solution to the problems of life.

Confidence in the Buddha's Teaching

Having realised the Truth through His own efforts, the Buddha offered it to all who were ready to listen.

There is an old story of a turtle and a fish. The turtle lives on land as well as in the water while the fish only lives in the water. One day, when the turtle had returned from a visit to the land, he told the fish of his experiences. He explained that creatures living on land walked on solid ground. However, the fish could not imagine a place where other fish did not live and where creatures walked rather than swam. He refused to believe that dry land really existed because that was something beyond his own experience. In the same way, people may not have experienced the end of suffering, but it does not mean that the end of suffering is not possible.

A patient must have confidence in an experienced doctor, otherwise he will never take the medicine that the doctor has prescribed for him and will not be cured of his sickness. Similarly, people must



have confidence in the Teaching of the Buddha who has shown that the end of suffering is really possible.

The End of Suffering

The end of suffering is the final goal of the Buddha's Teaching. It can be experienced by anyone here and now. For example, when greed and anger arise in one's mind, one experiences unhappiness, and when thoughts of greed and anger cease, one's mind becomes happy and peaceful. To end suffering completely, one must remove desire, ill will and ignorance. This is the Third Noble Truth, that is, the End of Suffering.

Happiness

The Buddha taught that the end of suffering is supreme happiness. Every step towards the end of suffering is accompanied by ever-increasing joy. The Buddha said,

*“ Health is the greatest gain,
Contentment is the greatest wealth,
A trusted friend is the best relative,
Nirvana is the highest happiness.”*

Those who follow the Teaching of the Buddha live happily without greed among those who are overwhelmed by desire. They live happily without anger among those who harbour ill will. The more people free themselves from desire, ill will and ignorance, the greater will be their happiness. When they have completely overcome desire, ill will and ignorance, they will know the supreme happiness as experienced by the Buddha.

Enlightenment

By putting the Buddha's Teaching into practice, people too can achieve supreme Enlightenment. Enlightenment has countless qualities of which perfect wisdom and great compassion are the most important. Through perfect wisdom, the Buddha understands the real nature of all things. Through great compassion, He is able to help countless beings overcome their suffering.

Experiencing Nirvana for Oneself

The end of suffering has been described as supreme happiness and Enlightenment. However, these terms do not fully express the real nature of the end of suffering or Nirvana. Nirvana cannot be exactly put into words. Attempting to describe Nirvana is like saying that a mango is sweet and that it is not like a banana or an apple. One has to eat a mango in order to know for oneself what the taste is really like. Similarly, Nirvana has to be experienced for oneself.

Therefore, if people have confidence in the Buddha's Teaching and put it into practice, they can achieve happiness, peace and Enlightenment.

summary

People must have confidence in the Buddha when He says that the end of suffering is really possible, even though they may not now be able to experience it themselves. Nirvana, or the end of suffering, is the goal of the Buddhist path, which is attainable by all. Nirvana is described as true happiness, peace and Enlightenment, but people have to experience Nirvana for themselves in order to know what it is really like.



The Four Noble Truths: (IV) Path Leading to the End of Suffering

The Middle Path

As a youth, Prince Siddhartha enjoyed the indulgent life of pleasure in his father's palace. Later, when he renounced the worldly life and became an ascetic, he experienced the hardship of torturing his mind and body. Finally, not long before attaining Enlightenment, he realised the fruitlessness of these two extreme ways of life. He realised that the way to happiness and Enlightenment was to lead a life that avoids these extremes. He described this life as the Middle Path.

These three ways of life may be compared to the three strings of different tensions on a lute. The loose string, which is like a life of indulgence, produces a poor sound when struck. The overly tight string, which is like a life of extreme asceticism, similarly produces a poor sound when struck and is moreover, likely to break at any moment. Only the middle string which is neither too loose nor too tight and is like the Middle Path, produces a pleasant and harmonious sound when struck.

So those who follow the Middle Path which avoids the extreme of indulging one's desires and the opposite extreme of torturing one's mind and body unreasonably, will find happiness, peace of mind and Enlightenment. This is the Fourth Noble Truth of the path leading to the end of suffering.

The Noble Eightfold Path

Like a wise and experienced doctor, the Buddha recognised the sickness of suffering. He identified its causes and discovered its cure. Then for the benefit of mankind, the Buddha put His discovery into a systematic formula which one can easily follow in order to get rid of one's suffering. The formula includes both physical and mental treatment, and is called the Noble Eightfold Path. This is the Fourth Noble Truth.

The steps of this Noble Eightfold Path are:

- (1) **Right Understanding;**
Right understanding means to understand the Law of Cause and Effect and the Four Noble Truths.
- (2) **Right Thought;**
Right thought means not to harbour thoughts of greed and anger.
- (3) **Right Speech;**
Right speech means to avoid lying, tale-bearing, harsh speech and idle talk.
- (4) **Right Action;**
Right action means not to destroy any life, not to steal and not to commit adultery.
- (5) **Right Livelihood;**
Right livelihood means to avoid any occupation that brings harm to oneself and others.
- (6) **Right Effort;**
Right effort means to earnestly do one's best in the right direction.

(7) **Right Mindfulness;**

Right mindfulness means always to be aware and attentive.

(8) **Right Concentration;**

Right concentration means to train the mind to be steady and calm in order to realise the true nature of things.

The Three Ways of Practice

The eight steps of the Noble Eightfold Path are divided into three ways of practice, namely Good Conduct, Mental Development and Wisdom, as listed in the table below:

The Noble Eightfold Path	
(I) Good Conduct	Right Speech Right Action Right Livelihood
(II) Mental Development	Right Effort Right Mindfulness Right Concentration
(III) Wisdom	Right Understanding Right Thought

Through Good Conduct, people learn to control their words and deeds and to avoid unwholesome behaviour. In this way, they can live in harmony with themselves and with society, and lay the foundations for Mental Development and Wisdom. Through Mental Development, they learn to be self-reliant, mindful and calm so that they do not stray from the path of Good Conduct. In this way, they purify their minds in order to gain Wisdom. Through Wisdom, they learn to see things as they really are, to understand

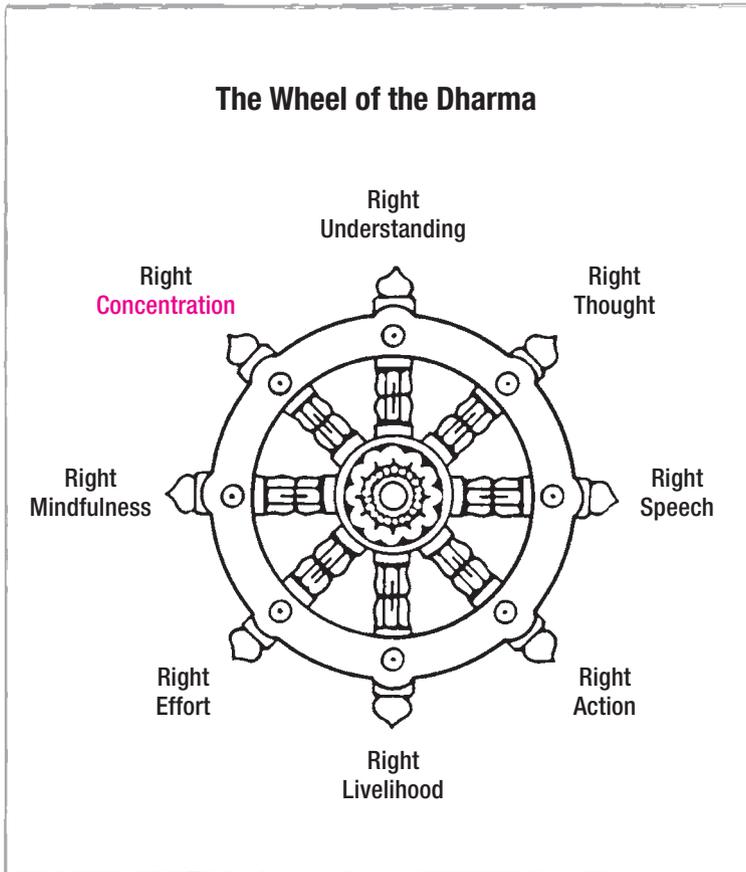
the relationship between cause and effect and the Four Noble Truths. In this way, they remove craving and ignorance, and experience the end of suffering. But in order to attain this goal, all three ways of practice must be followed and none should be ignored or neglected.

Therefore, those who wish to follow the Buddha's Teaching should seek to understand the Four Noble Truths clearly. The truly wise are those who understand the Four Noble Truths and follow the Noble Eightfold Path that will lead them away from craving and ignorance. When they are freed from craving and ignorance, they will avoid quarrelling, killing, stealing, lying, harsh speech and other unwholesome actions.

Following the Noble Eightfold Path is like entering a dark room with a light in one's hand. All the darkness will be dispelled and the room will be filled with light. It is the light of Wisdom that will clear away the darkness of ignorance.

summary

The path to the end of suffering is the Middle Path taught by the Buddha. This is the Noble Eightfold Path of right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. The path may be divided into the three ways of practice, namely, Good Conduct, Mental Development and Wisdom.



The Noble Eightfold Path is often represented by the eight spokes of the Dharma wheel. A wheel indicates motion. The Buddha's Teaching, like a wheel, moves on and on, helping people to overcome suffering and realise the Truth.



Growth of the Buddhist Community

Conversion of Yasha

With the conversion of the five ascetics at the Deer Park, the Order of Monks was formed. Subsequently, more and more people came in contact with the Buddha and they were so impressed by His manner and His Teaching that they asked to be accepted into the Order. During this period when the Buddha stayed at the Deer Park, the Order expanded to include fifty-five more monks, making a total of sixty.

The expansion of the Order began with the conversion of Yasha, the son of a rich merchant who lived in Varanasi. He led a life of luxury and pleasure, but found it boring and meaningless. One night, like the Buddha on the night of his renunciation, he woke up from his sleep and saw his courtesans and musicians lying about in the hall in a disorderly and unsightly manner. He was repelled by what he saw, for in the dim light of the oil lamp, the place looked like a cemetery strewn with corpses. Filled with disgust he cried, "It is horrible! It is horrible!" and ran out of his mansion.

Outside the city gate at the Deer Park, he was still crying, "It is horrible! It is horrible!" when he came upon the Buddha.

"Here it is not fearful. Here it is not horrible! Come, Yasha, be seated. I shall tell you about the nature of life," said the Buddha in a reassuring tone.

The Buddha then went on to teach Yasha about the Four Noble Truths. After hearing this Teaching from the Buddha, Yasha was like a man awakened from a dream. He realised that life is suffering, that beauty does not last, nor does any of the enjoyments of life. Yasha decided to stay with the Buddha and become His disciple. He said, "O Lord, may I be ordained?"

In reply, the Buddha said, "Come, monk, well taught is the Dharma. Lead the holy life."

Yasha was ordained, and later became an Arhat, that is, one who has overcome desire, ill will and ignorance. Meanwhile, his father had been searching for him. Eventually, he came upon the Buddha who explained His Teaching to him. He listened with growing enthusiasm and became the first lay follower to take the Threefold Refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

At the invitation of Yasha's father, the Buddha, together with Yasha, went for a meal at his house. While at his house, the Buddha talked about His Teaching, after which Yasha's mother and his former wife took the Threefold Refuge and became the Buddha's first two woman lay followers.

Fifty-four friends of Yasha heard of his conversion and they sought out the Buddha. They too were impressed by His Teaching and asked to be accepted as monks. The Order then numbered sixty members in all.

Instruction to the First Missionaries

When the first sixty disciples had become Arhats, the Buddha decided that it was time for them to go out and spread His Teaching. He said to them, "Go forth to teach, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare and happiness of men. Let not two of you go

by the same way. Monks, teach the Dharma that is entirely good. Explain a holy life that is utterly perfect and pure. I myself shall go to Uruvilva to teach the Dharma.”

The sixty disciples were instructed to go to sixty different places to spread the Teaching. They brought to the Buddha, many people who wished to be admitted into the Order. At that period, everyone had to be ordained by the Buddha Himself. Thinking that such an arrangement would be inconvenient for His disciples, He made a rule that all monks could ordain their novices. This rule is still followed by Buddhist monks today.

The Thirty Young Men

When the rainy season was over, the Buddha left the Deer Park and headed for Uruvilva. On the way, He rested at the foot of a tree in a grove. At that time, thirty young men were amusing themselves in the vicinity. All of them brought their wives along except one who, being a bachelor, had brought a courtesan with him. While they were all enjoying themselves, the courtesan stole their belongings and ran away. As soon as they discovered this, all the young men went in search of her.

Seeing the Buddha under the tree, they enquired whether He had seen her passing by. The Buddha calmly asked, “Which do you think is better, young man, seeking a woman or seeking oneself?”

“Seeking oneself, O Lord!” replied the young men.

Then the Buddha told them to listen to His Teaching. The young men were so moved by what they heard that they asked to be ordained and entered the Order, just as Yasha and his friends had done after hearing the Teaching.

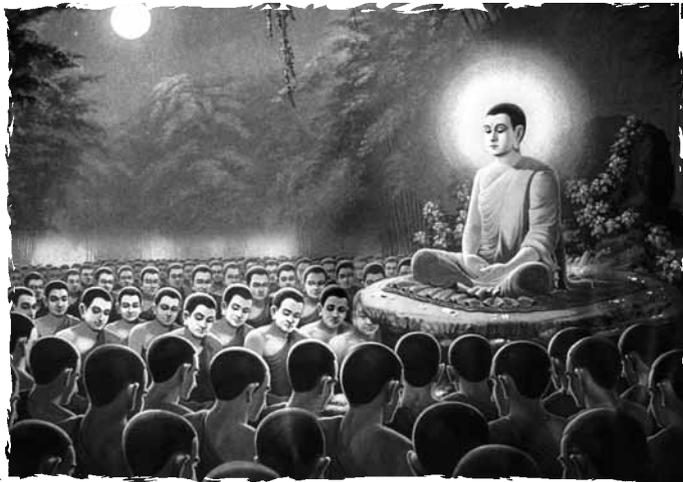
The Kashyapa Brothers

Finally, the Buddha arrived at Uruvilva where there were three matted-hair ascetics, known as the Kashyapa brothers. These three brothers had one thousand disciples who practised fire-worship. They were renowned for their supernatural powers and felt that their practice was much better than other existing religious systems.

The Buddha explained to their leader, Uruvilva Kashyapa that he was not free from desire, ill will and ignorance, and that his practice could not lead him to Enlightenment.

When Kashyapa realised the uselessness of fire-worship, he asked the Buddha to accept him into the Order. The Buddha would not accept him immediately. Instead, He asked Kashyapa to consult his own disciples first. After Kashyapa had spoken to his disciples, all of them asked to be allowed to join the Order.

When they were ordained, they cut their hair and threw them together with their belongings and sacrificial articles into the river.



The two younger brothers, who were staying on the river bank further downstream, were startled when they saw these sacrificial articles floating down the river. They made enquiries and were impressed when they heard of the Buddha's Teaching. These two younger Kashyapa brothers, along with their five hundred disciples, also abandoned the practice of fire-worship and became disciples of the Buddha.

The "Fire Sermon"

After the conversion of the fire-worshippers, the Buddha preached His "Fire Sermon". He used the term "fire" as a metaphor with



respect to the practice of fire-worship. In the ritual of fire-worship, the matted-hair ascetics kindled a real fire, but in the Buddha's sermon, all experiences of the senses are said to be burning with the "fires" of greed, anger and delusion. It is only through extinguishing these "fires" that people can attain the peace of Nirvana.

Summary

The expansion of the Order began with the conversion of Yasha. Later, Yasha's father was the first layman to take the Threefold Refuge. Yasha's wife and mother were the first women lay followers of the Buddha. From relatives and friends of the monks, the conversion extended to others like the fire-worshippers. In his "Fire Sermon", the Buddha explained that the "fires" of greed, anger and delusion should be put out in order to end suffering and achieve Enlightenment. Owing to the rapid expansion of the Order, the Buddha allowed monks to ordain their own disciples.



The Buddha in Magadha Kingdom

Conversion of King Bimbisara

From Uruvilva, the Buddha proceeded to Rajagriha, where He took shelter at a park called the Palm Grove. By the time he arrived there. He was already well known as the Arhat, the Fully Enlightened One, and the Great Teacher.

King Bimbisara heard of the Buddha's return to Rajagriha and was anxious to meet Him again. With hundreds of his noblemen and subjects, King Bimbisara set out for the Palm Grove. On their arrival, they were surprised to see Uruvilva Kashyapa, his two brothers and all their disciples with the Buddha. Since Uruvilva Kashyapa was a famous and well-respected matted-hair ascetic, the king and his retinue wondered who the real master was in that assembly — the Buddha or Uruvilva Kashyapa. Knowing what they were thinking about, the Buddha had Kashyapa declare publicly that he had abandoned the practice of fire-worship and had accepted the Buddha as his master. Kashyapa did so by saying, "The Buddha is my teacher, I am His disciple."

The Buddha then gave a sermon on charity, morality, the evil of clinging to pleasures of the senses, and the advantage of renouncing them. He also talked about suffering and its cause, and the way to end it. After they had listened to and understood the Buddha's Teaching, all those present asked to be accepted as His lay-followers. King Bimbisara said, "When I was young, I had the ambition to be a

king. Now, I have realised that ambition. I also wished the Buddha would visit my kingdom, so that I could have the opportunity to honour Him and hear His Teaching. All these wishes have been fulfilled. Now I go to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha for refuge.”

King Bimbisara invited the Buddha and His disciples to his palace the next morning for their meals, and personally served the Buddha during the meal. Since King Bimbisara wanted the Buddha to remain in his kingdom for a long time, he had to find a place where the people could easily reach the Buddha to listen to His Teaching. Such a place had to be quiet and away from the busy crowds of the city because it also had to be suitable for meditation. Considering the Bamboo Grove to be the most appropriate place, King Bimbisara offered it to the Buddha and the Order for their use.

Conversion of Shariputra and Maudgalyayana

During that time in Rajagriha, there was a religious teacher by the name of Sanjaya who had two hundred and fifty disciples. His two chief disciples were Shariputra and Maudgalyayana. These two disciples could not find the way to end suffering, so they became dissatisfied with the teachings of their master. They made a promise to each other that whoever found the Truth first should share it with the other. After making this promise, they parted and went out to search for the teaching which would bring an end to all suffering. One morning, Shariputra saw Ashvajit who was one of the first five monks, walking in the distance. Impressed by his appearance, Shariputra thought, “This is indeed a perfect one!” He followed Ashvajit until the latter had completed his rounds for alms. Then he approached him and respectfully asked, “On account of whom, your reverence, have you renounced the family life? Who is your teacher? Whose teaching do you profess?”

“I have renounced the family life on account of the Buddha. He is my teacher and I profess His Teaching,” replied Ashvajit.

“But what is His Teaching about? What does He point out?” Shariputra asked eagerly.

“I am His new disciple. I am also new to His Teaching. I cannot tell you much. But I can tell you its meaning briefly.”

“Tell me briefly, then.”

Ashvajit said, “The Buddha explains how suffering arises and how it comes to an end. This is His Teaching.”

Shariputra at once understood this and exclaimed, “If this is indeed the Teaching, you have seen the sorrowless path which is unseen by others.”

After asking where the Buddha was, Shariputra left Ashvajit and went to look for his friend, Maudgalyayana. On seeing him, Maudgalyayana was impressed by his serene appearance and asked, “Have you found the Truth?”

“Yes, I have found it!” said Shariputra. He gave an account of his meeting with Ashvajit, and repeated the latter’s comments. In that instant, Maudgalyayana understood the meaning of the Buddha’s Teaching. Thereupon, both of them decided to find the Buddha and become His disciples.

Before going to the Buddha, they told their master Sanjaya and his disciples of their intention. He tried to stop them from going, but failed. His disciples were swayed by the enthusiasm of the two and followed them to the Bamboo Grove.

Seeing them approaching, the Buddha said to those around Him, “These two men who are coming will be my chief disciples.”

When the two came up to the Buddha, they asked, “Lord, may we receive ordination?”

To this request, the Buddha replied, “Come, monks, well taught is the Dharma. Live a life of purity to end suffering.”

In this manner, Shariputra and Maudgalyayana were admitted into the Order, along with the other former disciples of Sanjaya. In time, Shariputra and Maudgalyayana fulfilled the Buddha’s prophecy that they would be His chief disciples. Shariputra’s wisdom and Maudgalyayana’s power of meditation were second only to those of the Buddha.

On many occasions, the Buddha asked these two chief disciples to take His place in delivering a sermon and thus help spread the Dharma.

Conversion of Maha Kashyapa

In Rajagriha, there was a rich man who had gold, houses, cattle, fields and many servants. In spite of his great wealth, he found life meaningless. So he decided to give up his family life and become an ascetic known as Maha Kashyapa.

For a year, he searched in vain for a perfect man who could be his religious teacher. One day, on the way to Rajagriha, he met the Buddha and, on seeing His majestic appearance, realised that here was indeed an Enlightened One. At once, he prostrated himself at the feet of the Buddha and expressed his faith in Him by saying, “O Buddha! You are my master, I am your disciple.”

The Buddha at once accepted him as His disciple and said, “Kashyapa, I teach the Truth out of wisdom and not out of ignorance.”

“Kashyapa, you must restrain yourself according to the disciplinary rules. Cultivate good conduct and avoid the smallest fault. Be mindful in your actions, words and thoughts. Keep your senses well-guarded. Be steadfast and wise in your training.”

Maha Kashyapa was ordained and diligently practised what the Buddha had taught him. After only eight days, he became an Arhat.

Later, the Buddha praised Maha Kashyapa for his efforts in observing the strict disciplinary rules and for his achievement in meditation. He also asked him to instruct the monks.

Summary

The Buddha met King Bimbisara for the second time. The king was converted and donated the Bamboo Grove to the Buddha for the use of the Order. Shariputra, Maudgalyayana and Maha Kashyapa joined the Order and became noted for their wisdom, meditation and discipline respectively.



Return to Kapilavastu

An Invitation to Visit Kapilavastu

While the Buddha was at Rajagriha teaching the Dharma, the Shakyans came to know of His presence there. They reported the news to King Shuddhodana and suggested that Chandaka, the faithful charioteer, and Udayin, the playmate of Prince Siddhartha, be sent as messengers to invite the Buddha to Kapilavastu. King Shuddhodana agreed to the suggestion. Before sending the messengers on their mission, he told them to follow the Buddha's instructions.

The two messengers soon arrived at the Bamboo Grove and they approached the Buddha with respect.

The Buddha then invited them to be ordained as His disciples. Since the king had ordered them to follow the Buddha's instructions, they readily agreed. After their ordination, they remained in Rajagriha. Some time later, Udayin reminded the Buddha of His father and asked Him to return to Kapilavastu to spread the Teaching there. During His struggle for Enlightenment, the Buddha had put aside thoughts of His family. After the Enlightenment, He had been more concerned with the spread of the Teaching than with returning to His hometown. However, when Udayin invited Him to return to Kapilavastu, the Buddha agreed.

King Shuddhodana's Meeting with the Buddha

From Rajagriha, the Buddha and a large group of His disciples set off on the journey to Kapilavastu. When they arrived, they stayed at the Banyan Grove.

On hearing of their arrival, King Shuddhodana accompanied by a retinue of Shakyans subjects, went out to meet the Buddha. Just as the king was riding out of the city in his chariot, he saw a group of shaven monks receiving gifts of food from the people. On being told that they were the Buddha's disciples, the king was reminded of his disappointment at the renunciation of his son and exclaimed, "If my son had not left home, he would have been a universal king, triumphant and righteous. Send this company of monks away! I have no wish to see them." With that, the king returned to the palace with his retinue.

When this news reached the Buddha and His disciples, many senior monks begged the Buddha to allow them to see the king in order to persuade him to change his mind. The Buddha would not consent to their going. Instead, He chose Udayin for the task because he was well-liked by the king. Later in the palace, Udayin convinced the king of the Buddha's greatness by recounting His virtues. Consequently, the king ordered all the people in Kapilavastu to follow him to see the Buddha at the Banyan Grove.

The Buddha knew that the Shakyans were a proud people and that they would not listen to His Teaching unless they were sure of His Enlightenment. So, while they were approaching the Banyan Grove, the Buddha rose in the air. Then He performed the "Twin Miracle" in which the upper part of His body produced jets of water while the lower part produced fire. Later, fire issued from the upper part, and water from the lower part of His body. Humbled by these miracles, the Shakyans bowed in respect to the Buddha. King Shuddhodana, himself, was greatly impressed by these feats and also bowed to the Buddha.

The Dialogue with the Buddha

Concerned about the welfare of his son, King Shuddhodana wanted to know how He could lead the life of a monk after being brought up as a prince, so he asked, “When you were young, you wore beautiful woollen slippers and walked on carpets, with an umbrella over your head. Now, you walk bare-footed in the open; are your feet not hurt?”

“I have renounced everything and destroyed craving. I feel no pain,” the Buddha replied.

“When you were in the palace, you bathed in cool water scented by sandalwood. Now you roam about in cold nights in the forest. How do you bathe and refresh yourself when you are weary?” asked the king.

“Now, I bathe in the stream of virtues. The Dharma is the pool of virtues. It is pure and is always praised by man,” answered the Buddha.

“When staying in the palace, you wore garments made of the finest quality cloth. Now you wear a robe, coarse and plain. It is strange that you can bear it.”

“A Buddha does not pay attention to the beauty of His clothes, the comfort of His bed, or the taste of His food. He does not pay heed to sense pleasures.”

“Formerly, you slept on soft cushions of silk strewn with flowers. Now, you sleep on the grass in the field, or on the hard ground. Does not your body ache?”

“My life is without grief and sorrow now, for craving is destroyed. I sleep well and happily.”

“Formerly, in the palace, you were protected by armed guards. Now, in the forest, you are unprotected. Are you not afraid?”

“I have overcome fear. I am not moved by blame or praise. Like a lion, I am not frightened by noises. Can a conqueror, a leader of men, be afraid?”

“The whole earth would be your kingdom if you had not renounced the world.”

“The whole earth is still my kingdom. Thousands are my disciples!” the Buddha replied.

Greatly impressed by the answers given by the Buddha, the king exclaimed, “Your renunciation of family and kingdom has not been in vain. Your struggle for Enlightenment has been fruitful.”

The next day, as He had not been invited to the palace for His meal, the Buddha and His disciples went into Kapilavastu for alms. Yashodhara, who witnessed this scene, quickly reported it to the king. Immediately, the king went out to meet the Buddha and asked, “Son, why do you disgrace our royal lineage by seeking alms?”

“Seeking alms is the custom of my lineage,” replied the Buddha.

“Is it the custom of our royal lineage to earn a living by seeking alms?”

“My lineage is that of the Buddha’s,” He answered.

Then the Buddha and His disciples were invited to the palace for a meal. When the meal was over, the Buddha said to the Shakyans:

“One should practise the Dharma well,
One should not do evil.
He who practises the Dharma well, rests in bliss
Both in this world and in the next.”

On hearing this verse, King Shuddhodana and Prajapati gained faith in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

All this while, Yashodhara was absent from the meal because she wanted the Buddha to come to her. Knowing her mind, the Buddha went to her chamber. Yashodhara quickly came forward and bowed at His feet.

Seeing her affection, King Shuddhodana said to the Buddha, “Lord, Yashodhara tried to follow your way of life while you were away. When she heard that you wore yellow robes, she also put on a yellow robe. When she heard that you slept on the ground, she lay on a low couch. When she heard that you gave up garlands and perfume, she also gave these up. Her parents wanted her to return, but she never entertained the idea. My daughter is virtuous.”

“I know that she has always been devoted and faithful to me,” the Buddha said in praise of Yashodhara.

summary

The Buddha's decision to return to Kapilavastu led to the conversion of the Shakyans. This was evidence of the acceptance of His Teaching by His kinsmen. In the sermon to the Shakyans, the Buddha advised them not to do evil and to practise the Teaching diligently. In the dialogue with King Shuddhodana, the Buddha explained to him that the life of renunciation is happier than the life in a palace.



Ordination of the Shakyans

Upali and the Shakyans Nobles

During the Buddha's visit to Kapilavastu, five hundred young Shakyans headed by Shakyans nobles like Ananda and Devadatta, decided to leave home to take up the religious life. In a splendid and majestic procession, they left the city and arrived at the Banyan Grove. Upali, a barber who worked in the palace, also followed the crowd.

On approaching the Buddha, the Shakyans took off their fine garments and ornaments and handed them to Upali, saying, "Let these be your possessions, Upali. As we are entering the religious life, we have no need for them."

At first, Upali gladly accepted the things given to him, but after some thought, he decided to be ordained himself. While the five hundred Shakyans were talking to their parents, relatives and friends, Upali went up to the Buddha quietly and asked for ordination. The Buddha, to whom social rank meant nothing, agreed and ordained him before He ordained the Shakyans. When the Buddha ordained the Shakyans, He said, "The monk, Upali, is senior to you. Therefore, honour him." Then the five hundred Shakyans bowed at his feet.

Upali later became one of the senior monks in the Order. He became renowned for his faithful practice of the rules and precepts.

Among the other monks, Ananda became celebrated for his ability to remember all the sermons delivered by the Buddha. Devadatta, at first famous for diligent practice of the Teaching, however, later turned against the Buddha because he wanted to control the Order.

Rahula

While the Buddha was still in Kapilavastu, Prajapati invited Him to a meal in the palace. After the meal, He talked about the Dharma. Meanwhile, Rahula, now seven years old, came closer to the Buddha and gazed intently at Him. Rahula had not been told that the Buddha was his father. In fact, the king had ordered that no one should tell Rahula that the Buddha was his father. The penalty for going against the order was death.

Feeling a sudden deep yearning to see his own father, he turned to Yashodhara, his mother, and asked, "Where is my father?"

"He has gone to the south." That was all she could answer.

"Mother, could this monk be related to me in any way? I feel so happy and content when I see Him," said Rahula again.

His mother, however, remained quiet. As time went by, she thought to herself, "If I tell him, the penalty is death. If I do not tell him, my own son will be deceived. Come what may, I have to tell him!" So, she waited for a suitable moment to tell him the truth.

One day, seeing the Buddha passing by the street near the palace, she said to her son, "Rahula, do you see that monk? He is your father. Go to Him, my son! Tell Him who you are and ask for your inheritance."

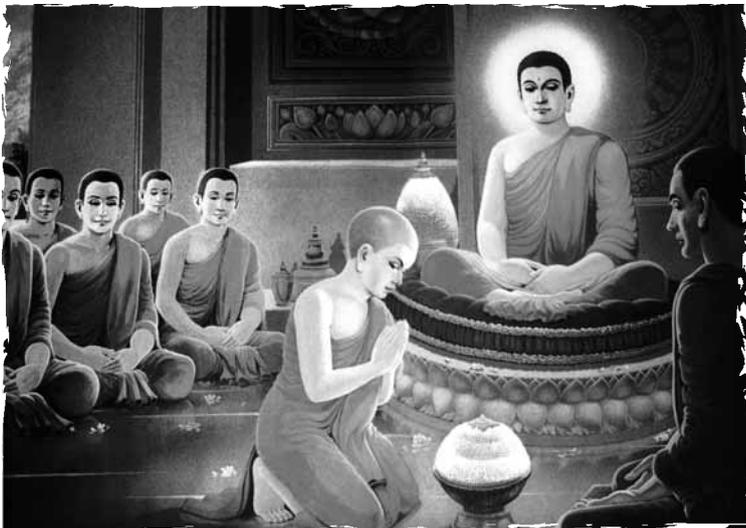
Rahula quickly ran to the Buddha and said, "I am your son, my Lord. Even your shadow is pleasing to me."

The Buddha only smiled and looked at him with compassion but did not speak. Rahula, following closely after Him, insisted, "I know that you possess the greatest treasures. Father, give me my inheritance!"

The Buddha heard what Rahula said, but He still carried on walking. Rahula persistently repeated his request.

When they arrived at the Banyan Grove, the Buddha spoke to Rahula, "Child, you know nothing about the treasures that you have heard men praise. The only treasures known to you are those dear to human greed. But why should you be kept in ignorance? You are right to claim your inheritance, Rahula. I shall give you the seven treasures which I received at the foot of the Bodhi tree. These are the seven virtues, namely Faith, Purity, Humility, Self-control, Receptivity to Advice, Unselfishness and Wisdom."

The Buddha then turned to Shariputra and said, "Ordain Rahula."



Soon, the matter was reported to King Shuddhodana who was upset by the news. He went to the Buddha and said, "When you left the palace, I was in great sorrow. Later, when you ordained Nanda, that grieved me too. Now you have also ordained your son, Rahula. My hope that he will inherit my kingdom is gone."

Then the king humbly requested that in future, children should not be ordained without their parents' consent.

The Buddha agreed and made it a rule, still observed today, that no monk should ordain a child without first getting his parents' permission.

Advice to Rahula

Being a young boy, Rahula often told lies for fun. The Buddha decided to teach him the importance of truthfulness.

On one occasion, the Buddha showed Rahula a vessel with a small amount of water in it and said, "A person who is not ashamed of telling lies knowingly, has little virtue in him. He is just like this vessel which has but a small amount of water in it."

Next, he threw away the water from the vessel and said, "A person who is not ashamed of telling lies knowingly, throws away his virtue just like this water being thrown away."

Then, the Buddha turned the vessel right way up and said, "A person who is not ashamed of continuously telling lies knowingly, is as hollow and empty as this vessel."

The Buddha also used another example to show him how to cultivate good conduct.

“What do you think of a mirror? What is its purpose?” the Buddha asked Rahula.

“It is meant to reflect one’s appearance,” he answered.

“In the same way, one’s actions, words and thoughts must be reflected upon as if one were looking at them in a mirror.

“Before actions are done, consider whether they are harmful to yourself, to others or to both yourself and others. Only when they are beneficial to all should they be done.”

“In the same way, before you speak, consider whether your words are harmful to yourself, to others or to both yourself and others. Only if they are beneficial to all should they be spoken.

“When thoughts arise, consider whether they are harmful to yourself or to others or to both yourself and others. If they are not beneficial to all, they should be discarded.

“This is the way you must train yourself to consider your actions, words and thoughts. This is the way to purify yourself.”

Rahula was delighted by the words of the Buddha and decided to discipline himself to become a good monk.

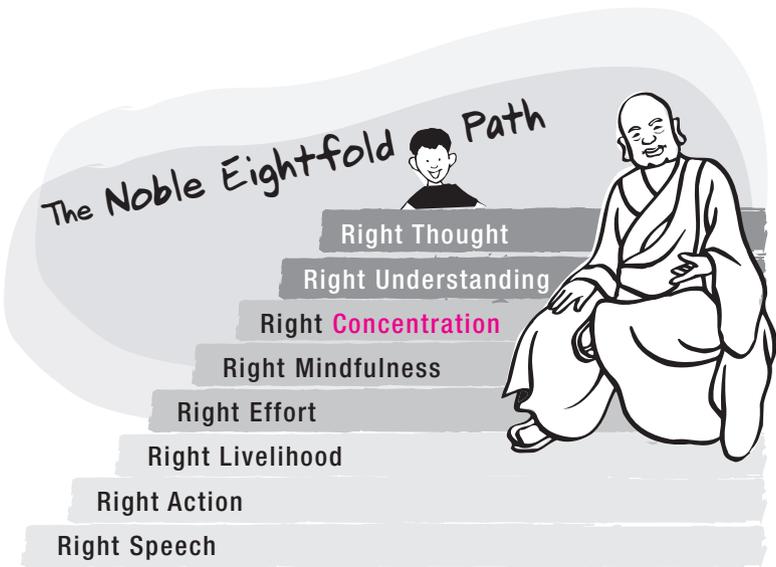
summary

Five hundred young Shakyans decided to join the Order. Besides the members of the noble families, Upali, the barber, was also ordained. Rahula’s ordination upset the king who requested the Buddha to make it a rule that no child should be ordained without his parents’ permission. Later, the Buddha advised Rahula not to tell lies even for fun, and to reflect upon his actions, words and thoughts.



The Noble Eightfold Path: (I) Good Conduct

The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path are the foundations of the Buddha's Teaching. The eight steps of the Noble Eightfold Path are divided into the three ways of practice, namely Good Conduct, Mental Development and Wisdom. Good Conduct includes right speech, right action and right livelihood. The rules of Good Conduct are based on the recognition of the fact that all living beings wish for happiness and dislike suffering. Therefore, one should follow these rules for the sake of one's happiness and the happiness of others.



Right Speech

To practise right speech, one must avoid telling lies, tale-bearing, harsh speech and idle talk.

(a) To avoid telling lies

If one has respect for truth, one will avoid telling lies. When a person consistently avoids telling lies, his relatives, friends and associates will trust him and value his sincerity. But if a person lies for the first time and the lie is not detected by others, he may continue to tell more lies until it becomes part of his nature. He will eventually lose the respect and trust of others.

There is a well-known fable of the shepherd boy who cried, "Wolf!" when there was actually no wolf attacking his sheep. The villagers, on hearing his cry for help, rushed to his aid but saw him sitting on the ground and laughing at them. He did this again and again until eventually nobody believed him. One day, when a wolf did attack his sheep, no one came to his help and all his sheep were killed.

This story reminds one that it is always better to be truthful. Lies, even when spoken out of fun, can cause regrets later on.

(b) To avoid tale-bearing

Tale-bearing is often a cause of ill will and quarrels among people. The tale-bearer speaks out of ill will because he intends to damage the reputation of others. One should speak to foster mutual understanding and harmony rather than create quarrels and disharmony.

(c) To avoid harsh speech

Harsh and abusive speech is also a cause of ill will and quarrels among people. Sometimes, on the road, one may see two aggressive motorists rushing out of their cars to confront each other because of a minor collision. One then hears a hot exchange of rude and abusive words as each tries to point out the other's mistake. Instead of settling the matter calmly and reasonably, they quarrel and may even come to blows.

It is best to refrain from using harsh words, as these only arouse anger and resentment in others. One should speak gently and courteously at all times.

(d) To avoid idle talk

Idle talk or gossip should be avoided because it disturbs the mind and distracts one from more important activities such as one's studies or work. A person who spends his time gossiping about others and criticising their faults, is not doing anything useful. His idle words may even cause quarrels and discord among his friends, relatives or neighbours. He only creates enemies for himself and others.

Thus one can see that speech plays a very important role in human relations. It can promote truth, harmony and peace but it can also create misunderstanding, discord and quarrels among men and nations. A good speaker can influence others immensely for better or for worse through his words. With this in mind, the Buddha advised one to consider these five conditions before speaking:

- (1) Do I speak the truth?
- (2) Do I speak gently?
- (3) Are my words beneficial to others?
- (4) Do I speak out of goodwill?
- (5) Do I speak at the proper time and place?

Right Action

The practice of right action involves the respect for life, property and personal relationships. It helps one to develop a character that is self-controlled and mindful of the rights of others. To practise right action means to avoid killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.

(a) To avoid killing

All living beings, whether human or animal, love life and fear death. The Buddha said,

“ All tremble at punishment, all fear death.
Putting oneself in the place of another,
One should not kill nor cause another to kill.”

Accordingly, the first aspect of right action is to avoid killing any living being. Just as one does not wish to be killed, so all living beings do not wish to be killed. If people resort to killing others in their desperate attempts to satisfy their desires for material things, power, fame or other pleasures of the senses, they may subsequently suffer punishment or revenge and be killed in turn. As the saying goes, “He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword.” Once one understands that killing inflicts pain and suffering on others, one should avoid killing.

(b) To avoid stealing

The second aspect of right action is respect for the property of others. This means that one should not steal, that is, take what is not one's own by right. Robbery, theft and fraud are dishonest ways of possessing the property of others by force or deceit. The dishonest businessman who sells faulty goods and the employee who neglects his duties and yet collects his salary, are just as guilty of taking what is not rightfully theirs as the robber and the thief.

A famous teacher once wanted to find out which of his students was worthy of marrying his beautiful daughter. One day, he decided to test their character by announcing, "I want to give my daughter in marriage, but I must have proper ornaments for her. Steal some ornaments. If you can steal some without anyone's knowledge, I will accept them. But if anyone knows that you have stolen the ornament, I shall not accept them."

All the students, except one, agreed to do as their teacher had instructed. The teacher then asked the youth why he remained silent. The youth replied that the teacher's plan was impossible to carry out. "You accept nothing which is not taken in secrecy," he said, "but I find that there is no secrecy in wrongdoing. Even if no one should see my wrongdoing, I myself shall know of it."

The teacher was very pleased with his response as it revealed his upright character. The teacher then gave his daughter in marriage to this honest youth. This story shows the importance of being able to recognise and avoid an unwholesome act.

Stealing is wrong because it takes away a source of happiness from others. In a society where the law has become ineffective and fraud, stealing and even robbery go unchecked, people live in fear and insecurity.

In recognising the anguish of loss when one is robbed or cheated, one should not think of stealing. It is for the security and good of everybody in society that people should avoid taking what is not rightfully theirs.

(c) To avoid sexual misconduct

Unlike the members of the Order, who lead celibate lives, Buddhist lay followers are not expected to abstain from sex altogether. However, the Buddha advised people to control their sexual desires so that they do not become a source of sorrow and suffering to themselves, their families and society as a whole. This means that they should avoid sexual relationships with the spouses of others, with those who are dependent on their parents or other relatives, and even with those who are engaged. This is the third aspect of right action.

Sexual misconduct will bring problems and suffering to the parties involved, and create tension and uneasiness in social relationships. Thus for their own good and that of society, people should avoid sexual misconduct.

Right Livelihood

Right livelihood means earning one's living in a way that is not harmful to others. In the choice of one's occupation, one should show respect for the life and welfare of all living beings.

There are five trades which the Buddha specifically considered as unworthy means of earning one's living. These are trades in deadly weapons, animals for slaughter, slavery, intoxicants and poisons. These five kinds of livelihood should be avoided because they cause suffering and unhappiness to others and create disunity in society in many instances.

(a) Trade in deadly weapons

To deal in deadly weapons is to provide others with the means of killing. This goes against the first aspect of right action which is to avoid killing.

(b) Trade in animals for slaughter

Similarly, any livelihood which involves the killing of animals goes against the principle of respect for life.

(c) Trade in slavery

Slavery takes away the liberty and happiness of those who are being offered for sale. It degrades human dignity when people are sold like goods. As no respect is shown for the life and welfare of these victims of slavery, any involvement in the slave trade should be avoided.

(d) Trade in intoxicants

Intoxicating drugs and drinks disturb and cloud the mind so that one cannot think and act clearly. A person addicted to intoxicants may squander his entire income on it and cause family quarrels and material problems. Thus dealing in intoxicants can create social problems and disharmony.

(e) Trade in poisons

Like deadly weapons, poisons are for the purpose of killing. Any occupation dealing with the manufacture and sale of poisons is not conducive to the life and welfare of others.

The practice of Good Conduct through right speech, right action and right livelihood helps one to live at peace with oneself and with others in society. As one speaks or acts with respect for the happiness and welfare of others, the goodwill and concern is appreciated and reciprocated. When such an environment is created, it is conducive to personal growth and lays the foundation for Mental Development and Wisdom leading to Enlightenment.

Summary

Three steps of the Noble Eightfold Path are included in Good Conduct. They are right speech, right action and right livelihood. Right speech means to avoid telling lies, tale-bearing, harsh speech and idle talk. Right action means to avoid killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. Right livelihood means to avoid trading in deadly weapons, animals for slaughter, slaves, intoxicants and poisons. Good Conduct is the basis for Mental Development and Wisdom.



The Noble Eightfold Path: (II) Mental Development

The mind has a great influence on all aspects of life. Medical science has shown that many illnesses such as hypertension, ulcers and migraine are partly caused by the mind. If a patient has a positive mental attitude, his chances of recovery are much improved.

The Buddha said, "All that people are, is the result of their minds; it is made up of their minds. If a man speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox that pulls the cart. If a man speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him."

It is clear that if people wish to gain happiness and Enlightenment, they must learn to control and develop their minds. Mental Development involves three steps of the Noble Eightfold Path, namely right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

Right Effort

A farmer who wishes to grow vegetables for the market must put in a lot of effort to prepare the ground for planting, water the crops regularly, pull out the weeds, apply fertilisers to the soil, and do whatever is necessary to promote the growth of his crops. Just like the farmer, any person who wishes to succeed in any task, be it his studies or his work, must approach it with enthusiasm and make a sincere effort to do it well.

Effort is needed to cultivate Good Conduct or develop one's mind, because one is often distracted or tempted to take the easy way out of things. The Buddha teaches that attaining happiness and Enlightenment depends upon one's own efforts. Effort is the root of all achievement. If one wants to get to the top of a mountain, just sitting at the foot thinking about it will not bring one there. It is by making the effort of climbing up the mountain, step by step, that one eventually reaches the summit. Thus, no matter how great the Buddha's achievement may be, or how excellent His Teaching is, one must put the Teaching into practice before one can expect to obtain the desired results.

According to the Buddha, there are four types of effort to be developed. Firstly there is the effort to prevent the arising of unwholesome thoughts, such as the desire for the property of others. Secondly, there is the effort to get rid of unwholesome thoughts that have already arisen in one's mind. Thirdly, there is the effort to develop wholesome thoughts of loving-kindness and compassion. The fourth type of effort is the effort to maintain the wholesome thoughts that have already arisen even when they are not appreciated by others.

Right Mindfulness

Right mindfulness is an essential quality in one's daily activities. If one's mind is distracted and one is not mindful when, for example, driving a car or crossing a busy street, accidents can easily happen.

Right mindfulness is the awareness of one's deeds, words and thoughts. The Buddha once told a story of an acrobat performing with his apprentice. When the two had climbed a pole, the master acrobat said to his apprentice, "Protect me and I will protect you. In this way, we will perform our act, come down safely and earn our living."

However, the apprentice replied, “No, that won’t do. You protect yourself and I will protect myself. So self-protected and self-guarded, we will perform our act and earn our living.” Similarly, the Buddha advised each person to protect himself by being mindful.

Right mindfulness is necessary if one is to progress towards Wisdom and Enlightenment. The mind must constantly be aware of what is happening. People should be aware of their thoughts, words and deeds at all times whether they are sitting quietly conversing with others, or doing something else. They should always be conscious of what they are doing.

The mind must be controlled and protected against distractions. People should consciously avoid greed and anger. When they speak, they should also consciously avoid telling lies, tale-bearing, harsh speech and idle talk. In their actions, they should avoid killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. They should be careful not to act in such a way as to cause harm to the lives and welfare of others.

Right Concentration

Concentration is trained through meditation by focusing on a single object and remaining fixed on it without wavering. The object of concentration may be a material thing like a flower, or an idea such as loving-kindness or compassion. It is important that there be a qualified meditation teacher to guide one when one begins to meditate. If one practises meditation even if only for a few minutes a day at the beginning, one will experience its benefits. The constant practice of meditation helps one to develop a calm and concentrated mind and helps to prepare one for the attainment of Wisdom and Enlightenment ultimately.

Mental Development ensures that the rules of Good Conduct are not broken through lack of effort. In addition, it prepares the mind

for Wisdom by purifying it of unwholesome thoughts and guarding it against distractions. People also learn to concentrate their minds. Through Mental Development, people can progress steadily along the Noble Eightfold Path to Enlightenment.

Summary

Three steps of the Noble Eightfold Path are included in Mental Development. They are right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Right effort is fourfold: the effort to prevent and abandon unwholesome thoughts and the effort to develop and maintain wholesome ones. Right mindfulness is to be aware of our deeds, words and thoughts. Right concentration trains the mind to focus single-pointedly on an object. It calms the mind and combined with Wisdom, leads to Enlightenment.



The Noble Eightfold Path: (III) Wisdom

The highest achievement within the Noble Eightfold Path is Wisdom which opens the door to Enlightenment. Wisdom was the essence of the Buddha's experience under the Bodhi tree more than two thousand five hundred years ago and remains the key to Enlightenment to this day. Both Good Conduct and Mental Development although necessary, are just preparations for the attainment of Wisdom.

The two steps of the path included in Wisdom are right understanding and right thought. Right understanding removes ignorance of the true nature of existence while right thought removes desire and ill will. Between them, right understanding and right thought ensure the complete end of suffering, that is, Nirvana.

Right Understanding

Right understanding is seeing things as they really are, rather than as they appear to be. In order to see things as they really are, one must observe one's self and one's situation carefully and also examine the meaning of what is observed.

An enquiring and analytical attitude is important in acquiring right understanding. The Buddha asked people not to rely upon hearsay, tradition or authority for the Truth but to judge the Truth in the light of their own experience. Just as a wise man does not accept any metal that glitters as being gold on the advice of another, but tests

its properties for himself, so one should not accept what is heard without testing it by one's own experience.

Nonetheless in seeking the Truth, one can do well to turn to the Teaching of the Buddha for help. This is the first step towards developing right understanding. One should listen to and study the Teaching of the Buddha and the explanations of qualified teachers. But listening to the Buddha's Teaching alone is not enough. One must also be attentive and try earnestly to remember it. Just as it is useless to try to fill a leaky vessel with water, so it is of no use listening to the Buddha's Teaching if what one hears goes in one ear and comes out of the other.

On one level, right understanding means the understanding of the relationship between cause and effect. In other words, if one acts and speaks rightly, one will experience good results but if one speaks and acts wrongly, one will experience suffering. "As you sow, so shall you reap" is a common teaching of all religions. So long as people fail to understand this law, they have not achieved right understanding even in the most basic sense.

At a deeper level, right understanding means the understanding of the Four Noble Truths. This is the understanding that:

- (1) Life is suffering;
- (2) Desire and ignorance are the causes of suffering;
- (3) The end of suffering is Nirvana;
- (4) The Noble Eightfold Path is the way to achieve this goal.

Right Thought

Thoughts influence one's words and actions. If one speaks or acts out of greed or anger, then one will speak or act wrongly and suffer as a consequence. It is necessary to purify one's thoughts if one really wishes to improve one's conduct.

Right thought means to avoid desire and ill will and to cultivate thoughts of renunciation, loving-kindness and compassion. Desire should be avoided because it can never be fully satisfied. Even if it is partially satisfied, it will inevitably lead to greed and unwholesome actions like telling lies and stealing. Ill will too is a cause of unwholesome actions like killing, tale-bearing and harsh speech.

Thoughts of renunciation remove desire, while thoughts of loving-kindness and compassion remove ill will. In His own life, the Buddha exemplified the qualities of renunciation, loving-kindness and compassion. He renounced a life of pleasure in His father's household to seek the Truth. Even as a child, He showed loving-kindness and compassion in His treatment of the wounded swan. After attaining Enlightenment, the Buddha continued to care for the sick and comfort the distressed.

Wisdom is the last of the three ways of practice. It is the most difficult to attain because it depends on the cultivation of Good Conduct and Mental Development. Nonetheless, it is right understanding and right thought that give direction and purpose to the rest of the Noble Eightfold Path. One must always keep them in mind just as someone who climbs a mountain keeps the summit in view so as not to lose his way.

summary

Two steps of the Noble Eightfold Path are included in Wisdom. They are right understanding and right thought. Right understanding means to understand the relationship of cause and effect and to understand the Four Noble Truths. Right thought means to avoid desire and ill will and to cultivate renunciation, loving-kindness and compassion.



The Buddha and the Generous Anathapindika

Anathapindika

In Shravasti, the capital of Koshala Kingdom, there lived a very wealthy merchant by the name of Sudatta. Generous in nature, he often gave food and shelter to the orphans, the old and the poor. Hence, he was popularly known as *Anathapindika*, which means “one who is charitable to the needy”.

While he was attending to some business in Rajagriha, Anathapindika heard about the Buddha from his brother-in-law and wanted to meet Him. His brother-in-law, however, was too busy to lead him to the Buddha. So eager was Anathapindika to meet the Buddha that he got up and set off to see Him in the middle of the night. On the way, he had to walk through a cemetery but he continued his journey in spite of his fear.

By daybreak, he reached the park where the Buddha called out to him, “Come Sudatta.” Anathapindika was surprised the Buddha knew his name. He was glad to see the Buddha that he at once prostrated himself before Him and said, “I hope the Buddha is living at ease.”

“Yes, always at ease He lives. Untouched by desire, He has entered the ideal state of Nirvana. While being free from all attachments, He has removed all suffering. In his mind, He is calm,” the Buddha replied.

After hearing the Buddha's words, Anathapindika took the Threefold Refuge and became a lay follower. He invited the Buddha to a meal and requested Him to visit his hometown of Shravasti. The Buddha accepted this invitation.

The Jeta Grove

Back in Shravasti, Anathapindika went around looking for a suitable place for the Buddha to stay. He spotted a grove belonging to Prince Jeta, which seemed ideal for a monastery. However, Prince Jeta was reluctant to sell the grove even for the high price of a hundred thousand pieces of gold. When Anathapindika persisted in asking the price of the grove, the prince decided to discourage him by imposing a condition of sale which he thought Anathapindika would find impossible to fulfil. Prince Jeta declared that he would sell the grove for the amount of gold pieces needed to cover it.

Taking the prince's words in earnest, Anathapindika immediately instructed his men to bring the gold pieces and lay them on the ground of the grove. Except for the space occupied by the trees, the whole grove was soon completely covered. Prince Jeta was struck by Anathapindika's determination to fulfil the condition of the sale. When he came to know that the grove was being acquired for the Buddha, he was deeply touched. Anxious to have a part in the offering, he said to Anathapindika, "The land is yours but the trees are mine. I give away the trees as my share of the offering to the Buddha."



*Jetavana Monastery
by Anathapindika*

In honour of the prince, the grove was known as the Jeta Grove. In it, Anathapindika built a monastery for the use of the Buddha and His disciples. This was later known as the Monastery of Anathapindika.

The “Sermon on Blessing”

The Buddha delivered many sermons during his stay at the Monastery of Anathapindika. Among the most famous was the “Sermon on Blessing” in which he defined the highest blessing. The Buddha emphasised that the highest blessings are conditions which are conducive to happiness, now and in the future. In the sermon, the Buddha said:

“Not to associate with the unwise,
To associate with the wise,
And to honour those who are worthy of honour,
This is the highest blessing.

To reside in a suitable locality
To have done meritorious actions,
And to follow the right way.
This is the highest blessing.

Great learning, perfect skill,
Excellent moral discipline,
And pleasant speech.
This is the highest blessing.

To support one’s father and mother,
To care for one’s wife and children,
And to have a peaceful occupation.
This is the highest blessing.

Generosity, Good Conduct,
Helping relatives,
And blameless action.
This is the highest blessing.

To cease from doing unwholesome actions,
To avoid intoxicants,
And to be steadfast in virtue.
This is the highest blessing.

Reverence, humility
Contentment and gratitude,
And timely hearing of the Dharma.
This is the highest blessing.

Patience, receptivity to advice,
Meeting with the members of the Order,
And Dharma discussions at appropriate times.
This is the highest blessing.

Self-control, leading a religious life.
Understanding the Noble Truths,
And the attainment of Nirvana.
This is the highest blessing.

He whose mind is not disturbed by worldly conditions,
Sorrowless, pure and secure,
This is the highest blessing.

To those who fulfil these conditions,
Who are everywhere unconquerable,
Who in every way move happily,
These are the highest blessings.”

The Virtues of a Wife

While the Buddha was in Shravasti, He was often invited to the house of His lay follower, Anathapindika. During the course of one of these visits, the Buddha heard about a quarrel that was going on in the house. On enquiry, the Buddha was told that the quarrel had been started by Anathapindika's daughter-in-law who was proud and disrespectful. She neglected her husband and did not respect her parents-in-law.

After listening to the account of this young lady's character, the Buddha called her and spoke to her on the qualities of a good wife. He told her that a wife should be faithful and loving, and should care for the welfare of her husband. He told her to take care of her husband's wealth and not squander it. A good wife, He said, should be a companion to her husband, sharing his sorrow and helping him whenever he is ill or in trouble. He added that she should always be gracious and gentle in behaviour.

After hearing this sermon, Anathapindika's daughter-in-law promised to mend her ways and be a good wife.

summary

Following his conversion, Anathapindika invited the Buddha to Shravasti where he acquired the Jeta Grove and donated it to the Order. There, the Buddha delivered many sermons including the "Sermon on Blessing" in which He explained the conditions conducive to happiness. On one of his visits to Anathapindika's household, the Buddha described the qualities of a good wife.



Eminent Women Followers

Prajapati -The First Nun

In the fifth year after the Enlightenment, while the Buddha was staying in a monastery near Vaishali, He received a message that His father was seriously ill. Without delay, He returned to Kapilavastu with his disciples.

At his father's deathbed, the Buddha preached a sermon on the impermanence of all things. At the end of the sermon, He said, "There is nothing to fear, Father. Your virtue is pure and your mind is without evil. Remember the Teaching and calm your mind." Hearing the Buddha's assurance, the king passed away in peace, having become an Arhat.

After attending the funeral of His father, the Buddha stayed on in the Banyan Grove. It was during this time that His aunt, Prajapati, decided to become a nun. The Buddha declined her request and returned to Vaishali. Undeterred, Prajapati cut her hair, put on a yellow robe, then accompanied by Yashodhara and other Shakyans women, walked to Vaishali. The long journey caused their feet to swell. Looking weary and with their clothes covered with dust, they finally arrived at the monastery where the Buddha was preaching. It was Ananda who saw them in such a sorry state. Seeing their determination to join the Order, he asked the Buddha whether women were capable of leading a holy life and becoming Arhats when they renounced the world and practised the Teaching. The

Buddha asserted that they could. Ananda pointed out that in that case, they should be allowed to join the Order. Prajapati and her companions were then ordained and so the Order of Nuns was formed.

Kshema

Kshema was a beautiful queen of King Bimbisara. Although he had often urged her to meet the Buddha, she had always refused. Knowing that she was attracted to beautiful things, the king arranged for poets to compose poems about the beauty of the Bamboo Grove where the Buddha was staying, and had performers in the court sing these compositions.

Fascinated by the poems, she decided to go to the Bamboo Grove and see its beauty for herself. While admiring the scenery there, she caught sight of an especially beautiful maiden, standing beside the Buddha and fanning Him. Kshema observed that the maiden was more beautiful than her and, drawn to look closer, she moved nearer and nearer to the Buddha.

Actually, the beautiful maiden was just a vision created by the Buddha with His supernatural powers. While Kshema was gazing at it, the maiden was transformed into an old woman with broken teeth, grey hair and wrinkled skin. She appeared to grow weaker and weaker and finally collapsed and died. Kshema was startled. Then, the Buddha said, "Kshema, beauty is impermanent." Then and there, Kshema realised this fact of life.

The Buddha added, "Those who are slaves to desire are like spiders entangled in the webs they have made for themselves. Those who are free and have destroyed attachment to desire, do not delight in the pleasure of the senses."

On hearing these words, Kshema became an Arhat and with the King's consent, entered the Order of Nuns. Later, she became the chief woman disciple of the Buddha. Well-known for her wisdom, she often helped the Buddha in instructing the nuns.

Utpalavarna

Utpalavarna the second chief woman disciple of the Buddha, was well-known for her supernatural powers. Born to a banker in Shravasti, she was named *Utpalavarna* (the colour of a lotus) because her skin was as beautiful as the lotus.

She was married to a merchant but her marriage was a failure. Later on, she married two other men, but none of her marriages was successful. Disillusioned with life, she became a courtesan in Rajagriha.

One day, while she was with a group of young men on an outing, Maudgalyayana happened to pass by. In jest, the young men urged her to tempt the monk. She went to Maudgalyayana and began to behave in an improper manner. Unmoved by her, Maudgalyayana said, "Your body is made up of flesh and blood. Without wisdom and in ignorance, you are overcome by desires for pleasures of the senses that grow deeper and deeper as time passes by."

Moved by these words and feeling ashamed of herself, Utpalavarna honoured him and expressed her wish to become a nun. Despite her earlier life as a courtesan, she was admitted into the Order of Nuns. Sometime later, she was declared by the Buddha to be equal to Kshema in her exemplary conduct.

The Devoted Vishakha

Vishakha was declared by the Buddha to be foremost among those who had devoted their services to the Order. When she was seven years old, the Buddha happened to visit the place of her birth. Her grandfather, a follower of the Buddha, took her to hear a sermon. After hearing it, she developed great faith and trust in the Buddha.

When still a young girl, she was married to the son of a wealthy man in Shravasti. Her father-in-law, being a staunch supporter of another religion, did not have respect for the Buddha's disciples. Nevertheless, through her patience and wit, she succeeded in converting him and the whole family to Buddhism. From then on, she was free to perform her religious activities and was able to give daily alms to the Order when they came to her house. In the morning and afternoon, she visited the monastery to care for the needs of the monks and nuns, as well as to listen to the sermons of the Buddha.

One day, she happened to visit the monastery wearing a very costly headdress. Out of respect for the Buddha, she removed it before seeing Him and handed it over to a servant. After the sermon, she left the monastery with the servant, forgetting to take the headdress with them. Ananda found it and showed it to the Buddha who instructed him to keep it for her. When Vishakha came to know that it was with Ananda, she decided not to take it back but to sell it for the benefit of the Order. The Buddha advised her to build a monastery in the eastern part of Shravasti with the proceeds from the sale. This she did. This monastery became as famous as the Monastery of Anathapindika. Here the Buddha delivered several important sermons, in one of which He mentioned four qualities which could lead women to happiness in this life and four other qualities which could lead to happiness in the next life. He said,

“Happy is the woman in this life
who is a capable worker, courteous in her ways,
who manages her servants well and
guards her husband’s wealth.
Happy is she in the next life who is firm in faith,
virtue, charity and wisdom.”

Being a devout lay follower, Vishakha played an important role in affairs of the Order of Nuns and from time to time, she was asked by the Buddha to settle disputes among the nuns.

summary

After the death of King Shuddhodana, Prajapati was admitted into the Order. She was responsible for the establishment of the Order of Nuns. Other Shakyan women, including Yashodhara, also followed her. Kshema and Utpalavarna became prominent members of the Order of Nuns while Vishakha was outstanding among the women lay followers.



Karma

When people are happy and contented, they tend to take life for granted. It is when they suffer and find life difficult, that they begin to search for a reason and a way out of their difficulties. They may ask why some are born in poverty and suffering, while others are born in fortunate circumstances. Some people believe that it is due to fate, chance or an invisible power beyond their control. They feel that they are unable to live the life they desire and experience happiness always. Consequently, they become confused and desperate. However, the Buddha was able to explain why people differ in their circumstances and why some are more fortunate in life than others. The Buddha taught that one's present condition, whether of happiness or suffering, is the result of the accumulated force of all past actions or karma.

Definition of Karma

Karma is intentional action, that is, a deed done deliberately through body, speech or mind. It is a natural law that every action produces a certain effect. So if one performs wholesome actions such as donating money to charitable organisations, one will experience happiness. On the other hand, if one performs unwholesome actions such as killing a living being, one will experience suffering. This is the law of cause and effect at work. In this way, the effects of one's past karma determine the nature of one's present situation in life.

The Buddha said,

“According to the seed that is sown,
So the fruit you reap.
The doer of good will gather good result,
The doer of evil reaps evil result.
If you plant a good seed well
Then you will enjoy the good fruits.”

Wholesome and Unwholesome Karma

Actions are considered wholesome and virtuous if they produce happiness for oneself and others, and unwholesome if they produce suffering. There are ten unwholesome or non-virtuous actions which need to be avoided if one wishes to be happy. They are:

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| (1) killing; | (6) harsh speech; |
| (2) stealing; | (7) idle talk; |
| (3) sexual misconduct; | (8) greed; |
| (4) telling lies; | (9) anger; |
| (5) tale-bearing; | (10) wrong views. |

Alternatively, there are ten wholesome or virtuous actions which one ought to strive to perform. They are:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| (1) charity; | (6) dedication of merit; |
| (2) self-restraint; | (7) rejoicing in the merit of others; |
| (3) meditation; | (8) hearing the Dharma; |
| (4) reverence; | (9) teaching the Dharma |
| (5) service; | (10) straightening one's views. |

Short-term and Long-term Karma

The effect of an action done in this life can be experienced within this lifetime. This is called short-term karma. For example, in the time of the Buddha, the ambitious Ajatasattu imprisoned and killed his old father, King Bimbisara in order to rule the kingdom. Later,

when Ajatasattu became king, he was in turn killed by his son for the same motive.

In some cases, actions do not produce their effects in this lifetime. The effects are felt in future lives. Similarly, actions done in past lives may produce effects in this life. These are the effects of long-term karma. It can be seen at work in the case of Maudgalyayana, one of the Buddha's chief disciples, who died at the hands of bandits. According to the Buddha, Maudgalyayana had, in a previous life, taken his old parents into the forest where he had beaten them to death and then claimed that they had been killed by bandits. The effect of this previous act was experienced by Maudgalyayana when he himself was beaten to death by bandits.

Another example concerns a person who refuses to study, spends his money on drugs and steals to support his habit. One can easily foresee the suffering he will experience in this life, unless he breaks his bad habits. Obviously, effects that will arise in future lives are not visible to people unless they have developed the capacity and wisdom to see into the future. Nevertheless, the effects will occur. The Buddha and His prominent disciples were able to see the future effects of karma through their own extraordinary understanding. People have the free will to act wisely or foolishly. If a person acts wisely by performing wholesome actions, he will experience happiness in this life as well as in future lives. If he acts foolishly, by performing unwholesome actions, his unwholesome karma will result in suffering in this life and in future lives.

Neutral Actions

The law of karma does not apply to actions such as walking, sitting or sleeping. Such actions do not produce effects apart from the actions themselves. Similarly, accidentally killing an insect is considered a neutral action because it is unintentional.

There was once a blind monk who would, while walking about, accidentally step on ants thereby killing them. When his fellow monks noticed this, they reported it to the Buddha who pointed out that as the blind monk's killing of ants was unintentional, it was neither wholesome nor unwholesome karma and no corresponding effect would arise.

Determining One's Destiny

The law of karma is a natural law of cause and effect. Intentional actions will at some time or other produce their effects. People in their present lives are experiencing the effects of their past actions or karma. However it is possible to alter or reduce the effects of these past actions through counteractions. By their present actions, people can produce new karma with short-term and long-term effects. This new karma will determine their situation in future lives. Thus understanding the law of karma helps one realise that people are whatever they make themselves to be. They are entirely responsible for their destiny.

summary

Karma is action with intention. The law of karma teaches that actions produce effects now and in the future. Wholesome actions produce happiness, while unwholesome actions produce suffering. The law of Karma is a natural law. It is not fate as one can perform counteractions to change and determine one's circumstances in life. People are entirely responsible for their destiny.



Rebirth

One question that is often asked is, “What happens to us after death?” According to Buddhists, rebirth takes place at the end of this life. Buddhists regard rebirth as a fact. There is evidence that each person has lived many lives in the past and will continue to live many lives more in the future.

The Case for Rebirth

The existence of past lives has been experienced by those who have developed their minds through meditation. Some meditators who have attained great powers of concentration have been able to recall their previous lives in great detail. The Buddha and His prominent disciples in many countries and at different times have been able to recall their past lives. The Buddha, on the night of His Enlightenment, developed the ability to see His past lives. He also saw beings dying in one state of existence and being reborn in another, according to their actions. Thus it was from personal experience that the Buddha taught His followers the truth of rebirth.

In the last twenty years, researchers in Europe and America have investigated many memories of past lives. For example, Dr. Arthur Guirdham, a senior consultant in psychology who read medicine in Oxford, provided evidence recently both in writing and on BBC TV and Radio in England about memories of past lives.

He gave evidence of a woman who recalled her former life in thirteenth century France. When her descriptions were first published, very little was known about the historical events in that part of France, even by historians in England. The woman gave an astonishingly detailed description of her religious practices and life in Languedoc in the thirteenth century with uncanny historical accuracy. This was subsequently verified by prominent French authorities such as professor Nelli and monsieur Duvernoy.

Another example of this is the case of Bridey Murphy. A Mrs. Ruth Simmons of the United States recollected a previous life in Ireland, more than 100 years ago. She said she had been Bridey Murphy in the year 1789 and gave full details of Bridey's life. The details were later checked and found to be quite accurate, although in the present life, Mrs. Simmons had never been outside America.

In another case in England, a woman called Mrs. Naomi Henry recollected two previous lives. In the first instance, she recalled her life as an Irishwoman living in a village called Greenhalgh in the seventeenth century. Research into her case was carried out and this revealed that such a village did exist then. In the second instance, she remembered that in one of her previous lives, she was an Englishwoman who became a nurse to several children in an English town called Downham in 1902. A search into the official records kept in Downham showed that such a woman did exist.

Professor Ian Stevenson of the University of Virginia, U.S.A., has researched and published his findings on over twenty cases of rebirth. These cases, which have been well-documented, are from various countries including France, Italy, India, Sri Lanka and Burma. Other well-known researchers on rebirth are Dr. Helen Wambach, Dr. Bloxham, Dr. Edith Fiore and Mr. A. Hurst.

Rebirth in the Six Realms

Buddhism teaches that birth, death and rebirth are part of the continuing process of change. This is similar to the continuous process of growth, decay and replacement of cells in one's body. According to medical experts, after every seven years, all the cells in one's body are replaced by new ones.

At the moment of death, when this life is over, and the body can no longer survive, the mind is separated from the body. At that time, the craving for life causes one to seek a new existence and the karma done previously determines the place of one's rebirth.

There are six realms in which one may be reborn after death. They are the realms of the gods, the demigods, human beings, animals, hungry ghosts and the hells. These are just general categories and within each, there exist many sub-categories. The six realms of existence include three relatively happy states, and three relatively miserable states. The realms of the gods, the demigods and human beings are considered relatively happy because in these realms, living beings experience more happiness and less suffering. The realms of animals, hungry ghosts and the hells are considered relatively miserable because living beings there suffer more from fear, hunger, thirst, heat, cold and pain.

In general, wholesome or virtuous actions like good conduct, charity and mental development are the cause of rebirth in the happy realms of the gods, the demigods and human beings. On the other hand, unwholesome or non-virtuous actions like immoral conduct, miserliness and cruelty cause rebirth in the unhappy realms of the animals, hungry ghosts and the hells.

One need not wait till one is reborn to imagine what existence in other realms is like. For instance, when one is intensely happy or totally at peace with oneself, one experience a state similar to that

of the gods. When one follows one's baser instincts and is totally preoccupied with eating, sleeping and sex, one's existence is like that of the animals. Then again, when one is overwhelmed by fear and pain, or is tortured and killed in this life, one experiences suffering like that of the hells.

Of all the six realms, the realm of human beings is considered the most desirable. In the realm of human beings, the conditions for attaining Nirvana are better. In general, in the unhappy realms, the suffering of living beings is so intense and their ignorance so great that they are unable to recognise the Truth and follow the path to attain freedom. Alternatively, living beings in the realms of the gods and demigods experience so much happiness and have so many distractions that they do not think of rebirth until it is too late. Then they may be reborn in one of the lower realms of suffering. In the realm of human beings, however, people experience both happiness and suffering, and are intelligent enough to recognise the Truth and follow the path to attain freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Therefore, one is indeed fortunate to be born as a human being, and one should remember that the principle of rebirth in this realm is Good Conduct.

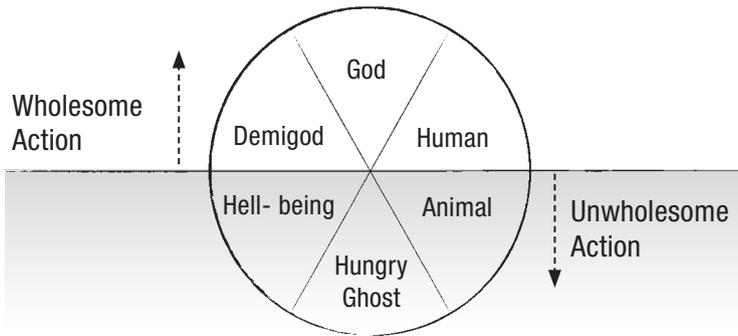
The Cycle of Birth and Death

The Buddha pointed out that no matter where one is reborn, whether as a human being, as an animal or as a god, none of these states of existence is permanent. The average lifespan of the living beings in the six realms of existence differs but none of them lasts forever. Eventually, rebirth will take place. The realm into which one is reborn and one's conditions of birth are determined by one's past and present actions. This is the law of karma at work.

Because of the force of their karma, people are born and reborn endlessly in one realm of existence or in another. The Buddha declared that there is no permanent rest in this cycle of birth and

death. It is only when one follows the Noble Eightfold Path taught by the Buddha and eventually attains Nirvana that one finally becomes free from this ceaseless cycle and gains supreme and permanent happiness.

People who understand karma and rebirth see life in a better perspective. They understand that every action they perform will have its effects now and in the future. This knowledge gives them hope and strength in the face of difficulties. It gives them courage to continue doing good. They are convinced that they will experience the good effects of their wholesome actions either in the short-term or in the long-term.



summary

Buddhism teaches that after death, one is reborn in one of the six realms of existence, namely the realms of the gods, the demigods, human beings, animals, hungry ghosts and the hells. The realm of one's rebirth is determined by one's previous karma. Wholesome or virtuous actions will result in rebirth in the happier realms. Unwholesome or non-virtuous actions will result in rebirth in the realms of suffering. However, the Buddha has taught people the way through which they can be freed from the cycle of birth and death and attain supreme and permanent happiness of Nirvana.



Dependent Origination

All things arise from causes and conditions. A sprout, for example, arises from a seed but it depends on soil, moisture, air and sunlight for its growth. If any of these conditions is missing, then the sprout will not grow. The flame of an oil lamp depends on the wick and oil. When either the wick is totally burnt up or the last drop of oil is used up, the flame will die out. In the same way, life arises from causes and conditions and not through mere chance.

Dependent Origination and Rebirth

Just as the flame of an oil lamp depends upon the wick and the oil for its existence, so rebirth and suffering occur dependent on an impure mind and actions (karma).

The mind is impure so long as it is not free from ignorance, craving and clinging. Ignorance is failing to see things as they really are. Out of ignorance, people crave for pleasant experiences and when pleasant experiences arise, they cling to them. They fail to understand that pleasant experiences such as wealth, friendship, youth and even life are impermanent. All these will eventually slip through their fingers like a handful of sand.

As a result of an impure mind, people commit unwholesome acts to obtain the things they crave for and soon become used to acting in the same way. If some people find that they can obtain what they want by dishonest means on one occasion, they may be tempted

to do it again on future occasions. Eventually, dishonesty becomes a habit. However, others may find that they can succeed by hard work. As a result, they are encouraged to work hard at each new task and hard work becomes a habit for them.

In the same way, other habits are formed and become part of the personality. When people come face to face with a new situation, they will respond to it in their accustomed way and so reinforce their habits. At death, an impure mind with its habitual actions becomes the cause of a person's rebirth just as the seed which is supplied with soil, moisture, air and sunlight, is the cause of a sprout. So long as people's minds are not freed from ignorance, craving and clinging, they will continue to act in their accustomed way, and so long as they act in this way, they will be reborn.

Rebirth is suffering because experience conditioned by ignorance, craving and clinging is never satisfactory. Even the pleasant experiences which people crave and cling to, are impermanent. Consequently, people experience the suffering of loss, ageing, death, sorrow and grief.

To end rebirth and suffering, people need to purify their minds of ignorance, craving and clinging. When they have freed their minds of impurities, actions (karma) will not take place. Then rebirth and suffering will also cease and freedom from the cycle of birth and death is achieved.

Dependent Origination and Relativity

At the beginning of this chapter, it was seen how a sprout and the flame of an oil lamp depend on a combination of causes and conditions for their existence. This means that the sprout and the flame, like all things, do not exist independently. They exist only in relation to other things. This is called relativity or "emptiness" in Buddhism and is another aspect of Dependent Origination.

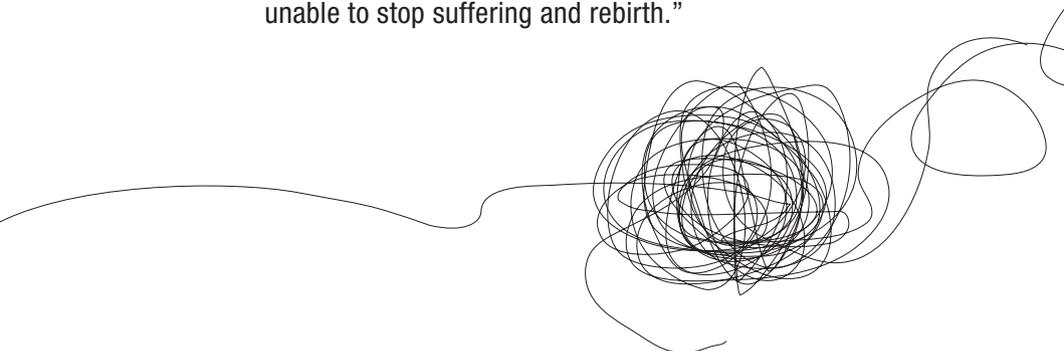
Things are what they are, only in relation to other things, for instance, the same man is a father to his son and a son to his father. His identity depends upon his relation to another, and is relative.

The distance between Singapore and Bangkok is long in relation to the distance between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, but in relation to the distance between Singapore and New York, it is short. *Short* and *long*, like *father* and *son*, are therefore relative. They exist and make sense only in relation to other things.

Relativity or “emptiness” means that, because things do not exist independently, they do not have an unchanging nature of their own. One is not independently or by nature a father. A man becomes a father because of his relation to his son. “Emptiness” does not mean nothingness. On the contrary, it means openness and infinite possibility. Any son can become a father if the right combination of causes and conditions is present. Similarly, anyone can become enlightened if he cultivates Good Conduct, Mental Development and Wisdom.

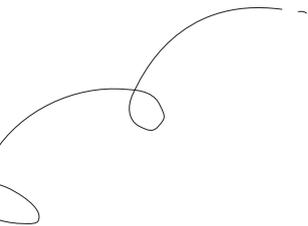
The principle of Dependent Origination is the central teaching of the Buddha. Through the understanding of Dependent Origination, the Buddha attained Enlightenment. He said,

“Deep indeed is Dependent Origination.
It is by not realising this principle that all men
have become entangled like a ball of thread,
unable to stop suffering and rebirth.”



Summary

All things arise dependent on a combination of causes and conditions. Life arises dependent on an impure mind influenced by ignorance, craving and clinging, and habitual actions. At death, an impure mind and habitual actions become the cause of the next life. Consequently, rebirth and suffering occur. But when one's mind is freed from impurities, actions (karma) do not occur. Then rebirth and suffering cease. Dependent Origination also means relativity or "emptiness" because all things are what they are only in relation to other things. Since all things are dependent upon causes and conditions for their existence, they have no real nature of their own and so they are relative or "empty".





The Buddha's Wisdom and Compassion

The Qualities of the Buddha

As a child, Prince Siddhartha was extraordinarily thoughtful and was able to meditate even at the age of seven. The saving of the wounded swan was evidence of another quality, compassion. Now that He had attained Enlightenment, perfect wisdom and great compassion could be seen in all His words and actions. Many unhappy and unfortunate people came to the Buddha in order to find solutions to the problems of life and recover their confidence. The Buddha helped them to distinguish between what was useful and what was not, and encouraged them to think for themselves. He also showed them how to comfort their fellowmen who were distressed by suffering.

The Buddha's Practical Approach

Although the Buddha lived about two thousand and five hundred years ago, his approach to the problems of life was like that of the scientist of today. He was not interested in theories which had no real importance for living. He looked for practical answers. He saw a problem in the shape of the suffering of life and offered a solution to it based on His experiences. He used the following parable to illustrate the attitude of those who cannot distinguish between what is useful and what is not:

“Suppose someone was hit by a poisoned arrow and his friends and relatives found a doctor able to remove the arrow. If this man were

to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I know whether the person who had shot it was a priest, a prince or a merchant, his name and his family. I will not have it taken out until I know what kind of bow was used and whether the arrowhead was an ordinary one or an iron one.' That person would die before all these things are ever known to him."

In the same way, those who say they will not practise the Dharma until they know whether the world is eternal or not, infinite or not, will die before these questions are ever answered.

The Buddha did not answer these questions because they are not relevant to the problems of suffering, nor do they lead to happiness, peace and Enlightenment. Whether one believes that the world is eternal or not, or that it is infinite or not, one has to face the reality of birth, old age, sickness, death and suffering. The Buddha explained suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering and the path leading to the end of suffering here and now. The Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths because He knew that they lead to happiness, peace and Enlightenment.

The Importance of Critical Thinking

In the Buddha's days, there were so many different religious teachings that the people did not know which teaching to follow.

Once, when the Buddha visited a village, the inhabitants (the Kalamas) told Him, "There are teachers who visit our village, who explain their own teachings and condemn the teachings of others. Then others come and they too explain their own teachings and condemn the teachings of others. So we are always troubled as we are not certain which of these teachers has spoken the truth and which has spoken falsely."

The Buddha replied that it was natural that they should have doubts regarding matters which were open to dispute. Then he told them, "Do not be led by rumour, or tradition, or by the authority of religious text, nor by false arguments, nor by appearances, nor by theories, nor even by reverence. But rather when you know through your own experience that certain things are wrong and unwholesome, do not lead to calm and happiness and are not beneficial, then give them up. When you know for yourselves that certain things are right and wholesome, lead to calm and happiness and are beneficial, then follow them."

The Buddha advised them to accept His Teaching only after having examined it for themselves and not out of reverence for him. For instance, it is clear that greed and anger are not beneficial. A person who is overcome by greed and anger finds that he cannot eat or sleep. Greed and anger destroy the well-being of mind and body, and can lead to disagreements and quarrels with others. When people see for themselves the harmful consequences of greed and anger, they will understand the truth of the Buddha's Teaching that greed and anger lead to suffering.

Care for the Sick

The Buddha's compassion was exemplary. Not only did He arouse confidence in those who were forlorn and who had lost hope, but He also inspired others to cultivate wholesome attitudes towards their fellow beings.

Once a young monk, known as Tissa fell sick. At first, small boils broke out on his body. Gradually they became bigger and finally burst. Eventually when open sores covered his entire body, his fellow monks became unwilling to look after him and left him alone. On learning this, the Buddha set some water to boil over a fire. Then he went to where Tissa was lying and took hold of the corner of the

bed. The monks understood what the Buddha wanted and carried the patient to the fire. The Buddha had the monks wash Tissa's clothes and dry them while He Himself gently cleaned the sores and washed Tissa. The monk's suffering was greatly eased and he lay on his bed with his mind at peace.

Comforting the Distressed

Then again, there was the case of the woman known as Patacara who was born into a wealthy family at Shravasti. She was so attractive that in order to keep away her suitors, her parents confined her in a tower watched over by guards. She fell in love with one of the guards and when she heard that her parents had arranged to have her married to another man, she ran away with her lover.

The two soon found life difficult as they had little to live on. When she became pregnant, she wished to give birth to the baby in her parents' home but her husband was reluctant to let her go. Nevertheless, she set out for her parents' home by herself. Fearing for her safety, her husband joined her, but before they could reach their destination, the child was born. They then decided to return home.

Sometime later, she became pregnant again. This time, in her husband's absence, she took her child in her arms and started for her parents' home. Her husband caught up with her but they were overtaken by disaster. A great storm arose and they were without shelter. Fear and worry hastened the time of delivery. She asked her husband to look for a shelter, but while doing so, he was bitten by a snake and died. While waiting for her husband's return, the baby was born.

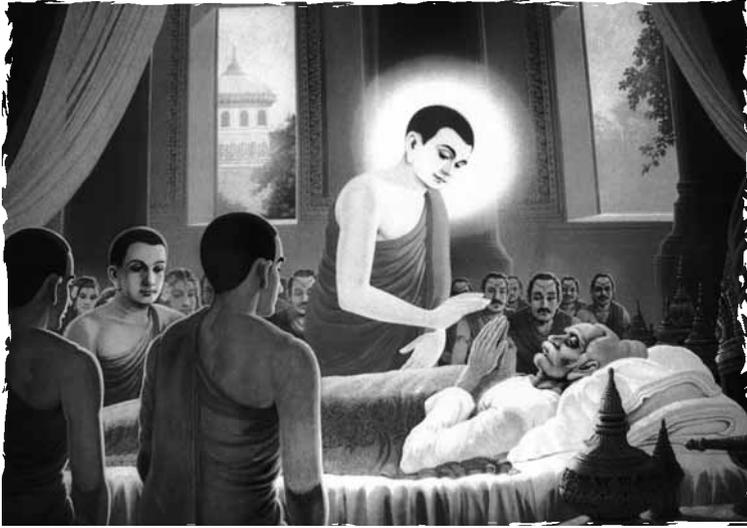
In the morning, she was grieved to find the body of her husband. Feeling helpless, she hurried on with her two children towards her

parents' home. When she came to a river swollen by the recent rain, she was too weak to carry the two children across. She carried the newborn baby across first and left him hidden under some leaves. Then she went back to fetch the other child. While she was in midstream, an eagle swooped down to where she had left the baby and carried him off. Though she shouted and clapped her hands, the bird took no notice. The other child, watching from the bank, thought that his mother was calling him. He started to go to her but tumbled into the river and was carried away by the swift current.

Overcome by grief at the loss of her husband and children, Patacara went on to her parents' home. There, more bad news awaited her. She learnt that her father, mother and brother had died when their house collapsed in the storm. On hearing the news, she could no longer bear her grief and became mad. She ran naked through the streets of Shravasti. The sight of her aroused amusement among the foolish, some of whom even threw stones at her.

When she sought refuge at the Monastery of Anathapindika, some tried to prevent her from entering, but the Buddha forbade that. She came before the Buddha who said to her, "Sister, regain your mindfulness." His compassionate words calmed her and she regained control of her mind. A kind person in the crowd then gave her a shawl to cover her body. The Buddha talked to her and she began to have an understanding of the nature of things. Some time later, when her insight was complete, she became an Arhat.

These episodes show how the Buddha's wisdom and compassion helped confused and desperate people to realise the Truth and regain hope and confidence. The Buddha, having overcome suffering Himself, was always ready to relieve the suffering of others. He treasured life and cared for the spiritual and material needs of the people.



Summary

The Buddha had great wisdom and compassion. Through His wisdom, people learn to be practical in their approach to the problems of life, as illustrated by the parable of the man wounded by a poisoned arrow. He also taught people to examine all teachings in the light of their experience in order to know which is true. Out of compassion, He taught people to care for and comfort the sick and the unfortunate, as in the cases of the sick monk and Patacara.



Three Universal Characteristics

A characteristic is a fact which tells us something about the nature of a thing. If a fact is sometimes connected with a thing and sometimes not, then it is not a characteristic and will not help us very much to understand the nature of that thing.

Heat, for example, is a fact. Heat is not a characteristic of water, as water is not always hot. The heat of water depends upon other factors like the sun or an electric stove. But heat is a characteristic of fire because fire is always hot and the heat of fire does not depend on any other factors. Heat is always connected with fire and tells us something about the nature of fire.

When the Buddha taught that there are three characteristics or facts of existence, He meant that these characteristics are always connected with existence. They are generally found in all that exists and so they can tell us something about the nature of existence.

The three characteristics of existence taught by the Buddha are impermanence, suffering and impersonality.

(a) Impermanence

The Buddha taught that all existence is impermanent because there is nothing internal or external whatsoever which is permanent, stable, lasting, not subject to decay and destruction, and forever the

same. Everything changes continuously. Existence is like the flowing water of a river or the burning flame of a candle, which is never the same in two consecutive moments.

Our body, for instance, is made up of material elements such as flesh, bones and blood, which are impermanent. From the moment of our birth, the body constantly undergoes change. The human mind, too, is dependent on many factors. It is in constant change. It is like a monkey forever jumping about, never still for even a moment. Thus neither the body nor the mind is permanent and unchanging.

Science teaches that apparently permanent objects like the oceans, continents, mountain ranges, and even the earth, the sun and the solar system are constantly changing and will some day become extinct. When all these are also subject to change and destruction, one cannot doubt the impermanence of life. Life can end at any moment. No one can avoid death and the destruction of the body.

Understanding the characteristic of impermanence benefits people in two important ways. Firstly, it can improve human relationships and activities. Secondly, it can encourage people to follow the Noble Eightfold Path.

Often people find that they make mistakes in their relationships with others because they fail to take into account the changes that constantly occur in themselves and others. Often friendships die because one or both parties fail to realise that their friend's personality, interests and attitudes have changed.

When one realises that people and situations are impermanent and constantly changing, one will approach each moment of a relationship with an open mind. One will be able to react to each new situation without clinging to outdated ideas about people. Relationships can then develop fruitfully. Success in life depends on

one's ability to adapt to change in situations and to make the most of new opportunities arising.

Having understood that youth, health, material well-being and even life itself are impermanent, people should then make the most of those favourable circumstances while they last. This means that they need to practise the Noble Eightfold Path in order to achieve happiness and Enlightenment. The Buddha's last words were,

“Subject to change are all things,
Strive on with diligence.”

(b) Suffering

The Truth of Suffering is the first of the Four Noble Truths taught by the Buddha. Suffering is a fact of life which people can see for themselves. It is one of the three characteristics of existence.

Whatever is impermanent is also suffering. Everything which arises will last only for a time, then it decays and finally dies. Repeated birth and death is hard to endure. It disturbs one's peace of mind and is a cause of suffering.

Thus old age, sickness and death which are evidence of the impermanence of life itself are forms of suffering. Since people tend to cling to youth, health, relationships and material achievements, the knowledge that these are impermanent causes anxiety and fears. It is said that even the gods trembled when the Buddha reminded them that the heavens are also impermanent.

Understanding that suffering is universal and inevitable enables one to face the realities of life with calmness of mind. One will be able to cope with old age, sickness and death without becoming disheartened or desperate. It also encourages people to look for a solution to the problem of suffering just as Prince Siddhartha did.

(c) Impersonality

People often think that there must be a personality or self that is real and permanent, otherwise they would not exist or experience things in life. However, the Buddha taught that there is no real, permanent and independent personality or self at all. This is the third characteristic of existence.

If a permanent and independent self really exist, one should be able to identify it. Some people may say that the body is the self, or that the mind is the self. However, both ideas are wrong. Both body and mind are impermanent, ever changing and subject to destruction. They depend on many factors for their existence. Neither body nor mind can possibly be the permanent and independent self.

If the body were the self, it would be able to will itself to be strong or fair. However the body grows tired, hungry and falls sick against its will, so the body cannot be the personality or self.

Similarly, if the mind were the self, it could do whatever it wished. But the mind often runs away from what it knows to be right, and runs after what is wrong. It becomes disturbed, distracted and excited against its will. Therefore the mind is also not the self.

When people say, for instance, "I am going to school", they are just using a convenient name "I" for a collection of physical and mental factors. In reality, there is no "I" or self.

So long as people think that the self is permanent and independent, they are bound to be self-centred and egoistic. Not only will they feel constantly threatened by people and situations, they will also feel compelled to protect themselves, their possessions and even their opinions, at any cost.

But once people realise that the self is just a convenient name for a collection of constantly changing physical and mental factors, they will no longer cling to it in fear and insecurity. They will find it easier to grow, learn, develop, and to be generous, kind and compassionate because they will no longer need to be constantly on the defensive.

Understanding the fact of impersonality can help people deal more effectively with everyday situations. It encourages the cultivation of Good Conduct and helps one to progress towards happiness, peace and Enlightenment.

Impermanence, suffering and impersonality are the three characteristics of existence. Whatever is impermanent causes suffering, and whatever is impermanent and suffering is also without an independent self. Those who realise the truth of these three facts of existence will be able to overcome suffering because their minds are freed from the delusions of permanence, pleasure, and the self.

summary

A characteristic is a fact that tells us something about the nature of a thing because it is always connected with it. The three characteristics of existence are impermanence, suffering and impersonality. All things, whether internal or external, are impermanent and ever changing. All things are involved with suffering and all things are impersonal, that is, not self. Through understanding the three characteristics, people can deal more effectively with life and on realising the true nature of existence, they finally overcome suffering.



Personal Experience

The Idea of “Self”

As mentioned in the previous chapter, what people call *self* is actually a collection of constantly changing physical and mental factors, just as the word *car* is a name for a collection of parts such as the wheels, engine, axles and chassis which are assembled in a particular manner. The wheels alone do not make the car, neither does any other particular part. It is the correct assembly of all the parts of the car in a certain order that makes the final product. Similarly, when all the physical and mental factors are working together, people speak of a self and personal experience.

The Physical and Mental Factors of Experience

Personal experience consists of physical and mental factors. The physical factors of experience are the objects that people see around them such as tables, chairs, mountains and trees. Even the human body is a collection of physical factors like the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the skin, bones, blood, hair, nails, teeth and so on.

The physical factors alone do not constitute personal experience. Experience is not possible without the mind. Mental factors are therefore important too. The mind is aware of the physical factors of experience and turns them into personal experience by means of feelings, ideas and habits. When one's eyes happen to set upon

a piece of cake, it is the mind that becomes aware of it, identifies it as chocolate cake and responds to it with pleasure and anticipation. Finally, it is the mind that moves one to reach for the cake and eat it. One can see how the mind along with the mental factors of feelings, ideas and habits, contribute to personal experience. Given the physical factors, that is, the eyes and the object they set upon, the mind forms an idea of the object, in this case, a piece of chocolate cake. It responds to the idea of a piece of chocolate cake with a feeling of pleasure. Finally, it reacts to the experience with a habit such as the habit of eating chocolate cake. Had one's eyes set upon a snake instead, the mind would have become aware of it and would have formed the idea of a snake. It would then respond to this idea with a feeling of displeasure and fear, and react with the habit of running away.

In the same way, whether people see a flower, hear a piece of music, meet a friend or are told of a coming examination, the physical and mental factors work together to produce an experience which may be pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent.

The Nature of the Physical and Mental Factors

The physical and mental factors of experience are impermanent and ever changing. The physical factors of experience which consist of the things people see around them as well as their own bodies are impermanent and ever changing. Trees are cut down to be made into tables and chairs while with the passing of time, tables and chairs eventually become firewood. Even mountains can become levelled through the gradual process of erosion. Parents become old and die while children become parents.

The mental factors of experience like feelings, ideas and habits too are impermanent and ever changing. People respond with pleasure to a piece of music today but sometime later, they dislike it. They

form the idea that the moon is larger at the horizon than when it is above their heads and then eventually realise that this is untrue. Others may develop the habit of smoking and later drop the habit when they learn that smoking is harmful.

The Buddha taught that the physical and mental factors of experience are impermanent. Neither the physical factors nor the mental factors of experience is the self. All things are impermanent. There is no permanent independent self to be found.

It is the mistake of regarding the physical and mental factors of experience as the self that gives rise to the thoughts of *I*, *me* and *mine*. In life, people encounter the eight worldly conditions of gain and loss, honour and dishonour, praise and blame, and happiness and pain. They often react with thoughts such as “I am praised” or “He blames me” or “The gain is mine”. It is because people regard these conditions from an egoistic and self-centred point of view that they react to them with hope and fear and suffer as a consequence. People hope for gain, honour, praise and happiness and are afraid of loss, dishonour, blame and pain. But if people regard the physical and mental factors of experience as not self, they will not react to the eight worldly conditions in terms of *I*, *me* or *mine* but will regard them in a calm and detached way. They will then be able to relate to people and situations in harmony with a mind liberated from egoism.

summary

Personal experience is the result of the interaction of physical and mental factors. The physical factors of experience are material objects. The mental factors of experience are the mind along with its feelings, ideas and habits. The physical and mental factors of experience are at work in all daily activities. Since both the physical and mental factors are impermanent and ever changing, there is no permanent self. Once this is realised, one can regard the eight worldly conditions in a calm and detached way.



Last Days of the Buddha

The Sermon on the Welfare of a Nation

After having attained the supreme Enlightenment, the Buddha went from place to place, tirelessly spreading the Teaching until He reached eighty years of age.

One day, while the Buddha was at Rajagriha, a minister approached Him for an opinion about a plan to conquer a neighbouring state. Instead of giving a direct answer, the Buddha spoke about the seven conditions conducive to the growth of a nation's welfare. He said that people should assemble in harmony, discuss their national affairs together, follow the established laws and not change them unreasonably. In addition, they should honour their parents, teachers and elders, lead a moral life, respect their religion, and follow the advice of the wise and the virtuous. As long as people followed this advice, their nation would prosper. Satisfied with the answer, the minister left, promising to convey the Buddha's reply to his king.

The Sermon on Morality

From Rajagriha, the Buddha set out northwards with a large community of disciples. One day, they arrived at a village where the Buddha delivered a sermon on morality. In this sermon, the Buddha said,

“The immoral man will meet five dangers: he will lose his wealth through not practising good conduct, acquire a bad name, feel ashamed of himself and be afraid to mix freely with others, he will not die peacefully, and will suffer in the next life. A moral man will acquire five blessings: he will increase his wealth through diligence, have a good reputation, always be confident of himself, die peacefully, and be happy in the next life.”

The Buddha’s Illness

From that village, the Buddha proceeded by stages to Vaishali. Since it was the beginning of the rainy season, He decided to spend the retreat in the neighbourhood. It was during this time that the Buddha became severely ill. Ananda, who had been His faithful attendant for the past twenty-five years, wept for he thought the Buddha was dying. But by strength of will, the Buddha recovered from His illness. However, Ananda was still worried about the Buddha’s health and asked Him for some last instructions for the Order.

The Buddha replied, “What more does the Order expect from me, Ananda? I have already taught the doctrine. There is nothing in the Teaching that I have kept hidden from you. Now, I am old and feeble. This is my eightieth year and my life is spent.”

He added, “Ananda, each of you be your own lamp. Look to no one to bring you light. He who is his own lamp after I have left the world will show that he has understood the meaning of my words. He will be my true disciple. He will know the right way to live.”

Soon after, the Buddha decided to talk to His disciples about the time when He would pass away. He asked Ananda to assemble all the disciples who were in the neighbourhood of Vaishali. In their presence, He declared, “The time of my Final Nirvana is near. Three months from now, I will pass away. Be earnest, be

mindful and be of pure virtue. With determination, guard your own mind. Whoever untiringly follows the Teaching shall end rebirth and suffering.

“You should respect each other and avoid quarrels. You should not be like water and oil, repelling each other, but you should be like milk and water mixed together.”

The Last Meal

From Vaishali, the Buddha continued His journey to Pava. There, a blacksmith called Chunda, out of devotion, offered Him a meal. Soon after, the Buddha became very ill, but He bore the pains resolutely and remained calm.

Thinking that Chunda might be blamed for causing His illness, the Buddha explained, “There are two offerings of food which excel other offerings. The first is the offering just before the Enlightenment, and the other is the one just before Final Nirvana. Chunda has gained merit through this deed and should not feel sorry.”

The Buddha added that generosity increases one’s merit, self-control frees one from anger and virtue prevents evil. One who removes greed, anger and delusion is at peace.

The Last Scene

Then the Buddha set out for the Sala grove at Kushinagara with a large community of His disciples. They crossed a river and finally arrived at their destination. There, between two large Sala trees, Ananda prepared a couch on which the Buddha rested. He laid on His right side with His head towards the north.

At that moment, the two Sala trees burst into full bloom, though it was not the flowering season. When the blossoms rained upon



Lumbini

His body, the Buddha said, “This is not the best way to honour me. Whoever follows the Teaching and lives virtuously honours me best.”



Four Places of Pilgrimage

As it was the practice of the disciples to visit the Buddha after the rainy season retreat, Ananda asked Him what should be done after His Final Nirvana. In reply, the Buddha mentioned four places a devoted follower could visit to respect Him. They are Lumbini, Bodhgaya, the Deer Park at Varanasi and Kushinagara.



Bodhgaya



Sarnath (The Deer Park)



Kushinagara

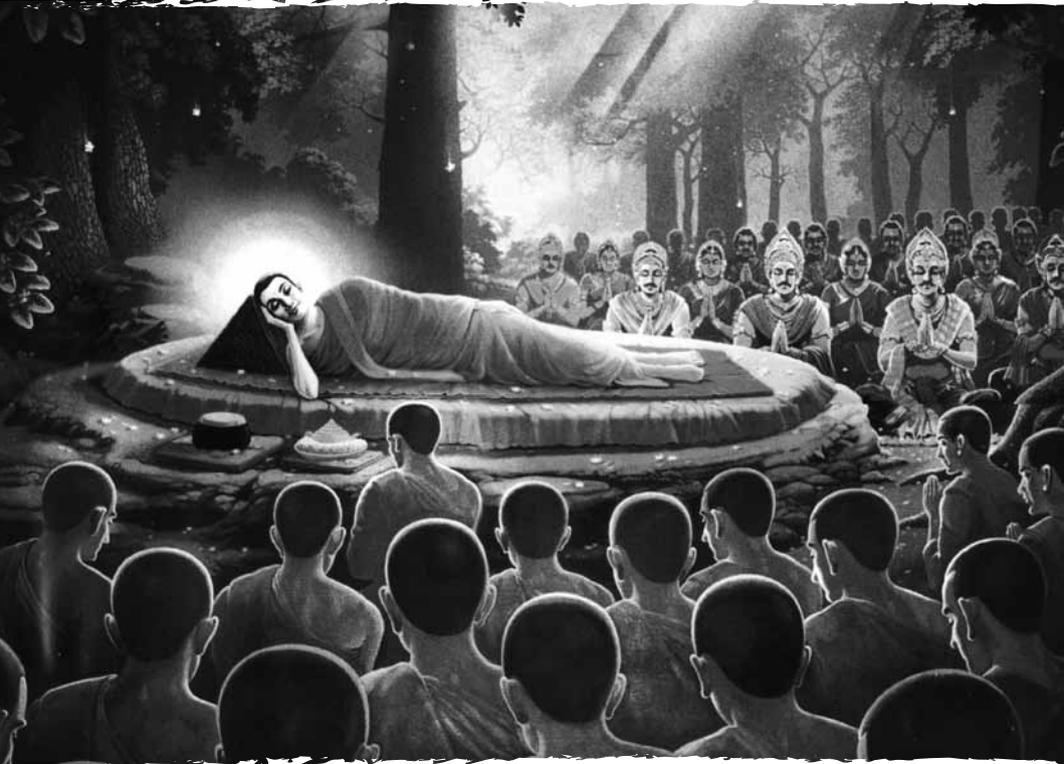
The Last Convert

On hearing that the Buddha was going to pass away in their neighbourhood, the people of Kushinagara went in groups to see Him out of respect. Among them was a wandering ascetic named Subhadra who approached Ananda and asked to be allowed to see the Buddha. However, Ananda refused because he did not wish the Buddha to be disturbed as He was very ill. Subhadra repeated his request three times but without success.

The Buddha overheard their conversation and instructed Ananda to allow Sudhadra to see Him as he was sincere in seeking the Truth and would understand His Teaching. The question which Subhadra put to the Buddha was whether all ascetics and priests who were leaders of large followings, were enlightened. The Buddha replied that in whatever teaching and discipline where the Noble Eightfold Path is found, there Enlightenment is found. On hearing this, Subhadra requested to be admitted into the Order. Thus, he became the last disciple to be ordained by the Buddha himself.

The Final Advice

Before entering Final Nirvana, the Buddha said to Ananda, "Some may think that when I am no more with you, you will have no teacher. But that is not so, Ananda. The Teaching and Discipline shall be your guide when I am gone."



The Buddha then address His disciples, “If any of you have doubts concerning the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, then ask me now so that you will have no cause for regrets later on.”

Though the Buddha repeated this thrice, all His disciples remained silent. After some time, Ananda said, “I am confident that everyone in this assembly has no doubts concerning the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha!”

The Buddha replied, “Ananda, you spoke out of faith, but I know for certain that among this community of monks, there is not one who is in doubt.”

Finally, the Buddha spoke His last words, “O Disciples, subject to change are all things; strive on with diligence.” Then He entered Final Nirvana.

Homage to the Remains

The people of Kushinagara first honoured the body of the Buddha and then carried it to the east of the town for cremation. Many kings who heard about the Buddha’s Final Nirvana send messengers to ask for a portion of the relics left after the cremation. The people of Kushinagara refused to part with any, and a conflict arose. Fortunately, a priest came forward and reminded them that as the Buddha had taught tolerance, it would be improper to quarrel over the possession of His remains. He suggested that the relics be divided into eight portions to be shared equally among the claimants. His suggestion was accepted and the relics were distributed accordingly. The claimants brought back their share of the relics to their respective countries and kept them in stupas so that people could pay respect to the Buddha and have faith in His Teaching.

summary

At Rajagriha, the Buddha spoke about the conditions that lead to the welfare of a nation. On the way to Vaishali, He delivered a sermon on the advantages of a moral life. At Vaishali, the Buddha informed the Order that He would enter Final Nirvana three months later. After taking a meal from Chunda, the Buddha became seriously ill. However, he proceeded to Kushinagara, where He advised His followers to rely upon His Teaching and Discipline and to strive diligently to end suffering. After the Buddha had entered Final Nirvana, His remains were divided among the eight nations of northern India.



Buddhism in Perspective

The Importance of Basic Human Values

Much has changed in the world since the Buddha lived and taught about 2,500 years ago. Man has made tremendous strides in the fields of science, technology and medicine. These advances have enabled him to improve the material standards of his life enormously. He can now control the environment as he never has been able to before. He is able to produce more and better consumer goods for his convenience and enjoyment, and he has been able to increase his lifespan by a number of years.

Despite all these successes, most people will agree that life is still full of frustrations and fears. The world is still full of intolerance, exploitation and violence. Material progress alone does not seem able to solve the human problems. All the scientific, technological and medical progress imaginable cannot help to make the world a better place to live in if people fail to appreciate and cultivate basic human values like self-discipline, respect for the lives and welfare of others, tolerance and compassion. The Teaching of the Buddha stresses the importance of these basic human values that contribute to contentment, harmony and peace which are still needed today.

The True Meaning of Renunciation

The values taught in Buddhism are relevant not only to monks and nuns, but also to ordinary men and women. The true meaning

of renunciation lies in a person's attitude towards life. When one realises that material success is not the sole end of life and gives up the single-minded pursuit of wealth and pleasure in order to look for a higher goal in life, one is already practising renunciation. Renunciation is the giving up of unwholesome habits, bigotry, greed and anger.

The Unsatisfactory Nature of Existence

So long as there is ignorance, desire and ill will, a person's actions (karma) will cause him to be reborn again and again in one of the six realms of existence. The cycle of birth and death is endless. It is said that if all the skeletons from a person's past lives were all heaped up, the pile would exceed the highest mountain.

A person's unwholesome actions may result in his rebirth in the hells or in the realms of animals or hungry ghosts. In these lower realms of existence, he may experience immense suffering. If a person has acted with good intentions, he may be reborn in the relatively happier realms of human beings, the demigods or the gods. However, the happiness experienced is not permanent because rebirth may take place in any one of the six realms of existence. Once people realise that the six realms of existence are universally impermanent, unsatisfactory and insubstantial, they should look for a way to break the bonds of the cycle of birth and death. Only then can they experience the supreme and lasting happiness and freedom which is Nirvana.

Attaining Nirvana

The Buddha has shown by His own example that it is possible to attain Nirvana. His personal achievement should give people confidence in the possibility of attaining Nirvana when they faithfully practise what He taught. The Buddha said,

“As the vast ocean is of one taste, the taste of salt,
So also, in my Teaching, there is but one taste,
The taste of freedom, that is, Nirvana.”

People who have encountered the Buddha's Teaching and enjoy youth, health and material well-being, should make use of these favourable conditions in life to strive to attain Nirvana. So long as Nirvana has not been attained, one cannot avoid the suffering of old age, sickness and death, the suffering of separation from those one loves, being with those one dislikes, and not having one's desire satisfied. Moreover, one never knows where one may be reborn in the six realms and when one will have such an opportunity again to listen to and practise the Buddha's Teaching in order to attain Nirvana.

The Way to Attain Nirvana

The Buddha taught people the Noble Eightfold Path leading to the attainment of Nirvana. The path is divided into the three interrelated ways of practices, namely Good Conduct, Mental Development and Wisdom. Through the practice of Good Conduct, people learn to control their words and deeds so that they cease to do unwholesome actions. Through Mental Development, they purify their minds so that they do not stray from the course of Good Conduct. Finally through Wisdom, the causes of unwholesome actions, that is, ignorance, desire and ill will, are removed. When people eventually see things as they really are, having fully understood the Four Noble Truths, they have achieved Nirvana.

The Importance of Patient Practice

It is through patient practice that one can arrive at the final goal of Nirvana. As the Buddha said,

“By degree, little by little, from time to time,
A wise man should remove his impurities,
As a silversmith removes the impurities from silver.”

Even if one does not attain Nirvana in this life, one's effort is not wasted. First, one experiences contentment, harmony, peace and prosperity in this life and the next. Eventually one achieves the supreme happiness and peace of Nirvana.



Buddhism in Practice





Becoming a Buddhist

When a person wishes to become a Buddhist, the first step he takes is to go to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha for refuge. Since the time of the Buddha, taking this Threefold Refuge has identified a person as a Buddhist.

Reasons For Taking Refuge

If people observe the world around them carefully, they are bound to notice the pain, suffering and frustration experienced by sentient beings. A Buddhist will look for a way to end such distressing conditions in life just as a traveller caught in a storm will seek shelter. If the traveller is able to find shelter inside a building that is strong and safe, he will call out to others who are still struggling in the storm outdoors to join him in this safe refuge. Similarly, a person chooses to become a Buddhist when he understands who the Buddha is, and how the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha can provide him the way to end suffering. Out of compassion, he will also encourage others to take the same refuge.

The Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are called the *Triple Gem* or the Three Jewels because they represent qualities which are excellent and precious like a gem. Once a person recognises these unique qualities after careful consideration and is confident that the Triple Gem can help lead him towards happiness and Enlightenment, he takes refuge. It is, therefore, not out of mere faith, but with an open-minded attitude and enquiring spirit that he begins to practise the

Buddha's Teaching. In a way, he resembles the scientist who decides to carry out a research project once he is confident that it will bring positive results.

The Buddha

The word *Buddha* means the "Fully Enlightened One" or "Awakened One". It is the title given to those who have attained supreme and perfect Enlightenment. Buddhists acknowledge the Buddha as the embodiment of the highest morality, deepest concentration and perfect wisdom. The Buddha is also known to His followers as the "Perfected One" because He has wiped out desire, ill will and ignorance, and has overcome all unwholesome actions. He has put an end to suffering and is no longer bound to the cycle of birth and death.

The Buddha is the Fully Enlightened One because He has realised the Truth and sees things as they really are. He knows through His perfect wisdom, what is good and what is not good for all beings. Out of great compassion, He shows people the path leading to the end of suffering.

The Buddha's exemplary conduct, perfect wisdom and great compassion make Him an excellent teacher. By His use of skilful means, He is able to reach out to all His followers so that they can understand His Teaching.

The Dharma

The Buddha taught the Dharma solely out of compassion for sentient beings who suffer in the cycle of birth and death. The Dharma is therefore taught without any selfish motives. It is well-taught and completely good. It is by nature pure and bright like a light that destroys the darkness of ignorance. When the Dharma is studied and practised, it brings many benefits now and in the future.

The Dharma is the Teaching about the nature of life. This Teaching of the Buddha is contained in the three collections of scriptures called the *Tripitaka* or the “Three Baskets”. These consist of the sermons (*Sutra Pitaka*) said to have been taught by the Buddha, the rules governing the discipline of the monastic community (*Vinaya Pitaka*) and the philosophy and psychology of Buddhism (*Abhidharma Pitaka*).

A Buddhist gets to know about the Dharma by reading the scriptures. He also learns from the writings and explanations of qualified teachers of Buddhism. Once he has familiarised himself with the Dharma through reading and listening, he has to realise its truth for himself by putting it into practice. This means purifying his conduct and cultivating Mental Development until the Teaching becomes part of his own experience.

The Sangha

The Sangha that a Buddhist takes refuge in is the community of *Noble Ones* who have led exemplary lives and attained extraordinary insight into the true nature of things. Their lives and achievements show others that it is possible to progress on the path to Enlightenment.

However, the Sangha also generally refers to the fourfold community of monks, nuns, men and women lay followers. Monks and nuns are respected for their good conduct and for their experience in meditation. They are also respected for their diligence, mindfulness and calmness. Wise and learned, they are able teachers of the Dharma. They can also be like trusted friends inspiring the lay followers along the path of Good Conduct.

The lay followers accept the Four Noble Truths and the other teachings of the Buddha and seek happiness and Enlightenment as their common goal in life. They also uphold common moral values

such as avoiding injury to others in any way. Thus a Buddhist can look to other members of the lay community for help and advice in times of need.

Analogy of a Journey

To understand better the idea of taking refuge, one might take the example of a traveller who wants to visit a distant city where he has never been to before. He will surely need a guide to lead him towards his destination. He will need a path to follow. He may also wish to have travelling companions on the journey. A Buddhist working towards attaining happiness and Enlightenment is like the traveller trying to reach that distant city. The Buddha is his “guide”, the Dharma his “path” and the Sangha are his “travelling companions”.

A Buddhist takes refuge in the Buddha as his guide because he believes that the Buddha, having attained Enlightenment Himself, is able to guide him towards that goal. The Dharma that he takes as his refuge is like a path that has been well laid out. Such a path may include signposts to show directions, bridges for crossing rivers and steps for climbing mountains. Similarly, the Dharma includes the rules of Good Conduct to help him avoid unwholesome actions and the techniques of Mental Development to help him overcome distractions. It also teaches him how to overcome ignorance and gain Enlightenment.

Taking refuge in the Sangha is like having good travelling companions who keep a traveller company, care for him when he is sick and encourage him along when he is tired. The members of the Sangha, like ideal travelling companions, help the lay follower to purify his unwholesome ideas and correct his behaviour through sound advice and instruction, and encourage him to continue his journey to Enlightenment.

The Act of Taking Refuge

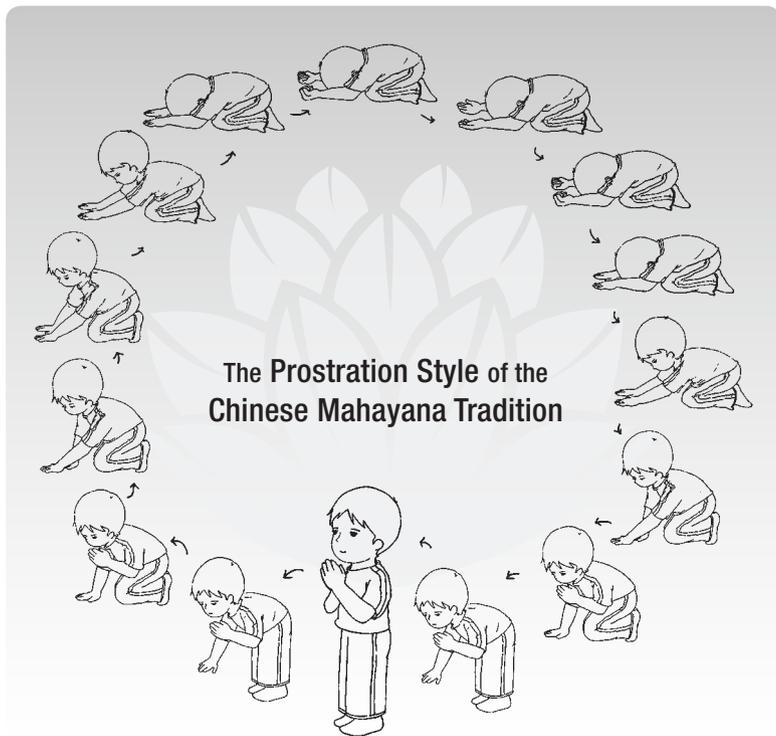
A Buddhist expresses his intention of taking the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha as his refuge by repeating the following lines thrice :

“ I go to the Buddha for refuge.
I go to the Dharma for refuge.
I go to the Sangha for refuge.”

These lines can be recited by the person alone, before the image of a Buddha or repeated line by line after a monk or master. A Buddhist may repeat the Threefold Refuge daily to remind himself that he has made a commitment to attain the goal of happiness and Enlightenment through the guidance and inspiration of the Triple Gem.

The Benefits of Taking Refuge

A Buddhist performs the act of taking refuge as the first step on the path to Enlightenment. Thereafter, through Good Conduct and Mental Development, he tries to achieve contentment, self-control, a calm and clear mind, and wisdom. Even if Enlightenment is not achieved in this life, a Buddhist who takes refuge in the Triple Gem is more likely to have favourable conditions for attaining Enlightenment in a future life.



summary

A person takes refuge when he fears the suffering of the world and develops confidence in the Triple Gem which can lead him to happiness and Enlightenment. The Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are called the Triple Gem because they represent qualities that are precious like a gem. A Buddhist who wishes to attain Enlightenment regards the Buddha as his guide, the Dharma as his path and the Sangha as his travelling companions. He repeats the formula of taking refuge before an image of the Buddha or a monk. Taking refuge is the first step on the path to Enlightenment.



Good Conduct in Practice

When a person becomes a citizen of a country or a member of a club, he has to abide by the rules and regulations of that country or club. Similarly when a person becomes a Buddhist by taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, he also voluntarily undertakes to observe the Five Precepts.

The Five Precepts

The Five Precepts are usually expressed in the following form:

- (1) I observe the precept to refrain from killing;
- (2) I observe the precept to refrain from taking what is not given;
- (3) I observe the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct;
- (4) I observe the precept to refrain from telling lies;
- (5) I observe the precept to refrain from taking intoxicants.

These precepts provide the basic guidelines for Good Conduct. To show that he is resolved to observe the Five Precepts, a Buddhist may recite them in front of the image of the Buddha or he may repeat them after a monk or master.

Purpose of Observing the Five Precepts

Observing the precepts is a means of helping a Buddhist to cultivate Good Conduct by restraining himself from committing unwholesome actions. There was an occasion when the Buddha spoke to a priest named Kutadanta about the observance of the

Five Precepts. Kutadanta had asked the Buddha about a suitable form of sacrifice that a person might perform in order to show how grateful he was for his good fortune. According to traditional practices, the people killed animals and offered them as sacrifice to the gods. The Buddha, however, deplored the killing of animals for such a purpose. He suggested to Kutadanta that a better way of expressing one's gratitude was to practise charity. An even better way was to "sacrifice" one's unwholesome actions by observing the Five Precepts. This not only expresses one's gratitude for present good fortune, but also increases the opportunity for happiness and good fortune in the future. The observance of the Five Precepts helps a Buddhist to make progress on the path to Enlightenment and at the same time, contributes to the well-being and happiness of those around him.

The First Precept: To Refrain from Killing

One shows respect for life by refraining from killing. The Buddha spoke on this matter on the occasion when He was informed that two groups of people had nearly killed one another during a violent quarrel. The Buddha reminded His followers that all living beings are alike in fearing death. Therefore, understanding this, they should refrain from killing.

Observing the first precept not only means that one refrains from killing other people, it also implies that one refrains from the killing of animals whether for profit or pleasure. The principle of non-killing is therefore extended to all living beings.

In observing the first precept, one tries to protect life whenever possible. Furthermore, one cultivates the attitude of loving-kindness to all beings by wishing that they may be happy and free from harm.

The Second Precept: To Refrain from Taking that which is Not Given

Every person has the right to keep the things he owns and part with them on his own free will. In observing the second precept, one expresses respect for the right to own property.

On one occasion, a monk picked up a piece of cloth from the ground, thinking that it had been thrown away by someone. Later, a man came to search for the cloth which belonged to him. When he saw it in the monk's possession, he accused him of stealing it. On finding out that the cloth belonged to that man, the monk quickly returned it to him. The Buddha was later informed of the incident and He said, "He who takes nothing that is not given, I call him virtuous and wise."

In observing the second precept, one avoids committing robbery and theft. Besides these, one avoids misusing money or property belonging to the public or other people. In a broader sense, the second precept also means that one should not evade one's responsibilities. If an employee is lazy and neglects the duties or tasks assigned to him, he is, in a way, "stealing" time that should have been spent on his work.

In its broadest sense, observing the second precept also means that one cultivates the virtue of generosity. A Buddhist gives to the poor and the sick because of their need. He makes offerings to the monks, nuns and masters because he respects the qualities they possess. He is generous in his gifts to his parents, teachers and friends because of the advice, guidance and kindness they have shown him.

Besides giving material things to the needy and the worthy, Buddhists should also offer sympathy and encouragement to those who are hurt or discouraged. It is said, however, that the best of all

gifts is the gift of the Dharma in the form of teaching it or in the production and distribution of Buddhist books.

The Third Precept: To Refrain from Sexual Misconduct

Refraining from sexual misconduct shows one's respect for people and personal relationships. There was once a man who had the habit of committing adultery. Even though he was arrested a number of times for his misconduct, he would not change his ways. Finally in desperation, his father took him to the Buddha for advice. The Buddha then pointed out that a person who indulges in sexual misconduct creates problems and suffering for himself as well as others. He not only squanders his money and loses his reputation but also creates enemies for himself.

In observing the third precept, one controls one's sexual desires and is faithful to one's husband or wife. This helps to create peace in the family now that the major cause of disagreements between husband and wife is removed.

The Fourth Precept: To Refrain from Telling Lies

To refrain from telling lies is to show respect for the truth. No good can come from telling lies, be it out of fun or malice.

In one incident, some ascetics belonging to other religious groups noticed that the Buddha and His disciples were drawing more and more people into their Order. Envious of the Buddha's popularity, these ascetics decided to destroy His reputation in order to draw away His followers. They bribed a woman to feign pregnancy and accuse the Buddha of being responsible for her condition. However, her fraud was exposed and she was driven away by some of the people present in the assembly. This incident led to the Buddha's comment that there is no evil a liar cannot do.

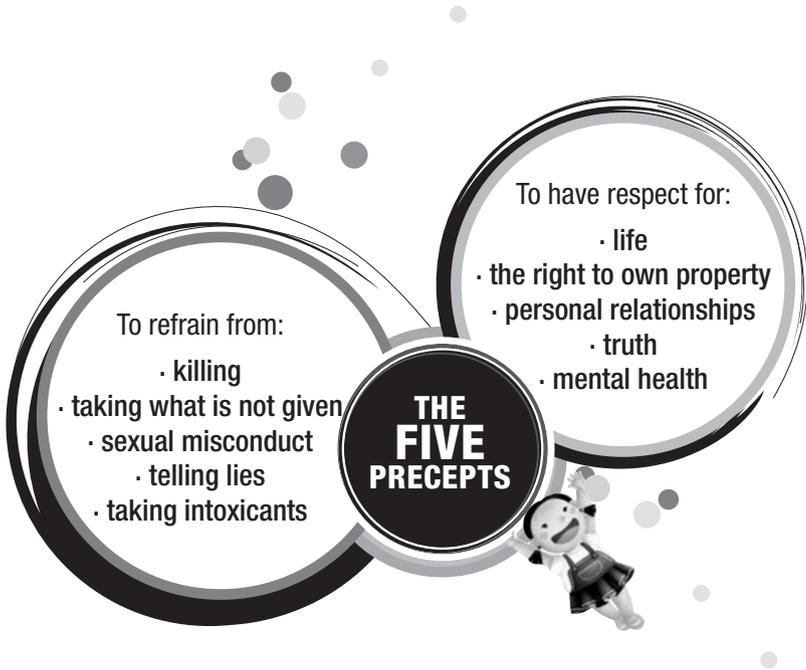
When a Buddhist observes the fourth precept, he refrains from telling lies or half-truths that exaggerate or understate, and instead cultivates the virtue of truthfulness. Once people uphold the respect for truth, there will be fewer quarrels and misunderstandings and fewer cases of false accusations in the courts of justice. Society will then become more peaceful and orderly.

The Fifth Precept: To Refrain from Taking Intoxicants

The fifth precept is based on respect for mental health. It guards against the loss of control of one's mind. On one occasion, the Buddha was delivering a sermon when a drunkard happened to be in the assembly. Restless and unable to control himself, the drunkard disturbed the assembly with his disorderly behaviour. The Buddha then commented on the harmful consequences of taking intoxicating drinks.

Alcoholism and drug abuse are serious health problems in modern society. Taking alcoholic drinks and drugs dull the mind, causing it to be easily distracted and confused. Unable to think clearly while under the influence of strong drinks, a person may commit many careless and unwholesome acts. A drunken driver, for example, is a danger on the road for he is very likely to cause an accident. In fact, drunkenness is a major cause of death and injury in road accidents in many urban societies of today. The damage caused in such accidents creates suffering and unhappiness for the victims and their families.

The fifth precept is particularly important to those who meditate because, by refraining from taking intoxicants, they can more easily cultivate awareness, attention and clarity of mind. Thus the observance of the fifth precept not only contributes to happiness in the family and peace in society, it also prepares a person for the practice of Mental Development.



The Five Precepts as an Ideal

A lay Buddhist may find the Five Precepts difficult to observe completely and constantly, but he should not be disheartened by this. Even if he is able to observe only one or two of the precepts successfully, he is already laying the foundation for happiness now and in the future. He may also make a daily renewal of his determination to observe the precepts as a reminder of the ideal way of life that they represent. He should strive as hard as he can to achieve the ideal as much as possible. In doing so, he creates within himself the sense of inner peace and of being at ease with the world.

The Eight Precepts

The Eight Precepts consist of the Five Precepts described above and three others, namely:

- (1) to refrain from taking food after midday;
- (2) to abstain from indulging in songs, dances, music and shows as well as the use of ornaments, perfumes and cosmetics;
- (3) to refrain from using a high or luxurious seat or bed.

The Eight Precepts are usually observed on new moon and full moon days. These precepts may be difficult for a lay Buddhist to follow. Therefore, their observance is entirely voluntary. Those who make the attempt are those who wish to experience the disciplined life of renunciation lived by members of the Order.

In observing the sixth precept, for example, the lay Buddhist eats one or two simple meals between dawn and noon and avoids taking food beyond that. This cuts down the time spent on meals and allows him more time to spend on meditation. As for the seventh precept, the lay Buddhist refrains from enjoying songs, dances, music and shows during his period of observance so that he will not be distracted by sensual pleasures that may give rise to unwholesome thoughts. At the same time, by refraining from the use of ornaments, perfumes and cosmetics, he becomes more aware that physical beauty is impermanent and that one should not be vain. By observing the eighth precept, the lay Buddhist experiences a simple way of life with the minimum of luxuries.

Observing the sixth, seventh and eighth precepts requires more effort on the lay Buddhist's part because he has to restrain himself from indulging in the physical comforts and pleasures that he may be so accustomed to in everyday life. The purpose is to enable him to detach himself from all the distractions of normal activity in order to gain a better understanding of the real nature of life.

Summary

A Buddhist undertakes to observe the Five Precepts. They are: to refrain from killing, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from telling lies and from taking intoxicants. By observing the Five Precepts, a Buddhist restrains himself from committing unwholesome actions. The Five Precepts represent ideals which a Buddhist tries to achieve. In addition, a Buddhist may observe the Eight Precepts on special days. This enables him to experience the disciplined life of renunciation.



Family and Society

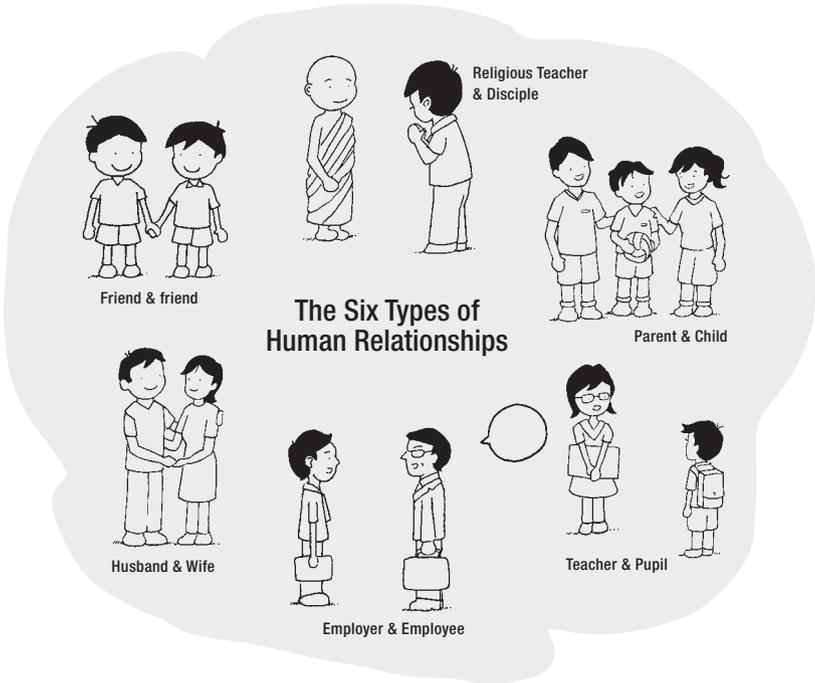
The Buddha delivered many sermons on the life of lay followers. In one of these sermons, which is called the *Sigalovada Sutta*, the Buddha talked about the roles and responsibilities of members within the family and within the society. He defined the ideal relationships that the lay follower should develop with respect to his family and the society at large. These relationships are based on the acceptance of reciprocal responsibilities between people.

Honouring the Six Directions

One day, according to the *Sigalovada Sutta*, the Buddha saw Sigala bowing to the six directions, that is, east, south, west, north, above and below, immediately after his morning bath. Sigala had promised at his father's deathbed to observe this ritual faithfully. It was then believed that when people practised this ritual, they were honouring the gods residing in the six directions. As a result, these gods would be pleased and would bestow good luck, happiness and prosperity on them.

The Buddha, however, explained to Sigala the meaning of paying respect to the six directions. He said that the east represents the parent; the south, teacher; the west, spouse; the north, friends; above, religious teacher; and below, employee. The six directions represent the six types of human relationships, namely those between parent and child, teacher and pupil, husband and wife, friends, religious teacher and disciple, as well as employer and

employee. Thus honouring the six directions means fulfilling one's reciprocal responsibilities in each of these relationships. As every person assumes several roles in life whether as a parent, a child, a friend or employer, he has to be aware of and fulfil his responsibilities in each of these roles.



Responsibilities Within the Family

When members of the family love and respect one another, the home will be as beautiful as a flower garden. But if they are constantly in conflict with one another, the home becomes like a garden after a storm. When discord arises within the family, its members should ask themselves whether they have shown concern for one another by carrying out their respective responsibilities whether as a parent, child, husband or wife.

(a) *Between Parent and Child*

There is happiness and harmony in the home when parents do their best in bringing up their children, taking good care of them and educating them, and when the children appreciate their parents' efforts in providing for their security and well-being. Filial love is a form of respect that children have for their parents. A child may express his gratitude and respect towards his parents by:

- (i) supporting them;
- (ii) taking upon himself the duties that they have to perform;
- (iii) protecting the family property;
- (iv) preserving the family honour;
- (v) making offerings in honour of them and dedicating merits to them after their death.

The feeling of parents towards their children is one of tender compassion. Parents protect their children and wish them well. Parents can guide and help their children by:

- (i) restraining them from unwholesome behaviour;
- (ii) teaching them moral values;
- (iii) providing for their education;
- (iv) helping them to make a good marriage;
- (v) letting them inherit the family wealth at a proper time.

(b) *Between Husband and Wife*

Marriage is a partnership that allows the husband and wife to share their individual strengths and talents. As husband and wife form the nucleus of the family, a harmonious and successful marriage contributes to the stability and happiness of the family as a whole. An ideal marriage can be achieved if a husband shows love and respect for his wife by:

- (i) being courteous to her;
- (ii) appreciating her;
- (iii) being faithful to her;
- (iv) sharing authority with her in family matters;
- (v) giving her presents.

In return, the wife should reciprocate with love and respect for her husband and assist him by:

- (i) managing the household well;
- (ii) being hospitable to his friends and relatives;
- (iii) being faithful to him;
- (iv) taking care of the wealth of the family;
- (v) being industrious in her work.

Responsibilities Within the Society

Within the social unit of the family, members need to fulfil their reciprocal responsibilities if they want harmony and happiness for all. Similarly, in the society as a whole, all members of the community need to fulfil their responsibilities so that everyone will be able to live in security and happiness.

(a) Between Teacher and Pupil

The teacher-pupil relationship is important in society because of the knowledge, moral values and wisdom that a teacher can impart to his pupil in order to help him develop his potential to the fullest. Thus a pupil should show respect and gratitude to his teacher by:

- (i) rising from his seat to greet his teacher;
- (ii) attending to his needs to make him comfortable;
- (iii) being eager to learn from him;
- (iv) giving him special services beyond his basic needs;
- (v) listening attentively when he is teaching.

The teacher in turn should show his affection and concern for the well-being of his pupil by:

- (i) being an example of correct behaviour
- (ii) seeing that he masters the knowledge and skills taught;
- (iii) using effective methods of teaching;
- (iv) introducing his pupil to his own friends and associates;
- (v) caring for his welfare and safety.

(b) *Between Friends*

Everyone desires to have friends. The test of true friendship lies in the genuine concern, sympathy and understanding shown by one person towards another at all times and in all circumstances. A person extends his friendship by:

- (i) being generous;
- (ii) being courteous;
- (iii) being helpful;
- (iv) treating the other person well;
- (v) being sincere.

There are certain obligations one fulfils towards one's friends. A person reciprocates true friendship by:

- (i) protecting the other party when he is careless;
- (ii) protecting his property when he is neglectful;
- (iii) offering him refuge when he is in danger;
- (iv) not deserting him when he is in trouble;
- (v) respecting other members of his family.

(c) *Between Employer and Employee*

The success of any business depends on a good relationship between the employer and his employees. If the relationship between them

is strained because of a lack of concern and understanding on either side, or both, they cannot do their best. With this in mind, the employer must look after his staff by:

- (i) assigning them work according to their capabilities;
- (ii) giving them fair salaries;
- (iii) providing them with medical care;
- (iv) letting them enjoy special benefits such as bonus and allowances;
- (v) giving them leave at the proper time for vacation or even leave to attend to urgent family matters.

In appreciation of their employer's concern for them, the employees should reciprocate by:

- (i) being punctual and showing initiative in performing their work;
- (ii) seeing their work through to its completion;
- (iii) being honest;
- (iv) doing their work well;
- (v) maintaining the good reputation of the employer.

(d) Between Religious Teacher and Disciple

A religious teacher plays an important role in guiding his disciples along the path to ultimate happiness. He should therefore be honoured by:

- (i) deeds, words and thoughts that express their affection and regard;
- (ii) being welcomed in his disciples' homes;
- (iii) being provided with his material needs.

The religious teacher, treated with such affection and regard by his disciples, should show his compassion for them by:

- (i) correcting them when they behave badly;
- (ii) encouraging them to do good;
- (iii) being affectionate towards them;
- (iv) teaching them the Truth;
- (v) showing them the way to happiness in the future.

After listening to the sermon, Sigala praised the Buddha and said, "I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. May the Perfected One receive me as one who has taken the Refuge from this day to the end of my life."

Although the Buddha gave this sermon to Sigala about 2,500 years ago, it is still relevant to the society of today. In pointing out how people should behave, the Buddha has provided His lay followers with guidelines that promote respect and responsibility among members of the society. If these guidelines are sincerely followed, they will result in a society in which all can enjoy harmony, security and prosperity.

Summary

The Buddha explained to Sigala that honouring the six directions really means fulfilling one's reciprocal responsibilities in six social relationships. The six types of human relationships are those between parents and children, husband and wife, teacher and pupils, friends, employer and employee, and religious teacher and his disciples. Through fulfilling one's responsibilities, one can achieve harmony, security and prosperity both within the family and in the society as a whole.



Buddhist Observances

Buddhism in practice is more than just learning about the life of the Buddha and His Teaching. It includes many observances, some of which are common to all Buddhists while others are characteristic of a particular culture or country. In Buddhist homes and temples, one will see examples of such observances. They may take the form of offerings and bowing before the image of the Buddha or the chanting of certain verses or lines from the Buddhist scriptures. On special days, like Vesak and Ullambana, one will see the Buddhist community commemorating the occasions through various religious activities. Through these observances performed individually or as communal acts, the Buddhists venerate and show their appreciation of the Triple Gem.

Buddhist Shrines and Images

Man has always felt the need to remember the things he loves and reveres in a form that he can feel and see before him. A person may keep a photograph in order to recall a loved one who has gone abroad or has passed away. One may also feel a great sense of pride and love for a country when standing at attention before the national flag. The photograph and national flag are examples of symbols that enable one to remember the qualities of the people or things that are being represented. They form the focal point of one's feelings of love, respect or patriotism.

Similarly, the shrine found in Buddhist homes or temples is a focal point of Buddhist observances. At the centre of the shrine, there is usually an image of the Buddha. This image may be made of a variety of materials such as marble, gold, wood or even clay. The image is a symbol that helps people to recall the qualities of the Buddha.

The shrine may also have such objects as a volume of Buddhist scriptures to represent the Dharma. Some shrines may include other items such as images, pictures or photographs of Buddhist monks and masters to represent the Sangha. When a Buddhist stands before a shrine, the objects he sees on it help him to recall the qualities that are found in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. This inspires him to work towards cultivating these qualities in himself.

Gestures of Reverence

People in all cultures have certain gestures, or actions, which express their love and respect for others, such as bowing, taking off the hat, folding hands and kneeling. In Buddhism, the traditional gesture of reverence to the Triple Gem is to place the palms of both hands together and raise them high in front, usually up to the level of the forehead. In order to express deep veneration, a Buddhist may bow or prostrate before the image of the Buddha, members of the Sangha and the masters of the Teaching. When a Buddhist prostrates before an image, he acknowledges the fact that the Buddha has attained the perfect and supreme Enlightenment. Such an act helps the Buddhist to overcome egoistic feelings and he becomes more ready to listen to the Teaching of the Buddha.

Circumambulation is the act of going round an object of veneration for three or more times. This act is practised not only by Buddhists but also by members of some other religions. Buddhists circumambulate shrines, temples and other religious objects such

as stupas or the Bodhi tree. They walk in slow, measured steps in a clockwise direction, keeping their right side towards the object of veneration. This is one way Buddhists focus their attention on the object and is a gesture of respect.

Making Offerings



It is a common custom for people to offer gifts and tokens to others as an expression of their love, appreciation or veneration. Similarly, the making of offerings at the shrine in the home or temple is a way of expressing one's appreciation and veneration for the Triple Gem. A Buddhist offers to the Triple Gem only those things that he considers to be pleasant, pure or valuable. Some of the usual offerings at the shrine include light in the form of lighted candles, oil lamps or even electric lights. Additional offerings may consist of flowers, incense, fruits, water and food.

Light symbolises wisdom as contrasted to darkness which symbolises ignorance. Thus the offering of light to the Triple Gem reminds a Buddhist that the goal of Enlightenment is attained when wisdom drives away the darkness of ignorance.

The flowers which are offered at the shrine are fresh, fragrant and beautiful at the time when they are placed before an image but will soon become withered, scentless and discoloured. The offering of flowers reminds the Buddhist of the impermanence of things, an important teaching of the Buddha.

When incense is lit, its fragrance fills the air. This is like the spreading of the purifying effect of wholesome conduct. So in offering incense, a Buddhist not only expresses his veneration for the Triple Gem but also reminds himself of the practice of Good Conduct.

The Buddhist who makes offerings to the Triple Gem gains merits. This is especially so when he is mindful of the significance of what is being offered.

Chanting and Recitation

Just as prostration, circumambulation and offerings are the physical expressions of one's veneration for the Triple Gem, Buddhist chanting and recitation express the same feelings through words. This is similar to singing the national anthem and reciting the pledge of allegiance before the national flag as an expression of loyalty and respect for one's nation.

Buddhist chanting and recitation take three major forms. Firstly, words or verses may be recited in praise of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Secondly, the Buddhist may also recite the sermons of the Buddha. Thirdly, he may chant short phrases or syllables that symbolise certain teachings or qualities of the Buddha. These symbolic phrases or syllables are called *mantras*. When a Buddhist chants a mantra, it helps him to recall either the essence of a particular teaching or a special quality of the Buddha, such as His great compassion.

Therefore, chanting and recitation are not just acts of homage to the Triple Gem. They also remind the Buddhist of the ideal qualities of the Triple Gem that he strives to achieve. Furthermore, chanting and recitation also help him to concentrate and develop a calm and peaceful state of mind.

Popular Observances of the Buddhist Community

(a) The Observance of Vesak

The most important event in the year for the Buddhist community is the observance of Vesak which commemorates the birth, Enlightenment and Final Nirvana of the Buddha. Vesak falls on the full moon day of the fifth month of the year. This occasion is observed by millions of Buddhists throughout the world.

For some Buddhists, the observance of Vesak begins early in the morning when they assemble at the temple to observe the Eight Precepts. Others may join the communal observance later by going through the ceremony of taking the Threefold Refuge, observing the Five Precepts, making offerings at the shrine and by chanting and recitation. They may also participate in processions and circumambulation, and listen to discourses on the Dharma.

In some temples, Buddhists take part in the ceremonial bathing of the statue of baby Prince Siddhartha. A small standing statue of the



prince is placed in a basin of perfumed water strewn with flowers. The Buddhists scoop the perfumed water with a ladle and pour it over the statue. This act of bathing symbolises the purification of one's unwholesome actions.

On Vesak Day, some Buddhists release captive animals that are to be slaughtered for food such as fishes and crabs. This act of kindness recalls the Buddha's teaching of universal compassion. Many Buddhists also take vegetarian meals on this day. The temples are often colourfully decorated with Buddhist flags and lights. The shrines are also filled with flowers, fruits and other offerings brought by Buddhists. Vegetarian meals are often provided for all those present on this occasion.



(b) *The Observance of New Moon and Full Moon Days (Upavasatha Days)*

On the first and fifteenth day of the lunar month, which are the new moon and full moon day respectively, many Buddhists assemble in the temple to meditate, make offerings, recite sermons and perform acts of veneration to the Triple Gem. Many also take vegetarian meals on these days and some may also choose to observe the Eight Precepts.

(c) *The Observance of Ullambana*

The observance of Ullambana is based on the story of Maudgalyayana and his mother. According to popular Chinese tradition, Maudgalyayana discovered through his meditative powers that his mother had been reborn in one of the realms of misery. Distressed over the tormented state of his mother, he approached the Buddha for help. The Buddha then advised Maudgalyayana to make

offerings to the Order. The merit of making this offering would help relieve the suffering not only of his mother, but also that of other beings in the realms of misery. It is said that as a result of Maudgalyayana's offering, his mother was soon released from her unhappy state.

As a result of this incident, the act of making offerings to relieve the suffering of departed parents as well as other beings in the realms of misery, became a popular communal observance in China. This is called the observance of Ullambana, which takes place on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month. To this day, in various parts of the world, Ullambana is still being observed.

In Singapore, Buddhists observe Ullambana by making offerings to the Order, reciting sermons and performing acts of charity. Whatever form it may take, the observance of Ullambana is an expression of



the people's respect for their ancestors and their compassion for all beings suffering in the realms of misery.

summary

The practice of Buddhism includes many personal and communal observances. Among these observances are the uses of shrines and images, gestures of reverence as well as symbolic offerings and recitation of verses in praise of the Triple Gem and the like. Communal observances include the celebration of Vesak and Ullambana. Through the personal and communal observances, a Buddhist recalls the ideals and values taught in Buddhism.



The Four Immeasurables

Everyone wants to be happy, but happiness cannot be achieved in isolation. The happiness of one depends upon the happiness of all and the happiness of all depends upon the happiness of one. This is because all life is interdependent. In order to be happy, one needs to cultivate wholesome attitudes towards others in society and towards all sentient beings.

The Four Immeasurables

The best way of cultivating wholesome attitudes towards all sentient beings is through meditation. Among the many topics of meditation taught by the Buddha, there are four specifically concerned with the cultivation of loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity. These four are called the *Four Immeasurables* because they are directed to an immeasurable number of sentient beings, and because the wholesome karma produced through practising them is immeasurable. The four are also called the sublime states of mind because they are like the extraordinary states of mind of the gods.

By cultivating the wholesome attitudes of loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity, people can gradually remove ill will, cruelty, jealousy and desire. In this way, they can achieve happiness for themselves and others, now and in the future. The benefit in the future may come through rebirth in the fortunate realms.

(a) Loving-kindness

Loving-kindness, the first immeasurable, is the wish that all sentient beings, without any exception, be happy. Loving-kindness counters ill will. The attitude of loving-kindness is like the feeling which a mother has for her newborn son. She wishes that he may enjoy good health, have good friends, be intelligent and successful in all that he attempts. In short, she wishes sincerely that he be happy. One may have the same attitude of loving-kindness for a particular friend or for others in one's class, community or nation. In all these cases, one wishes that the person or persons concerned enjoy happiness.

The extent of loving-kindness in the instances mentioned above is limited to those for whom one has some attachment or concern. The meditation on loving-kindness, however, requires one to extend loving-kindness not only towards those whom one feels close to, but also to others whom one may know only slightly or not know at all. Finally, one's loving-kindness is extended to all sentient beings in all the realms of existence. Then only does the ordinary wholesome attitude of loving-kindness found in daily life reach the state of the sublime or the immeasurable.

(b) Compassion

Compassion, the second of the immeasurables, is the wish for all sentient beings to be free from suffering. It counters cruelty. People can observe the natural attitude of compassion in the world around them. When a mother, for example, sees her son seriously ill, she will naturally be moved by compassion and earnestly wish that he may be free from the suffering of his sickness. In the same way, most people have experienced the feeling of compassion upon seeing the suffering of a relative, a schoolmate or even a pet. All these are examples of the ordinary feeling of compassion. To become a sublime state of mind, compassion has to reach beyond the limited group of

individuals or beings whom one loves or cares for. Compassion has to be extended to all sentient beings in all the realms of existence before it becomes an immeasurable.

(c) Appreciative Joy

The third immeasurable is appreciative joy. It is the wholesome attitude of rejoicing in the happiness and virtues of all sentient beings. It counters jealousy and makes people less self-centred.

Appreciative joy may be experienced by people in their daily lives. It is like a mother's joy at her son's success and happiness in life. In the same way, almost everyone will have at one time or another, experienced the feeling of joy at the good fortune of a friend. These are the commonly experienced forms of appreciative joy. When one meditates on appreciative joy and extends it to all sentient beings and not just to loved ones, one then experiences appreciative joy as a sublime state of mind and as an immeasurable.

(d) Equanimity

Equanimity, the last of the four immeasurables, is the attitude of regarding all sentient beings as equals, irrespective of their present relationship to oneself. The wholesome attitude of equanimity counters clinging and aversion as you do not distinguish between friend, enemy or stranger but regard every sentient being as equal.

Equanimity can be experienced in common forms in daily life. When a grown-up son settles down with his own family, he begins to lead an independent life with responsibilities of his own. Although his mother still has her feelings of loving-kindness, compassion and appreciative joy towards him, they are now combined with a new feeling of equanimity. She recognises his new independent and responsible position in life and does not cling to him.

To become a sublime state of mind, however, the attitude of equanimity has to be extended to all sentient beings. In order to do this, one needs to remember that one's particular relationships with one's relatives, friends and even enemies, are the result of previous karma. Thus one should not cling to relatives and friends while regarding others with indifference or hatred. Moreover, one's relatives and friends in this life may have been one's enemies in a past life and may again become enemies in the future, while one's enemies in this life may well have been one's relatives and friends in the past, and may again become one's relatives and friends in the future.

Meditating on the Four Immeasurables

Various methods have been taught for practising the meditation on the Four Immeasurables. They are designed to help one extend systematically, the wholesome attitudes of loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity to all sentient beings by beginning where it is easiest to develop them.

To practise the meditation on loving-kindness, one should begin with oneself. One should cultivate the wish to be happy. Gradually, this practice will enable one to eliminate unwholesome attitudes and actions that produce unhappiness in one's life. When one has developed a feeling of loving-kindness towards oneself, one should go on to develop it towards a close relative or friend. When this is accomplished, one can move on to the more difficult task of developing loving-kindness towards strangers and even enemies. One then extends this attitude to all members of one's community and nation and finally to all sentient beings in all the realms of existence.

To develop compassion, one may begin with an individual whose suffering naturally arouses a feeling of compassion. Once compassion has been aroused in this way, one can go on to develop it step by

step towards relatives, friends, strangers and even enemies. Finally, like loving-kindness, compassion can be extended to all sentient beings without exception. When cultivating appreciative joy, one begins with a fortunate friend. Thereafter, one can extend one's attitude of appreciative joy to relatives, strangers, enemies and then to all sentient beings. In cultivating equanimity, however, one is advised to begin with a stranger because one is naturally free from strong feelings of clinging or aversion to him. Then, having aroused the wholesome attitude of equanimity, one can extend it to relatives, friends, enemies and all sentient beings.

Developing wholesome social attitudes through practising the meditation on the Four Immeasurables will bring about a change in one's personal and social life. To the extent that one can free oneself of ill will, cruelty, jealousy and desire, one will experience greater happiness with regard to oneself and in one's relations with others. One will find that at home, at school and at play, one can experience a new sense of harmony with all. Later, these wholesome attitudes will help one to relate successfully to others both in one's career and in one's social life. Even after this life, the wholesome karma gained by cultivating the Four Immeasurables will lead one to rebirth in more fortunate circumstances.

Summary

All life is interdependent. Therefore the happiness of one individual depends upon those of others. The Buddha taught the Four Immeasurables — loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity — in order to remove ill will, cruelty, jealousy, clinging and aversion.

In meditation, the Four Immeasurables are extended to all sentient beings. Through cultivating the Four Immeasurables, people can achieve happiness now and in the future.



The Monastic Community

The Buddhist monastic community began with the Buddha's conversion of the five ascetics at the Deer Park near Varanasi. Subsequently, more and more people asked to join the Order. At first, the Buddha Himself ordained all those who wished to be admitted into the Order. Later, He authorised the monks to ordain their novices. This made the entry of newcomers to the Order easier and, as a result, the community grew rapidly in size. The monastic community included monks as well as nuns. The Buddha's aunt, Prajapati, was the first woman to join the Order of Nuns.

Way Of Life In the Order

Initially, the monks and nuns travelled from place to place to teach, stopping only during the period of the seasonal rains when travelling was inconvenient. They followed the Buddha's instructions to go forth on their separate ways to teach the Truth for the good of many.

A change, however, took place even during the Buddha's lifetime when lay followers donated parks such as the Bamboo Grove at Rajagriha and the Jeta Grove at Shravasti, to the Order for their use. Having permanent places of residence for the members of the Order had its advantages. With a permanent place available to them, the members of the Order could hold discussions on the Teaching and instruct newcomers to the Order. They also had more opportunities to interact with the lay followers in order to instruct them in the Teaching.

Eventually, these places of residence for the monastic community grew into institutions which had many facilities. They usually included an assembly hall, a storeroom, a kitchen, toilet facilities, as well as individual units for the members to live in.

The running of such large institutions required a number of administrative officials whose duties included the distribution of food and robes to the members of the Order. Within a few hundred years of the Buddha's time, monasteries of this type were already common. When Buddhism reached other countries in Asia, monastic life continued to be an important part of the religion.

The Discipline of the Buddhist Monastic Community

The rules of monastic discipline governing the Order were first laid down by the Buddha Himself. They were then recorded in the books of disciplinary rules called the *Vinaya*. A disciplinary code called the *Pratimoksha* was also compiled in order to regulate the day to day conduct of the members of the Order. This code listed various offences and their penalties. It is recited today by the members of the Order during their assemblies on the new moon and full moon days of each month. This regular recitation of the code is to remind them of the rules of discipline and to give each one an opportunity to openly declare his breaking of any rule.

There are more than two hundred rules governing the conduct of members of the Order. The first four rules are the most important and they concern the refraining from:

- (1) sexual intercourse;
- (2) theft;
- (3) taking of a human life;
- (4) false proclamation of miraculous powers.

Breaking any one of these rules will result in expulsion from the Order.

Some of the other rules concern the social conduct of the members of the Order, both within the monastic community and towards the lay community. Rules concerning the acquisition and use of basic necessities such as dwelling places, food, clothing and medicine are also included. These rules help members of the Order to avoid harming others, to practise moderation and purify their minds, thus creating conditions favourable for the practice of the Teaching. For the members of the Order, moderation in eating, living in a secluded dwelling and the practice of meditation are the most important.

Life and Education in a Buddhist Monastery

When a person wishes to join the Buddhist Order, he is first ordained as a novice. As a symbolic act of his renunciation of the worldly life, he is asked to shave off his hair and put on a robe appropriate to the monastic tradition which he has entered. He is then ordained by the Preceptor, who is a senior monk, usually the abbot. The Preceptor and an instructor are then given the responsibility for guiding the novice through his period of monastic training. At the end of this period, the novice may receive the higher ordination as a monk (*bhikshu*) or a nun (*bhikshuni*).

An ordained member of the Order is provided with shelter, food, clothing and medical care. His life is secure, though not luxurious. His time is spent on the following activities, namely

- (1) study, either in groups or individually;
- (2) the performance of assigned tasks for the maintenance of the monastic institution;
- (3) meditation;
- (4) participation in collective observances like the recitation of the disciplinary code on new moon and full moon days; and
- (5) the performance of religious services for the lay community.



The amount of time taken up by any one of these activities depends on what the individual member can and wants to do, as well as the nature of the monastic institution that he lives in.

Although members of the Order are subject to the code of discipline and have renounced all but the most basic possessions, they retain the freedom to express their views. Throughout history, the Buddhist monastic community has always been highly democratic. Important decisions are normally taken collectively and only after all the members have had the opportunity to air their views.

At first, education in Buddhist monasteries was confined to the study of topics on Buddhist Teaching like the basic doctrines, the rules of discipline and the tales of the deeds of the Buddha in His former lives. Gradually, however, Buddhist monastic education became more comprehensive in scope. In the great Buddhist monastic universities of India, students were taught

everything from Buddhist and non-Buddhist Philosophy to Grammar and Composition, Logic, Mathematics, Medicine and even the Fine Arts.

In an age when education was not yet the responsibility of the state, the Buddhist monastic universities played an important role in providing the people with an education. When Buddhism spread to other parts of Asia, various Buddhist monastic universities were established in China, Tibet and the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia. Several of these are in existence even to this century.

The Role of the Monastic Community in Society

The main task of the Buddhist monastic community is to preserve and practise the Teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha Himself had indicated that the survival of the Teaching depended upon the existence of the monastic community, whose members can devote all their time and energy to this important task. Having accomplished this, they can use their learning and wisdom to help society as a whole.

Although the members of the Buddhist monastic community have renounced the worldly life, they still have an important contribution to make to the welfare of the society. For instance, they help to solve the problems of the lay followers through counselling. Not being attached to the worldly conditions such as happiness and pain, gain and loss, they are more objective and far-sighted in their outlook. They are therefore able to advise the lay followers on the best course of conduct. They also help lay followers to face the trials and sufferings of life, especially in times of distress such as when a serious illness or death occurs.

Finally, the members of the monastic community also help to provide various social services for the lay community. The Buddhist monasteries have an important role to play in the education of the young and even today, there are Buddhist schools functioning alongside state schools. In addition, Buddhist monks and nuns help in the running of free clinics, orphanages, homes for the aged and the sick, and other welfare organisations.

Summary

The Orders of Monks and Nuns began during the time of the Buddha. Soon after, it became usual for the members of the Order to live in permanent monasteries. They observe many precepts laid down in the code of monastic discipline. The members of the Order lead simple but secure lives in the monastery where education occupies an important place. The primary responsibility of the members of the Order is to preserve the Teaching of the Buddha. However, they also counsel the lay followers and provide social services.



The Way of the Arhat

During the lifetime of the Buddha, many of His disciples became Arhats. Among them were the first five monks, Shariputra, Maudgalyayana and the Buddha's own father, Shuddhodana, to name only a few.

The *Arhat* is the "Perfected One" who has overcome the impurities of desire, ill will and ignorance. At the end of the present life, he is no longer reborn. In other words, he is finally freed from the suffering of existence in the cycle of birth and death, and attains Nirvana.

When a person realises that there is no lasting happiness and freedom wherever he may be reborn within the cycle of birth and death, he will strive to attain the goal of Nirvana. The way of the Arhat is the path leading to this goal. The Arhat attains the goal of Nirvana by following strictly the three ways of practice, that is, Good Conduct, Mental Development and Wisdom.

Good Conduct: Purifying Body, Speech and Mind

The would-be Arhat achieves perfect purity of the three types of action of body, speech and mind by strict observance of the Five Percepts (avoiding killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, telling lies and taking of intoxicants) and by avoiding the ten unwholesome actions (killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, telling lies, tale-bearing, harsh speech, idle talk, greed, anger and wrong views).

By avoiding the first three unwholesome actions of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct, he purifies his body. By avoiding the four unwholesome actions of telling lies, tale-bearing, harsh speech and idle talk, he purifies his speech. Finally, by avoiding greed, anger and wrong views, he purifies his mind.

However, Good Conduct through perfect discipline of body, speech and mind only lays the foundation for the path leading to Nirvana. It prepares the way for the cultivation of Mental Development and Wisdom. According to the teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path, Mental Development comprises right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

Mental Development: Practising Mindfulness and Concentration

There are various methods by which the would-be Arhat gradually disciplines and controls his mind so that it remains calm, undistracted and aware. Two of the best known methods are mindfulness of the body and mindfulness of the process of breathing.

A person who practises mindfulness of the body cultivates awareness of his bodily actions and postures. When he is walking, for example, he is aware of the fact that he is walking. When sitting, he is aware that he is sitting. Similarly, he is aware when he is lying down, standing, or doing any other actions. Even in activities like dancing, martial arts and sports, it is important to be aware of the postures of one's body in order to perform well.

Breathing plays an important role in regulating a person's condition and mood. When a person becomes angry, nervous or upset, his breathing tends to quicken. At such times, if he makes a conscious effort to breathe deeply and slowly, he will usually find that his mind becomes calmer and his body more relaxed. Thus a commonly used form of Buddhist meditation is the practice of mindfulness of breathing.

A person who practises this method becomes aware of the process of inhalation and exhalation, and is aware of each stage in the process. For instance, when he is inhaling, he is aware of the inhaled breath at the nostrils, passing through the throat, then at the level of the chest and then at the level of the stomach. Similarly, when he is exhaling, he is aware of all the stages of the process.

These techniques for developing mindfulness help to reduce distractions of the mind because they train it to concentrate on a single object. Once the mind is calm and under control, it can begin to concentrate single-pointedly on an object.

In meditation practice, the object that the mind concentrates on may be either a material thing or an idea. There are many objects of meditation, traditionally forty in number. Among these, the ten most commonly used are the four elements (earth, water, fire and air), the four colours (blue, yellow, red and white), space and consciousness. On the advice of his meditation master, the meditator may use a colour, blue for example, as the object for him to concentrate on. After setting a blue disc of an appropriate size at a certain distance from his seat and at eye level, he focuses his mind on that blue disc. With practice, he will be able to concentrate his mind single-pointedly on the blue disc and eliminate all else from his sight and mind. Then with his eyes closed, the experienced meditator may be able to perceive in his mind an identical image of the blue disc. Eventually, the meditator achieves the extraordinary levels of concentration.

Wisdom: Developing Insight

The purpose of meditation, therefore, is to develop the power of concentration and clarity. Like a sharpened knife that can cut easily through a solid object, the concentrated mind is able to see things as they really are. At that point, the meditator gains insight into the three characteristics of existence. He understands perfectly that all

things are impermanent, involved in suffering and impersonal. For the first time, he gets a glimpse of Nirvana and is on the threshold of becoming an Arhat.

The development of insight, however, is a gradual process. Insight comes not all at once, but in a series of flashes. With gradual progress on the path, these flashes of insight come more frequently and are more sustained. Eventually, one is able to experience continuously the light of Wisdom.

This gradual progress towards achieving Wisdom is like the progress a child makes when learning a skill such as riding a bicycle. When he first begins to ride, he can only maintain his balance for a short distance. Gradually, as he becomes more accustomed to the new experience, he can travel longer distances until eventually he is able to ride a bicycle naturally and almost without effort.

The Four Stages of Becoming an Arhat

Progress on the path of an Arhat is measured by the person's ability to weaken or eliminate the ten fetters which bind him to the cycle of birth and death, and which keep him from attaining Nirvana. There are four recognisable stages which mark his progress along the path. These are explained in relation to the ten fetters below.

At the first stage is the *Stream-Winner*, that is, one who has entered the "stream" that eventually leads to the "ocean of Nirvana". When he is at this stage, his insight is powerful enough to remove the first three fetters, namely:

- (1) the belief in the existence of a permanent self;
- (2) doubt in the ability of the Triple Gem to lead him towards the goal; and
- (3) the mistaken belief that moral rules and ascetic rites alone are sufficient to lead a person to Enlightenment.

On attaining this first stage, the would-be Arhat will no longer be reborn in any of the lower realms of existence. He will be reborn no more than seven times in the human or heavenly planes of existence before he attains Nirvana.

As he makes further progress and perfects his insight still more, he reaches the second stage of the *Once-Returner*. After this life, he will be reborn only once more as a human being. In that rebirth, he would attain Nirvana. At this stage, he has also succeeded in weakening the fourth and fifth fetters. These are:

- (4) attachment to sensual desire; and
- (5) ill will

The third stage is that of the *Non-Returner*. At this stage, he completely removes the fourth and fifth fetters of attachment to sensual desire and ill will. The *Non-Returner* will no longer be reborn in the human realm; he will be reborn in one of the Pure Abodes in the heavens where he will attain Nirvana. At this stage, the first five fetters have been totally removed.

At the fourth stage, he makes the final advance towards becoming an Arhat (a Perfected One) who attains Nirvana because he has broken all the ten fetters, the last five of which are :

- (6) desire for existence in the worlds of Form;
- (7) desire for existence in the Formless worlds;
- (8) conceit;
- (9) restlessness; and
- (10) ignorance.

The career of the Arhat is like the career of a student in that development is measured by the highest stage or level he has achieved so far. When a secondary school student progresses in stages from

Secondary One to Secondary Four, his knowledge and mastery of skills increase with each higher level achieved. Eventually, he graduates from school when he passes his final year examinations. In the same way, the would-be Arhat overcomes more and more of the ten fetters at each higher stage of his development. When he successfully passes the fourth stage, he reaches the end of his career and is no longer subject to rebirth.

Summary

During the time of the Buddha, many of His disciples became Arhats by overcoming the impurities of desire, ill will and ignorance. The Arhats achieved their goal by purifying the actions of body, speech and mind. They cultivated Mental Development through the various techniques of mindfulness and meditation and then gained insight into the three universal characteristics of existence. Their progress towards becoming an Arhat is marked by four stages measured in relation to overcoming the ten fetters.



The Way of the Bodhisattva

The goal of Buddhist practice is to achieve supreme happiness and freedom from suffering. A person motivated by compassion will decide to attain this goal not only for himself but for all other sentient beings as well. When he has this wish, it means that he has awakened the Thought of Enlightenment and becomes a Bodhisattva. He has started on the path that will ultimately lead him to the supreme and perfect Enlightenment of a Buddha. The career of a Bodhisattva is exemplified in the previous lives of Shakyamuni Buddha, from the time he awakened the Thought of Enlightenment until he became a Buddha.

Awakening the Thought of Enlightenment

In one of his former lives, the Buddha was a merchant who had a blind mother. She had no one else to look after her other than her merchant son. One day, he had to travel to another country on business. Not wanting to leave his mother alone and neglected at home, he brought her along on his journey. Unfortunately, the ship in which they are sailing was wrecked in a storm and all the passengers fell into the sea. The merchant held on to a floating plank and looked around desperately for his mother. When he spotted her struggling in the water, he quickly swam over to her side. While saving his mother, he realised that all sentient beings, like his own mother, are immersed in suffering. Filled with compassion, he thought of gaining Enlightenment to relieve the suffering of all sentient beings. In this way, he awakened the Thought of Enlightenment and became a Bodhisattva.

The Vow and the Prediction

In a later life, the Bodhisattva was born as a young man named Sumedha who was extremely learned and wise.

One day, on a visit to the city, he found it being decorated as if for a festival and enquired the reason. He was told that the decorations had been put up in order to welcome Dipankara Buddha. On hearing this, Sumedha immediately decided to see the Buddha.

Sumedha was impressed by the serene and gracious manner of Dipankara Buddha who was also exceedingly pleasing to look at. Sumedha was filled with joy and made the following vow, "I too will strive to become an Enlightened One with all the qualities of a perfect Buddha. I too will teach the Dharma as this Dipankara Buddha has done just now. Having freed myself from the cycle of birth and death and gained supreme happiness, I too will lead others to the same goal."

Dipankara Buddha, aware of Sumedha's merits and knowing that he was sincere, then predicted that he would become a Buddha by the name of Shakyamuni. This was how the Bodhisattva vowed to attain Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings and received the prediction of his future buddhahood from Dipankara Buddha.

The Practice and the Attainment

Thereafter, through many lives, the Bodhisattva took steps to fulfil his vow by cultivating the perfections of giving, good conduct, patience, energy, concentration and wisdom. For instance, in one life as King Shibi, he practised the perfection of giving. It happened that he had rescued a pigeon which was about to be killed by a hawk. At that moment, he realised that by saving the pigeon, the hawk would have no food to eat and would starve to death. Faced with

this situation, the king was filled with compassion and willingly offered his own flesh as food for the hawk which had lost its prey.

Throughout many lives, the Bodhisattva performed many acts of merit and strengthened his virtues until he was perfect and ready to become a Buddha. In his last life as the Shakyan prince, Siddhartha Gautama, the Bodhisattva renounced his family and kingdom. This was because he wanted to attain Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. On the night of his Enlightenment, he ceased to be a Bodhisattva and became a Fully Enlightened One known as Shakyamuni Buddha.

Following the Way of the Bodhisattva

A person takes the first step along the way of the Bodhisattva when he awakens the Thought of Enlightenment. This takes place when he reflects upon the fact that all sentient beings are alike in their wish for happiness and fear of suffering. So out of compassion for all sentient beings, he does not think of attaining Enlightenment for himself alone, while others continue to suffer in the cycle of birth and death.

Moreover, he recognises that throughout the rounds of rebirth, all sentient beings have at one time or another been his parents, relatives or friends. He realises then that he has benefited immensely from their kindness in the past. For instance, as a baby he was totally helpless and was only able to survive through the care of his mother. As a

young child, his parents taught him to walk, sit, eat, clean himself and so on. Still later, his parents provided for his education. It was only through the help of his parents that he was able to grow up to become self-reliant and independent.

What is a Bodhisattva?

Answer: Someone who develops Bodhicitta.

What is Bodhicitta?

Answer: The mind that wants to achieve Enlightenment for sake of all sentient beings.

How does a Bodhisattva practise?

Answer: A Bodhisattva practises the Six Perfections.



Realising that all sentient beings have been related to him in one way or another in past lives, it is only natural that he should wish to repay them for their kindness. He wishes to help them achieve happiness and freedom from suffering. However, it is only a Buddha who has the ability to help sentient beings achieve this. Therefore, a person who wishes to follow the way of the Bodhisattva vows to attain Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, just as Sumedha did in the presence of the Dipankara Buddha.

One considers a person who sincerely vows to relieve even a few sentient beings of their suffering to be worthy and virtuous. A physician's vow to relieve the sick of their bodily complaints makes him worthy of respect. Similarly, one shows appreciation for a social worker's vow to improve the living conditions of the poor, and a psychologist's vow to reduce the problems and anxieties of the mentally distressed. Even the vow of giving food and clothing to the poor, which relieves their need to a certain extent only, is considered meritorious. However, the vow of the Bodhisattva, whose objective is to attain Enlightenment in order to relieve the sufferings of all sentient beings, is greater than any of these.

Summary

A Bodhisattva is one who is determined to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. The way of the Bodhisattva includes several stages as illustrated in the lives of the Shakyamuni Buddha. They are the awakening of the Thought of Enlightenment, the vow to attain Buddhahood, the practice of the perfections and the final attainment of Buddhahood. One who wishes to follow the way of the Bodhisattva can do so by awakening the Thought of Enlightenment out of compassion for all sentient beings who have at one time or other been one's parents, relatives or friends.



Practice of the Perfections

To follow the way of the Bodhisattva, one has to practise the perfections of giving, good conduct, patience, energy, concentration and wisdom. Through practising the perfections of giving, good conduct and patience, the Bodhisattva gains merit. Through the practice of the perfections of concentration and wisdom, he attains transcendental knowledge. At the same time, the practice of the perfection of energy or diligence is needed to gain both merit and transcendental knowledge. Ultimately, through gaining merit and transcendental knowledge, he acquires the great compassion and perfect wisdom of the Buddha. The Bodhisattva also, out of compassion practises skilful means to help all sentient beings attain Buddhahood.

Giving

The Bodhisattva practises the perfection of giving in order to remove desire and greed. He gives not for the sake of acquiring merits and without the thought of gaining a reward for his act of generosity. With this attitude of mind, the Bodhisattva is able to give up his wealth, possessions and even his life without clinging to them in the least.

It is said that in one of the previous lives of the Buddha when He was still a Bodhisattva, He was the wise leader of a tribe of monkeys.

On one occasion, a huge fire spread through the forest endangering the lives of all the animals living there. The only way of escape was



across a wide chasm. The chasm was too wide for the animals to jump across. It was too deep and its side was too steep for them to climb down into it to reach the other side. Only the monkey leader was strong and large enough to reach the other side of the chasm.

The great monkey, to save the lives of his fellow beings, then placed his feet firmly on the near side of the chasm and, stretching himself across, grasped the opposite edge with his hands. In this way, he made a bridge of his own body so that all the other animals could cross to safety. By the time all of them had reached the other side, the great monkey was exhausted by his tremendous effort. He had no more strength to hold on to the edge of the chasm and fell to his death below. This act of the great monkey who offered his own life in order to save his fellow beings is only one of the numerous examples of the Bodhisattva's practice of the perfection of giving.

Good Conduct

A Bodhisattva observes the precepts and practises the ten wholesome actions in order to purify himself of the unwholesome actions of body, speech and mind. He makes a constant effort to perform wholesome actions for the benefit of all beings. In practising the perfection of good conduct or morality, however, the Bodhisattva

performs meritorious acts and leads a moral life without feeling that he is morally superior to others. He does not cling to the thought of himself as the doer of meritorious acts, or of others as objects of these acts.

Patience

The Bodhisattva practises the perfection of patience so that ill will and anger do not arise in his mind. He does not retaliate even when he is threatened or harmed because he knows that retaliation will not relieve his own suffering or that of others. It will only create the cause of more suffering in the future. When he practises the perfection of patience, the Bodhisattva recognises that all hardships and suffering arise dependent upon causes and conditions and therefore, have no real nature of their own. Thus he endures hunger and thirst, heat and cold, and all other hardships.

For instance, in a previous life, the Buddha was the ascetic Kshantivadin who lived in a forest. One day, the king of the country came to the forest for a picnic, accompanied by his wives and attendants. After the meal, the king fell asleep under a tree. Feeling restless and bored, his wives and attendants soon wandered off to amuse themselves. Some distance away, they came upon the ascetic Kshantivadin. His serene appearance attracted them and they drew closer to admire him. Very soon, they were honouring him and sitting reverently at his feet.

Meanwhile, the king had awakened and realised that he was alone. Angrily, he went in search of the others. When he found them gathered around the ascetic, engrossed in listening to his sermon, the king was filled with jealousy and rage. He drew his sword and attacked the ascetic, striking off his limbs and mutilating him cruelly. Throughout this incident, however, the ascetic remained calm and composed. He felt neither anger nor ill will towards the king. Such

was the power of his endurance that he did not retaliate at all. In this way, the ascetic Kshantivadin practised the perfection of patience.

Energy

By practising the perfection of energy or diligence, a Bodhisattva overcomes laziness. He works enthusiastically towards achieving the goal of Enlightenment for the sake of all beings. He develops self-reliance as he is neither fatalistic nor dependant upon a supernatural power. When a Bodhisattva has achieved the perfection of energy, he has freed his mind from attachment to the self and from ideas of toil and weariness. Therefore, he is tireless in all his tasks and always cheerful and optimistic in carrying them out. No matter how great his exertions may seem to others, he never thinks of them as remarkable and never feels the need for rest.

Once, there was a boy named Sudhana who wished to attain Buddhahood and set out on a journey to attain it. Despite the length and difficulty of the journey, Sudhana was never discouraged but tirelessly went on. From his diverse experiences during the long journey, Sudhana realised there was something to be learned from everything he saw or heard.

From a doctor, he learnt compassion to the sick in their suffering. When Sudhana heard a wealthy man say that he had accumulated his fortune by saving pennies, he learnt that even small wholesome actions can lead to a treasure of merit. Then from a meditating monk, Sudhana learnt that a pure and peaceful mind has the power to purify other minds. Once he met a benevolent woman who impressed him greatly. From her, he learnt generosity.

Sudhana continued to learn more as he eagerly observed the behaviour of people and the objects of nature around him. By watching children playing in the street, he became aware of the

simple joys of life. From some gentle and humble people, who never desired what all the others wanted, he learnt how to live at peace with the world.

From the arrangement of an offering of flowers, he learnt the value of gratitude. One day, while passing through a forest, he took rest under a tree and noticed a tiny seedling growing out of a fallen, decayed tree nearby. This taught him about birth and death. In this manner, Sudhana proceeded along his journey and enthusiastically learnt about the nature of existence.

Concentration

The practice of the perfection of concentration removes distractions and makes the mind steady and calm. Because the Buddha had achieved this perfection on the night of his Enlightenment, his concentration remained undisturbed despite Mara's attempt to distract him. With his mind in deep concentration, he directed it to the understanding of things as they really are, thus realising perfect wisdom, which is the attainment of Enlightenment. Similarly, one who follows the way of the Bodhisattva perfects concentration to perfect wisdom in order to attain Buddhahood.

Wisdom

The practice of the perfection of wisdom removes ignorance. It is through wisdom that one comes to see things as they really are. The perfection of wisdom is the complete understanding of relativity or "emptiness". Everything depends upon a combination of causes and conditions for its existence. When the causes and conditions are not present, it ceases to exist. The flame in an oil lamp depends upon the oil and the wick, but when they are not present, the flame ceases to exist. Similarly, the ideas of "father" and "son", "short" and

“long” and so on, are all relative to each other. They exist and have meaning only in relation to each other.

Therefore, everything exists dependently and has no nature of its own. It is not absolutely real and is similar to a dream. What a person experiences in a dream seems to be real. But upon waking, he realises that it was only a dream. However, even a dream is not absolutely unreal because it is experienced by someone. Similarly, everything that exists dependently in this world is not absolutely unreal because it is experienced by people. This is the meaning of “emptiness” — that all dependently originated things are like a dream. They cannot be said to be absolutely real or absolutely unreal. Therefore, they are called “empty”.

The Bodhisattva’s understanding of “emptiness” enables him to remain perfectly unattached in his practice of the perfections. When practising giving, for example, the Bodhisattva is aware of the “emptiness” of the giver, the recipient and the action of giving. Similarly, in his practice of good conduct, patience, energy and concentration, he is aware of the “emptiness” of self, object and action. It is this awareness that turns these practices into perfections.

Wisdom is chief among the perfections. It is said that just as a group of blind men by themselves are incapable of reaching their destination, so the practices of giving, good conduct, patience, energy and concentration, without the perfection of wisdom, are incapable of reaching their goal. But just as a single sighted person can lead the blind man successfully to their destination, so can the perfection of wisdom help the other five perfections to reach their goal. Thus the perfection of wisdom is extremely important to the Bodhisattva’s achievement of Buddhahood.

When the Bodhisattva has developed the perfection of wisdom and understood “emptiness”, he knows that suffering exists dependent

upon causes and conditions and is not absolutely real. It is like a dream. One may then ask why the Bodhisattva strives to free all sentient beings from suffering if it is not absolutely real.

The answer to this question is that so long as a person is ignorant of the way things really are, suffering is real enough to him. Suppose he dreams that he is caught in a burning building and can find no way of escape from the flames. He will surely be overcome by fear and suffering. When he suddenly wakes up and finds that it was just a dream and that he is safe and sound in his own bed, he will naturally feel very relieved. Suppose on another occasion, he notices that his brother is asleep but thrashing about in bed muttering, "Fire! Fire!" Of course he knows that there is actually no fire and yet the fear and suffering experienced by his brother is real. Out of concern, he will naturally try to wake his brother up from his dream.

In the same way, the Bodhisattva, through his perfect wisdom, knows that all dependently originated things are not absolutely real and are like a dream. Out of compassion, he strives to awaken those who are still suffering because of their ignorance of the Truth.

Skilful Means

In addition to the six perfections explained above, there are four more perfections practised by a Bodhisattva. They are skilful means, resolution, power and knowledge. Of these, skilful means is the most important. The Bodhisattva who has achieved the perfection of skilful means is able to use an unlimited variety of methods to teach sentient beings according to their temperament and eventually free them from suffering.

The Buddha once told a story to show the use of skilful means. There was once a wealthy man whose house caught fire when he was away on some business. When he returned, he found that his

children were still playing inside the house, unaware of the fire that had started. The father screamed, “Run away, children! Come out of the house! Hurry!” But the children were so engrossed in their play that they did not bother to come out.

The anxious father then shouted, “Children, I have some wonderful toys here. Come out of the house and get them!” This time, their father’s words caught their attention and they ran out of the burning house.

In this story, the father knew that his children loved toys so he wisely used this as a means to save them from being burnt to death inside the house. In the same way, the Buddha has shown the use of skilful means to save sentient beings from suffering and guide them towards the attainment of Buddhahood.

Summary

The Bodhisattva gains merit and transcendental knowledge through practising the six perfections. The six perfections are giving, good conduct, patience, energy, concentration and wisdom. Wisdom is the understanding of emptiness. This understanding turns the practice of giving, good conduct, patience, energy and concentration into perfections. In addition, the Bodhisattva practises the perfection of skilful means by which he teaches all sentient beings according to their temperament in order to lead them to Buddhahood.



The Great Bodhisattvas

Over the course of many lifetimes, from the point at which he first awakens the Thought of Enlightenment and expresses his vow, the Bodhisattva practises the perfections. Gradually, he gains merit and transcendental knowledge and becomes a great Bodhisattva on the threshold of Buddhahood. Through his practice of the perfections, the Bodhisattva eventually comes to embody qualities of Buddhahood such as loving-kindness, compassion and wisdom. Many Buddhists venerate the great Bodhisattvas of whom the most well known are Maitreya, Dharmakara, Avalokiteshvara, Mahasthamaprapta, Manjushri, Samantabhadra and Ksitigarbha.



Bodhisattva Maitreya

Quality:
Loving-
kindness

Maitreya

Shakyamuni Buddha spoke of the Buddhas who had gone before Him and of the Buddhas who would appear in the future. The next Buddha to appear would be Maitreya. The name *Maitreya* means “one who possesses loving-kindness”, so the future Buddha embodies the quality of loving-kindness. He willingly grants help to all those who direct their minds towards him.

Having practised the perfections, Maitreya now awaits the time when,

like Shakyamuni Buddha, he will be born among human beings and will teach the Dharma for the good of many. Meanwhile, he resides in the Tushita Heaven. Many devoted Buddhists want to be reborn in the Tushita Heaven in order to be taught by him. They wish to be reborn in the world together with him when he becomes a Buddha. Even in this life, one who has purified his mind through the practice of Mental Development may direct his mind to the Tushita Heaven. There he may be taught by this future Buddha.

Amitabha Buddha (*Dharmakara*)



The Amitabha Buddha is flanked by Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara on His left and Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta on His right.

Amitabha, whose name means “infinite light”, is said to have attained Buddhahood many, many years ago. He now dwells in his Buddha-land (Western Paradise) where he teaches the Dharma. In a previous life, when he first awakened the Thought of Enlightenment, he was known as Dharmakara Bodhisattva. He made a large number of vows. He vowed, for instance that when he became a Buddha, his Buddha-land would have no lower realms of existence. He vowed

that even the name of evil would not be known there. He also vowed that all beings reborn in his Buddha-land are sure to gain Enlightenment. Another vow he made was that all beings in his Buddha-land would immediately understand the Dharma.

Perhaps most important of all, is his vow that those who give up unwholesome actions, recite the name of Amitabha and meditate upon him will be reborn in the Western Paradise when they die. There, they will enjoy happiness until they attain Enlightenment. Having made his vows, he practised the way of the Bodhisattva for many lives until he became a Buddha.

Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta

The two great Bodhisattvas who attend to Amitabha Buddha in his Western paradise are Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta. In the Buddhist art of East Asia, Avalokiteshvara is often represented standing on the left of Amitabha. *Mahasthamaprapta*, whose name means “one who possesses great strength”, stands on the right. It is said that he radiates the light of wisdom throughout the universe. Of these two, Avalokiteshvara is the more popular.

Avalokiteshvara is revered by many Buddhists in East and Central Asia as the embodiment of great compassion. He has vowed to free all sentient beings from suffering. Nonetheless, he has achieved the perfections of the way of the Bodhisattva and is on the threshold of Buddhahood. Avalokiteshvara has great powers and can help all sentient beings. His skilful means are limitless and he can appear in any form in all the six realms of existence to relieve the suffering of the sentient beings who live there. He rescues those who call upon him when they are in danger, for example, when caught in a fire, shipwrecked or facing an attack.



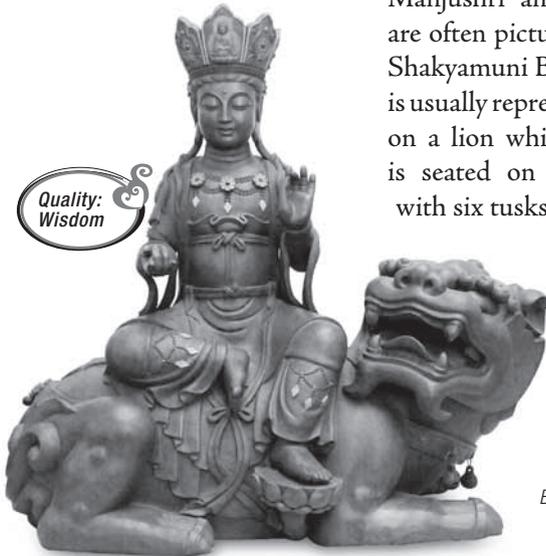
Quality:
Compassion

Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara

The name *Avalokiteshvara* means “the lord who looks upon the world with compassion”. In Buddhist art, Avalokiteshvara is sometimes represented with one head and four or eighteen arms. Sometimes, he is shown with one head and a thousand arms. In China, Avalokiteshvara is represented in female form and is known by the name *Guan-yin*. He is also known as *Chenrezig* in Tibetan Buddhism.

Manjushri and Samantabhadra

In the Buddhist art of East Asia, Manjushri and Samantabhadra are often pictured accompanying Shakyamuni Buddha. Manjushri is usually represented as mounted on a lion while Samantabhadra is seated on a white elephant with six tusks.



Quality:
Wisdom

Bodhisattva Manjushri

Manjushri, whose name means “gentle glory”, is the embodiment of wisdom. He appears to those who meditate on him. He instructs them in the Dharma, stimulates them to develop insight and gives them skill in writing and languages. He is usually represented with a sword in one hand and a sutra of Perfect Wisdom in the other. The sword stands for his ability to cut through the growth of suffering and the net of wrong views, while the sutra stands for perfect wisdom.

Samantabhadra, whose name means “completely auspicious”, embodies the quality of diligent practice of the way of the Bodhisattva. He has vowed to protect teachers of the Dharma. It is said that he stands by to remind a teacher of the relevant portion of the text if by chance the latter forgets it.



Bodhisattva Samantabhadra



Ksitigarbha

Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha is venerated by many Buddhists in China and Japan. He is well known for his vow to rescue all sentient beings suffering in the realms of the hells. After he had practised

the perfections of the Bodhisattva for many lifetimes, he was ready for the attainment of Buddhahood. However, he chose to remain among sentient beings in this period before the coming of Maitreya Buddha because of his compassion for all suffering beings. According to his vow, he will not become a Buddha unless all the sentient beings in the hells are relieved of their suffering. Ksitigarbha's patient support of sentient beings in the realms of the hells is similar to the earth's support of all forms of life. Based on this comparison, he bears the name *Ksitigarbha* which means "treasure of the earth".



Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha

Throughout the centuries, a number of outstanding persons have been regarded as Bodhisattvas. Among them were several of the Buddhist kings of Sri Lanka and Tibet, as well as some of the greatest saints and scholars of India and China. Today, Tibetan Buddhists regard the Dalai Lama and other notable religious personalities as Bodhisattvas.

summary

When a Bodhisattva has gained merit and transcendental knowledge, he becomes a great Bodhisattva or a Buddha. The great Bodhisattva embodies the qualities of Buddhahood like loving-kindness, compassion and wisdom as embodied by Maitreya, Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri. The others include Mahasthamaprapta and Samantabhadra. Amitabha practised the perfections over many lives and eventually became a Buddha.



The Historical Development & Spread of Buddhism





Buddhism in South Asia

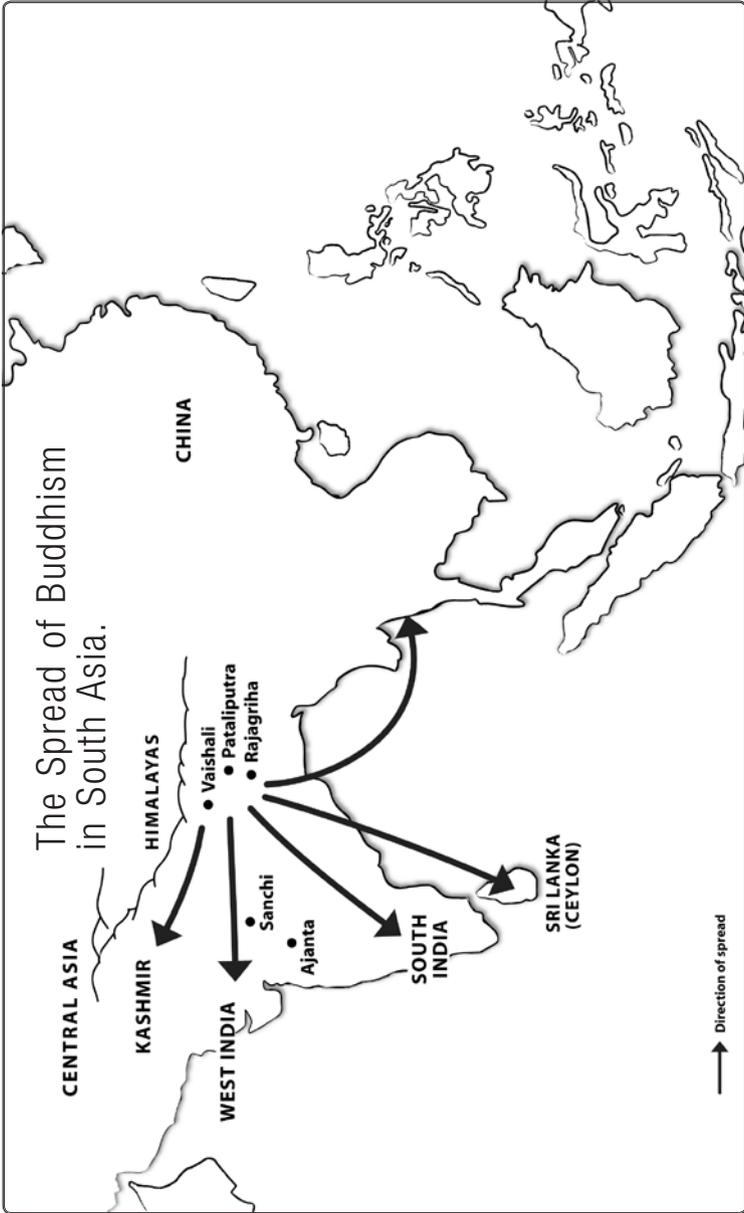
I. INDIA

In the centuries following the Buddha's lifetime, His followers faithfully preserved His Teachings and spread it not only throughout India, but also to many countries in Asia and lately even to Europe and America. During the first five hundred years after the Buddha's Final Nirvana, the Teaching and Discipline were not yet written down. Instead, they were retained in the memories of the monks who periodically assembled to recite and review them. A number of councils were held during this period to make sure that the Buddha's teachings were transmitted accurately.

The First Council

The first council arose out of Maha Kashyapa's concern for the future of the Dharma, as a result of the following incident. Maha Kashyapa was proceeding to Kushinagara at the head of a large assembly of monks when he was informed of the Buddha's Final Nirvana. On hearing this news, some monks were very sad, but one monk said that they should not grieve because they were free to do as they wished, now that the Buddha was no more with them. This remark made Maha Kashyapa uneasy. He was concerned that the Buddha's teachings would eventually disappear unless action was taken to preserve it.

Therefore, after the Buddha's body had been cremated and His relics distributed, Maha Kashyapa, with the support of many of



the senior monks, decided to hold a council. At this council, the monks would come to an agreement on the Teaching and Discipline that the Buddha had taught. Maha Kashyapa presided over this first council which was held at Rajagriha. He began by questioning Upali on the rules governing the life of the monastic community. Based on Upali's answers, the content of the Discipline (*Vinaya*) was agreed upon. Similarly, Maha Kashyapa questioned Ananda on the sermons taught by the Buddha. Based upon his answers, the Teaching (Dharma) was established.

The Second Council

About a hundred years after the Buddha's Final Nirvana, a second council was held at Vaishali. The purpose of this council was to settle a disagreement that had arisen between a group of monks and the elders of the Order. This group of monks resented the exclusive authority of the elders and wanted greater freedom in the application of the rules of the discipline. They adopted practices which many of the elders considered to be breaches of the rules of the Discipline. These practices included trivial items as well as more significant ones, such as the practice of accepting gold and silver.

With regard to the Teaching, these dissenting monks did not agree that becoming an Arhat was the highest attainment possible for most people. They believed that the Arhats, who did not possess the extraordinary qualities of the Buddha, were still fallible in many ways. According to them, the only goal worthy of attainment was Buddhahood. Moreover, the dissenting monks felt that their views represented the original spirit of the Buddha's teachings.

At the second council, the practices of the dissenting monks were declared to be unacceptable. The dissenting monks, however, refused to accept the decision of the council and proceeded to hold their own council elsewhere. They called themselves the "Great Community"

because they were sympathetic to the concerns of the majority of the ordinary monks and the lay community, and had their support.

The division between the monks of the “Great Community” and the elders gradually led to the appearance of two major Buddhist traditions: *Theravada* (Way of the Elders) and *Mahayana* (the Great Way). Although both traditions acknowledged the Buddha as their Teacher, they differ in some of the rules of monastic discipline. They also differ in the goal of religious practice. The Theravada tradition generally teaches that the highest goal which most people can aspire to is becoming an Arhat. The Mahayana tradition, however, teaches that the only worthy goal for all is the attainment of Buddhahood.

The Third Council

The third council was held at Pataliputra during the reign of Emperor Ashoka, the renowned Buddhist monarch of the third century B.C. The conversion of Emperor Ashoka to Buddhism led to lavish royal patronage of Buddhist monks and monasteries. This inevitably led to many non-Buddhists joining the Order not because they were genuinely interested in Buddhism but because it enjoyed royal patronage. These newcomers tended to retain their old beliefs and practices although they now belonged to the Buddhist Order. Therefore, the third council was held to remove these beliefs and practices which were not part of the Buddha’s teachings.

During the course of the council, several unorthodox beliefs were reviewed, one of which was the belief in an independent and permanent self. These beliefs were rejected and their exponents expelled from the Order. The council also compiled the Buddhist teachings which by now included not only the Teaching and the Discipline, but also Buddhist Philosophy and Psychology (*Abhidharma*).

Emperor Ashoka's Contribution to Buddhism

As a prince, Ashoka was known for his ruthless character. When he heard that his father was dying, he hurried to the capital and eliminated all his rivals to the throne. Ashoka had ambitious plans to expand his empire through military conquests. In his invasion of the neighbouring state of Kalinga, many thousands were killed, wounded or captured. The tremendous loss of lives in this invasion proved a turning point in the life of Ashoka. Disenchanted with war, he decided not to undertake any more military expeditions. He turned to religion instead and soon became a devoted Buddhist.

Ashoka came to respect the value of life. He drastically reduced the number of animals that were killed to sustain his household. While other kings went on hunting excursions, Ashoka went on pilgrimages to holy places. He had trees planted, wells dug and hospitals opened not only within his own territory, but also in the lands of his neighbours.

Ashoka taught people not to harbour unwholesome thoughts like greed and anger, but to cultivate moral values such as respect for



Ashoka pillar & Stupa, Vaishali

truth, loving-kindness and charity. He also encouraged them to be tolerant of all faiths and to show reverence to holy men. Through his proclamations carved on rocks and pillars, and through his missionaries, he hoped to improve the character of people.

Ashoka sent Buddhist missionaries to the far corners of the known world. Some of these missionaries went southwards to Sri Lanka where they were well received. Soon Sri Lanka became a stronghold of Buddhism.

The Fourth Council

The fourth council was held in the first century C.E. under the patronage of Kanishka, a powerful king who ruled in the north-western part of India. After his conversion to Buddhism, Kanishka became interested in the Teaching of the Buddha. Each day, he sent for a monk to instruct him in the Teaching. However, the king was confused when each monk gave instructions differing from the others. Finally, on the advice of a monk, he held a council at which the various Buddhist interpretations of the Teaching were represented and reviewed.

Furthermore, the council compiled commentaries on the three divisions of the Buddhist scriptures, that is, the Teaching, the Discipline and the Philosophy and Psychology. These commentaries gave interpretations that were agreed upon by a majority of the monks present at the council.

The Role of Buddhism in Later Indian Culture

For more than a thousand years after the fourth council, Buddhism flourished and enjoyed the patronage of many kings throughout India. Great monastic universities like that of Nalanda (near Rajagriha) were built and generations of scholars from India as well as the rest of Asia were taught there. Magnificent Buddhist



The ruins of the famous Nalanda monastic university in Bihar, India.

paintings, sculptures and other monuments were created, many of which can still be seen today, for example, at Ajanta.

During this period also, Buddhist scholars composed outstanding works in the fields of Ethics, Philosophy and even Logic. Eminent scholars like Nagarjuna and the two brothers, Asanga and Vasubhandu, made important contributions to the philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism. As a result of their efforts, Mahayana Buddhism gained greater popularity throughout India.

Nagarjuna was born in the southern part of India towards the end of the first century C.E. According to legend, his parents had long wanted a son, so they rejoiced at his birth. However, their happiness soon turned to sorrow when a local soothsayer told them that the boy would not live beyond the age of seven. When the boy's seventh birthday drew near, his parents, who did not want to see him die before their eyes, sent him on a journey accompanied by attendants. At the great monastic university of Nalanda, Nagarjuna

met a renowned Buddhist monk. This monk advised him that he could escape from his premature death by renouncing the family life and reciting the mantra of the Buddha of Limitless Life (*Amitayus*). Nagarjuna did as he was advised and lived to become one of the greatest philosophers Buddhism has ever known.



Nagarjuna, a famous philosopher in the second century C.E.

Nagarjuna wrote many books explaining the profound teaching of “Emptiness”. These works rank among the best of the philosophical writings ever produced by man. Widely regarded as a Bodhisattva, Nagarjuna gained great fame in India. Later when Buddhism reached China, Japan, Tibet and Mongolia, he also received the reverence of Buddhists in these countries.

The two brother, Asanga and Vasubandhu, were well known Buddhist scholars who lived in the fourth century C.E. Like Nagarjuna, they contributed greatly to Buddhist philosophy. Both wrote many books describing the role of the mind in the origin of suffering and in the attainment of Buddhahood. Buddhists of the Mahayana tradition believe that Asanga received instruction directly from Maitreya, the future Buddha, and wrote down what he was taught for the benefit of others.

As Mahayana Buddhism became more popular, many Buddhists in India began to look to the great Buddhas and Bodhisattvas like Amitabha, Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri, for encouragement and inspiration. During this period, there was an increase in the creation of images representing these Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. These images served as a reminder to the Mahayana Buddhists

of the qualities of Buddhahood such as limitless life, compassion and wisdom.

Vajrayana Buddhism (the Diamond Way) also appeared during this period. Like Mahayana, Vajrayana Buddhism teaches that Buddhahood is attainable by all. It differs from Mahayana, however, in some of the methods that it uses for achieving this goal. These methods, which include meditation upon special forms of the Buddha and the recitation of mantras, can help one attain Buddhahood more quickly.

After the thirteenth century, Buddhism largely disappeared from India, leaving only a few Buddhist communities in the Himalayas and in what is now Bangladesh. It left, however, a lasting impression on Indian life and culture. The ideas of renunciation, non-violence, karma and freedom from rebirth, as they are now found in Indian religion, owe much to Buddhist influence. In addition, Buddhism has contributed its sense of social justice, tolerance and democracy to Indian life. In recent years, Buddhism has again won new followers and fresh recognition in India.

II. SRI LANKA

About the year 246 B.C., Emperor Ashoka sent his son, Mahendra, as the head of a mission to Sri Lanka. There, he converted the king to Buddhism. The king supported these Buddhist missionaries and provided facilities for them in his capital. From there, they were able to carry on their work of spreading the Teaching of the Buddha. A great monastery was then built near the capital. Later, a shoot of the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya was brought to Sri Lanka by Ashoka's daughter, Sanghamitra. She also established an Order of Nuns in Sri Lanka. With the help of royal patronage, Buddhism became the dominant religion of Sri Lanka by the second century B.C. A century later, a Sri Lankan king commissioned the compilation of a collection of the Buddhist scriptures in written form.

In the first centuries of the Common Era, Buddhist culture and scholarship flourished in Sri Lanka. The fifth century saw the arrival of the famous scholar, Buddhaghosha, from South India. He made an outstanding contribution to the literature of the Theravada tradition.

From the earliest period of Sri Lankan history, invasions and migrations from India have threatened the independence of the island and have left it with a composite population consisting of both Hindu and Buddhist elements. Buddhism in Sri Lanka suffered setbacks during the periods when Hindu influence was greatest. Later, during the centuries of colonial rule under the Portuguese, Dutch and British, Buddhism suffered further setbacks.

A movement to revive Buddhism in Sri Lanka began in the later half of the nineteenth century through the efforts of a learned monk named Gunananda. His eloquent lectures on Buddhism aroused much interest. These lectures attracted the attention of H.S. Olcott, an American, who then came to Sri Lanka and enthusiastically supported the revival of Buddhism there. Olcott was soon aided by a young Sri Lankan named Dharmapala. Both of them travelled widely, giving lectures on Buddhism, distributing Buddhist literature and collecting funds for Buddhist education. Their active missionary work created widespread support for Buddhism in Sri Lanka. By the mid-twentieth century, Buddhism was once again as strong as it had ever been on the island. Today, as in the past, Sri Lanka is famous as a source of inspiration to the Buddhist world.

Summary

After the Buddha's Final Nirvana, four councils were held to preserve His teachings. At the first council, the Teaching and the Discipline were established. As a result of the second council, two Buddhist traditions arose. These developed into Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. The third council, held during Emperor Ashoka's reign, removed non-Buddhist beliefs and practices. Ashoka actively promoted Buddhism inside and outside his empire. During the fourth council, commentaries on the Buddha's teachings were composed. Over a thousand years after the fourth council, Buddhism flourished in India. Scholars contributed to the philosophy of Mahayana. The great Bodhisattvas became popular as did the Vajrayana tradition.

Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the third century B.C. by Mahendra and soon it achieved great popularity. In the fifth century C.E., Buddhaghosha made great contributions to the literature of Theravada. Although Buddhism in Sri Lanka suffered a decline during the colonial period, it began to revive in the later part of the nineteenth century.



Buddhism in East Asia

I. CHINA

During the third century B.C., Emperor Ashoka sent missionaries to the northwest of India, that is, present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. The mission achieved great success as the region soon became a centre of Buddhist learning with many distinguished monks and scholars. When the merchants of Central Asia came into this region for trade, they learnt about Buddhism and accepted it as their religion. With the support of these merchants, many cave monasteries were established along the trade routes across Central Asia. By the second century B.C., some Central Asian cities like Khotan, had already become important centres for Buddhism. The Chinese people had their first contact with Buddhism through the Central Asians who were already Buddhists.

Spread of Buddhism Among the Chinese

When the Han Dynasty of China extended its power to Central Asia in the first century B.C., trade and cultural ties between China and Central Asia also increased. In this way, the Chinese people learnt about Buddhism so that by the middle of the first century C.E., a community of Chinese Buddhists was already in existence.

As interest in Buddhism grew, there was a great demand for Buddhist texts to be translated from Indian languages into Chinese. This led to the arrival of translators from Central Asia and India. The first notable one was Anshigao from Central Asia who came to



A rock carving of Bodhisattva in Long-men.

China in the middle of the second century. With a growing collection of Chinese translations of Buddhist texts, Buddhism became more widely known and a Chinese monastic order was also formed. The first known Chinese monk was said to be Anshigao's disciple.

The earliest translators had some difficulty in finding the exact words to explain Buddhist concepts in Chinese, so they made use of Taoist terms in their translations. As a result, people began to relate Buddhism with the existing Taoist tradition. It was only later on that the Chinese came to understand fully the teachings of the Buddha.

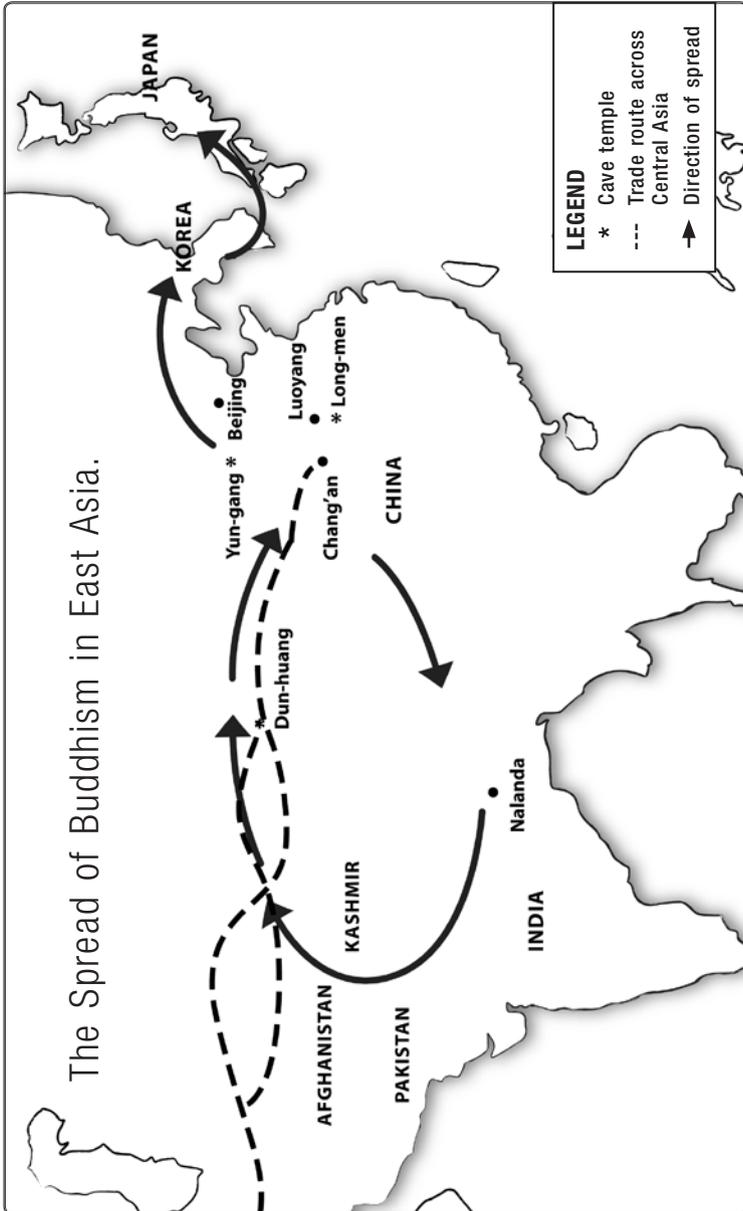
After the fall of the Han Dynasty in the early part of the third century, China faced a period of political disunity. Despite the war and unrest, the translation of Buddhist texts continued. During this time, Buddhism gained popularity with the Chinese people. Both foreign and Chinese monks were actively involved in establishing monasteries and lecturing on the Buddhist teachings.



Kumarajiva, the famous translator from Kucha in the fourth century.

Among the Chinese monks, Dao-an who lived in the fourth century, was the most outstanding. Though he had to move from place to place because of political strife, he not only wrote and lectured extensively, but also collected copies of the translated scriptures and prepared the first catalogue of them. He invited the famous translator, Kumarajiva, from Kucha. With the help of Dao-an's disciples, Kumarajiva translated a large number of important texts and revised the earlier Chinese translations. His

The Spread of Buddhism in East Asia.



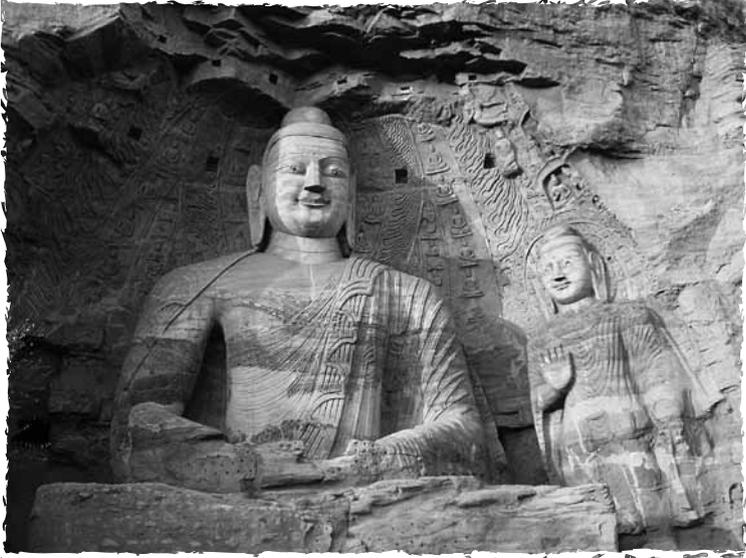
fine translations were popular and helped to spread Buddhism in China. Many of his translations are still in use to this day. Because of political unrest, Kumarajiva's disciples were later dispersed and this helped to spread Buddhism to other parts of China.

The Establishment of Buddhism in China

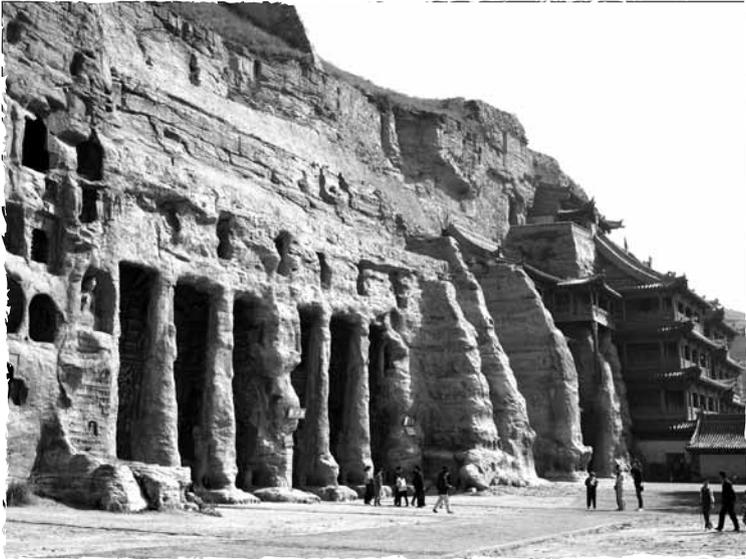
From the beginning of the fifth century to around the end of the sixth century, northern and southern China came under separate rulers. The south remained under native dynasties while the north was controlled by non-Chinese rulers.

The Buddhists in southern China continued to translate Buddhist texts and to lecture and write commentaries on the major texts. Their rulers were devoted Buddhists who saw to the construction of numerous temples, participated in Buddhist ceremonies and organised public talks on Buddhism. One of the rulers expanded on the earlier catalogue of Buddhist texts.

In northern China, except for two short periods of persecution, Buddhism flourished under the lavish royal patronage of rulers who favoured the religion. By the latter half of the sixth century, monks were even employed in government posts. During this period, Buddhist arts flourished, especially in the caves at Dunhuang, Yun-gang and Long-men. In the thousand caves at Dunhuang, Buddhist paintings covered the walls and there were thousands of Buddha statues in these caves. At Yun-gang and Long-men, many Buddha images of varying sizes were carved out of the rocks. All these activities were a sign of the firm establishment of Buddhism in China by the end of this period.



A cave in Yun-gang, Shanxi.



The Development of Chinese Schools of Buddhism

With the rise of the Tang Dynasty at the beginning of the seventh century, Buddhism reached out to more and more people. It soon became an important part of Chinese culture and had great influence on Chinese Art, Literature, Sculpture, Architecture and Philosophy of that time.

By then, the number of Chinese translations of Buddhist texts had increased tremendously. The Buddhists were now faced with the problem of how to study this large number of Buddhist texts and how to put their teachings into practice. As a result, a number of schools of Buddhism arose, with each school concentrating on certain texts for their study and practice. The Tian-tai school, for instance, developed a system of teaching and practice based on the *Lotus Sutra*. It also arranged all the Buddhist texts into graded categories to suit the varying aptitudes of the followers.

Other schools arose which focused on different areas of the Buddhist teachings and practice. The two most prominent schools were the Chan and Pure Land schools. The Chan school emphasised the practice of meditation as the direct way for gaining insight and experiencing Enlightenment in this very life. The Chan school of Buddhism is said to have been introduced to China by Bodhidharma who came from India at the beginning of the sixth century. He was, like many early missionaries, not only well versed in the Buddhist teachings, but also proficient in meditation. However, during his lifetime, he was not very well known as he secluded



Bodhidharma, the founder of the Chan school of Buddhism in China in the sixth century.

himself in a mountain temple. Later, through the efforts of his successors, this school became one of the most important of the Chinese schools of Buddhist practice.

The Pure Land school centres its practice on the recitation of the name of Amitabha Buddha. The practice is based on the sermon which teaches that people could be reborn in the Western Paradise (Pure Land) of Amitabha Buddha if they recite his name and have sincere faith in him. Once in Pure Land, the Buddhists are said to be able to achieve Enlightenment more easily. Because of the simplicity of its practice, this school became popular especially among the masses throughout China.

Xuan-zang's Pilgrimage to India

During the sixth and seventh centuries, when the various Chinese schools of Buddhism were being developed, there were more monks than before making pilgrimages to India to study the Buddhist scriptures there. Among the most famous of these pilgrims was Xuan-zang, who travelled overland to India. His journey was extremely difficult as he had to cross high mountains and deserts and was also confronted by bandits. He studied at the well-known monastic university at Nalanda and later travelled widely throughout India. On his return to China, he brought back a large collection of Buddhist texts which he translated during the remaining years of his life.



Xuan-zang – the famous Chinese pilgrim who travelled to India in the sixth century.

Because of his profound understanding of Buddhism and his excellent skill in languages, his translations marked a new period in Buddhist literature. His travel record gives detailed descriptions of

Central Asia and India and provides an eye-witness account of these regions during his time.

Further Development of Buddhism in China

In the middle of the ninth century, Buddhism faced persecution by a Taoist emperor. He decreed the demolition of monasteries, confiscation of temple land, return of monks and nuns to secular life and the melting of metal Buddha images. Although the persecution lasted only for a short time, it marked the end of an era for Buddhism in China. Following the demolition of monasteries and the dispersal of scholarly monks, a number of Chinese schools of Buddhism, including the Tian-tai school, ceased to exist as separate movements. They were absorbed into the Chan and Pure Land schools which survived. The eventual result was the emergence of a new form of Chinese Buddhist practice in the monastery. Besides practising Chan meditation, Buddhists also recited the name of Amitabha Buddha and studied Buddhist Texts. It is this form of Buddhism which has survived to the present time.

Just as all the Buddhist teachings and practices were combined under one roof in the monasteries, Buddhist lay followers also began to practise Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism simultaneously. Gradually, however, Confucian teachings became dominant in the court and among the officials who were not in favour of Buddhism.

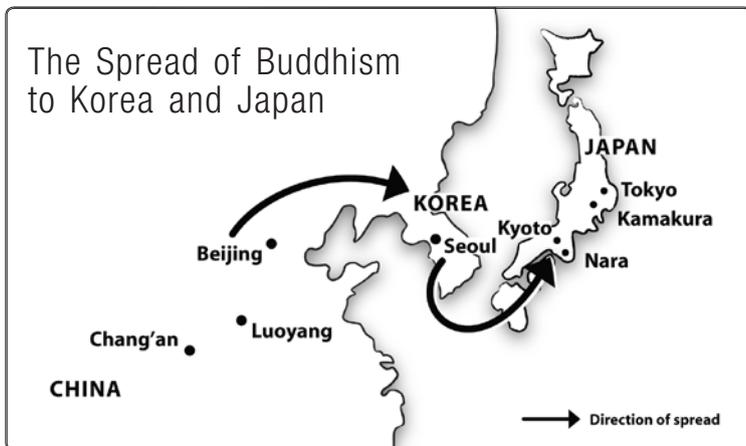
Buddhism, generally, continued to be a major influence in Chinese religious life. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, there was an attempt to modernise and reform the tradition in order to attract wider support. One of the most well-known reformists was Tai-xu, a monk noted for his Buddhist scholarship. Besides introducing many reforms in the monastic community, he also introduced western-style education which included the study of secular subjects and foreign languages for Buddhists.

In the nineteen-sixties, under the People's Republic, Buddhism was suppressed. Many monasteries were closed and monks and nuns returned to lay life. In recent years, a more liberal policy regarding religion has led to a growth of interest in the practice of Buddhism.

II. KOREA

Introduction of Buddhism to Korea

The earliest historical records state that there were three kingdoms in Korea, namely Koguryo in the north, Paekche in the southwest and Silla in the southeast. According to tradition, Buddhism was first introduced to the northern kingdom of Koguryo by a Chinese monk in the second half of the fourth century C.E. A Central Asian monk is said to have brought Buddhism to Paekche sometime later. The Silla kingdom was the most isolated region and was at first not ready to accept Buddhism. The people held firmly to their traditional religious beliefs. There was such strong opposition to Buddhism that a monk who went there to spread the Buddha's teachings is said to have been killed. Eventually, by the middle of the sixth century, even the Silla people accepted Buddhism.



Spread of Buddhism in Korea

During the sixth and seventh centuries, many Korean monks went to China to study and brought back with them the teachings of the various Chinese schools of Buddhism. Towards the end of the seventh century, the three kingdoms were unified under the powerful Silla rulers. From then onwards, Buddhism flourished under their royal patronage. Great works of art were created and magnificent monasteries built. Buddhism exerted great influence on the life of the Korean people. In the tenth century, Silla rule ended with the founding of the Koryo Dynasty. Under this new rule, Buddhism reached the height of its importance. With royal support, more monasteries were built and more works of art produced. The whole of the Tripitaka in Chinese translation was also carved on to wooden printing blocks. Thousands of these blocks were made in the thirteenth century and have been carefully preserved to the present day as part of Korea's national treasures.

Period of Suppression of Buddhism in Korea

Under the new rule of the Yi Dynasty from the end of the fourteenth century to the early twentieth century, Buddhism lost the support of the court when Confucianism became the sole official religion of the state. Measures were taken to suppress the activities of the Buddhist community. Buddhist monks were forbidden to enter the capital, their lands were confiscated, monasteries closed and Buddhist ceremonies abolished. Despite all the troubles of this difficult period, there were occasionally some great monks who continued to inspire their followers and kept Buddhism alive.

Revival of Buddhism in Korea

With the collapse of the Yi Dynasty, Korea came under Japanese control. The Japanese who came to Korea introduced their own forms of Buddhism, which included the tradition of the married clergy. As a result, some monks in Korea broke away from their tradition of celibacy.

From this period onwards, there was a revival of Buddhism in Korea. Many Buddhists in Korea have since been actively involved in promoting education and missionary activities. They have founded universities, set up schools in many parts of Korea and established youth groups and lay organisations. Buddhist texts, originally in Chinese translation, are now being retranslated into modern Korean. New monasteries are being built and old ones repaired. Today, Buddhism is again playing an important role in the life of the people.

III. JAPAN

Introduction of Buddhism to Japan

In the sixth century, the king of Paekche, anxious to establish peaceful relations with Japan, sent gifts of images of the Buddha and copies of Buddhist texts to the Japanese imperial court. Buddhism was recommended as a means of bringing great benefit to the country. The Japanese people soon accommodated Buddhism along with their indigenous Shinto beliefs. Being a religion of universal appeal, Buddhism helped to foster harmony within the country.

From the very beginning, the establishment of Buddhism depended on the protection and support of the Japanese rulers. Among these, Prince Shotoku deserves special mention for his great

contribution to the early growth and expansion of Buddhism in Japan during the early part of the seventh century. Tradition says that Prince Shotoku wrote the first “constitution” of Japan which promoted moral and social values that were taught in Buddhism. His devotion and royal patronage of Buddhism helped to make it widely known. Many Buddhist temples were built and works of art created. Monks were also sent to China to study. Besides encouraging Japanese monks to read the scriptures, Prince Shotoku lectured and later wrote commentaries on some of these scriptures. His commentaries are said to be the first ever written in Japan and are now kept as national treasures.

The Nara Period

The eighth century in Japan is known as the *Nara Period*. During this period, Buddhism continued to spread as more new temples were built in all provinces, the most famous being the Todaiji Temple at Nara. Buddhist scriptures were copied and distributed throughout the country. It was also during this time that Chinese monks started to arrive and many Chinese schools of Buddhism were introduced to Japan.

The Japanese monks not only studied and practised the Buddhist teachings, but also became involved in administrative roles. Some of them served as scribes and clerks in the court, while others helped in the carrying out of public works. A few were assigned to explore and draw maps of distant parts of the country. Though the monastic order grew in size, it remained firmly under the control of the court as the ordination of monks was only permitted at a few centres approved by the court.



*Todaiji Temple
at Nara.*



The Heian Period

The Heian Period began towards the end of the eighth century, when the capital was established at Heian (present-day Kyoto). During this period, two schools of Buddhism were brought to Japan from China by two Japanese monks named Saicho and Kukai.

Saicho had a temple on Mount Hiei which was near the new capital. Soon the ruler began to patronise the temple and also sent Saicho to study in China. On his return to Japan, Saicho introduced the Tian-tai school of Buddhism from China. However, he later combined several schools of Buddhism into one comprehensive system. At his temple on Mount Hiei, monks had to undergo a twelve-year course of study and meditation. Some of those who completed their training stayed on the mountain, while others left to serve the state in various administrative posts. The Tian-tai school of Buddhism soon flourished and at the height of its development, there were three thousand buildings on Mount Hiei and thirty thousand monks. Its influence on the development of Buddhism in Japan continued to be felt even a few centuries later.

At about the same time, the other monk, Kukai returned from China and introduced Vajrayana Buddhism to Japan. This school of Buddhism became very popular with the Japanese court and its influence was even greater than that of the Tian-tai school of Buddhism. Kukai himself was a learned monk and wrote a great deal on the teachings of this school.

The Kamakura Period

At the end of the twelfth century, political power shifted to a group of warriors (*Samurai*) who had their headquarters at Kamakura. During this period, a number of distinctly Japanese Buddhist

sects arose. They became popular because of their simplicity and directness of approach. Among these sects were the Jodo Shinshu, Nichiren and Zen.

(a) The Jodo Shinshu

The Jodo Shinshu was founded by Shinran who studied at Mount Hiei. His master, Honen, taught that the practice of reciting the name of Amitabha would be sufficient for its followers to be reborn in the Western Paradise. However, the other monks on Mount Hiei objected to his teaching. As a result, Honen and his disciples were forced into exile. Shinran was one of the disciples who accompanied Honen into exile.

Shinran's teaching was a modification of his master's. He taught that one need only to have faith in Amitabha to be reborn in the Western Paradise. According to Shinran, it was not even necessary to recite Amitabha's name.

Shinran later got married and, in this way, started the tradition of the married clergy in Japan. Those who follow this tradition continued to live in temples and conduct religious services, while leading a family life.

(b) The Nichiren Sect

The Nichiren sect was founded by Nichiren who studied at Mount Hiei but was not satisfied with the traditional Buddhist practices taught there. He later left Mount Hiei and travelled widely before returning to his native district.

Nichiren felt that the truth of Buddhism was to be found in the Lotus Sutra. He taught that reciting the formula, "Homage to the Lotus Sutra" is the only means of attaining Enlightenment. As he

was intolerant of the other Buddhist sects and vigorously denounced them, he was later sent into exile. In his later years, he was pardoned and allowed to return. After his death, his followers spread his teaching throughout the country and it soon gained popularity.

(c) *The Zen Sect*

The Zen sect is actually a Japanese version of the Chan school of Buddhism. It gained popularity among the warriors because of its emphasis on strict discipline of the mind and body. Zen teaching also influenced the development of the tea-ceremony, black-ink paintings, the art of flower arrangement and the *Noh* drama which consists of dances and recitation of poems that conveyed Buddhist ideas.

Buddhism from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century

From the sixteenth century, Buddhism lost favour with the military rulers who feared the rising power and influence of Buddhist religious groups in Japan. Some important Buddhist centres were even destroyed by these rulers. In the next three centuries, Buddhism came under the close supervision of the military dictatorship which had strict control over all areas of life. The traditions of the various sects were, however, maintained. The temples also continued to play an active role in the fields of education and social service.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Japanese emperor took control of the government. He did not support Buddhism. In fact, many Buddhist temples were demolished and valuable Buddha images and scriptures burned. The Buddhists in Japan responded by modernising their organisations. Schools and universities were established and Buddhist monks were given a modern education.

Developments in the Present Century

Since the Second World War, Japan has seen the rise of many religious groups which are modifications of the older established sects. Nichiren Shoshu, for example, grew out of the Nichiren sect of the Kamakura Period. The lay members of these newer religious groups play a prominent role in promoting Buddhist culture and education. At the same time, the older sects continue to exist and still attract support both inside and outside Japan.

Summary

Buddhism was introduced to China from Central Asia. By the first century C.E., a Buddhist community had been formed. Soon many translations of Buddhist texts were made and the Chinese monastic order was founded. By the seventh century, Buddhism had become an important part of Chinese culture. Although Buddhism suffered a brief period of persecution, it survived alongside Taoism and Confucianism.

Buddhism was introduced to Korea from China in the fourth century. Gradually, it spread throughout Korea. After a period of great influence, it declined. It has been revived since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Buddhism was introduced to Japan from Korea in the sixth century. In the subsequent centuries, Japan turned to China as a source of Buddhist teachings. During the Kamakura period, a number of Japanese sects developed and gained widespread popularity. Although in the later centuries Buddhism lost its official support, it continued to influence the common people. Even today, it is an important force in Japanese culture.



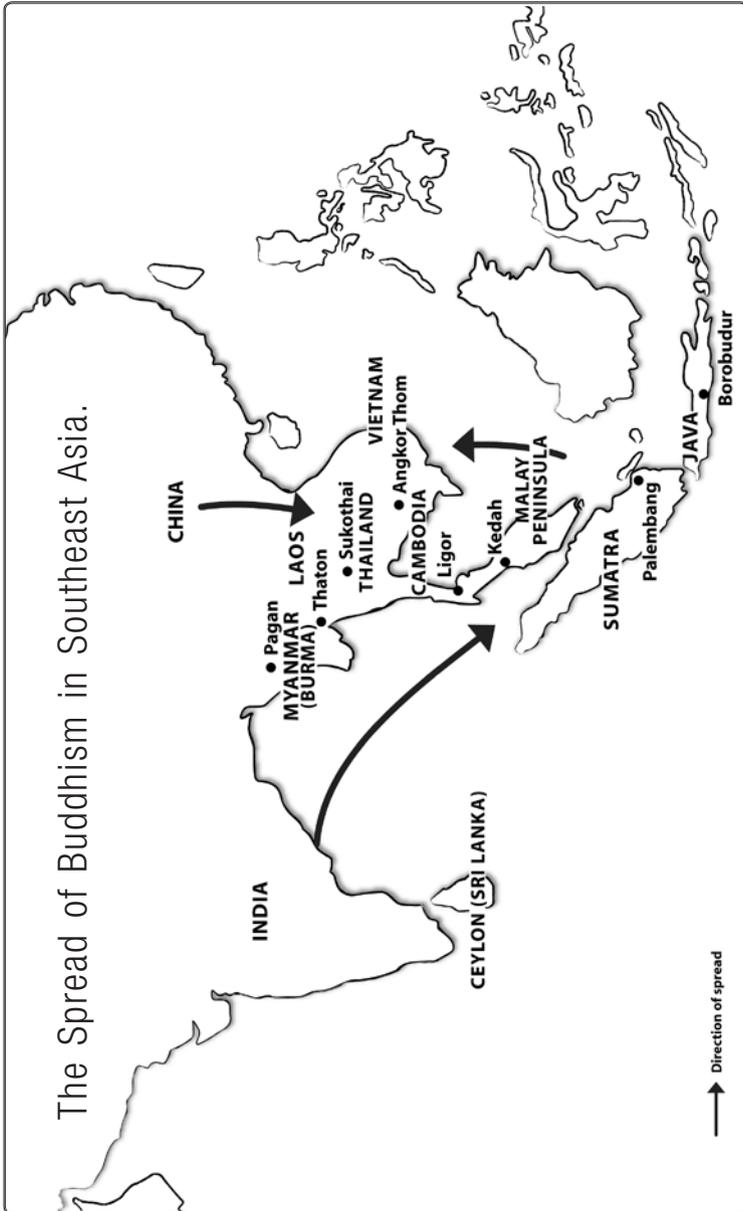
Buddhism in Southeast Asia

In the early centuries of the Common Era, the people in various parts of Southeast Asia came to know of Buddhism as a result of increased contact with the Indian merchants who had come to the region to trade. These merchants not only established trading stations in Southeast Asia, but also brought their religions and cultures with them. Under their influence, the local people began to practise a mixture of Buddhism and Hinduism while retaining at the same time, many of their old beliefs and customs.

Buddhism in Burma (Myanmar)

As early as the time of King Ashoka of India, monks were sent to Thaton to spread the Buddha's teachings. Thaton was a trading centre of southern Burma. However, from the first century C.E. onwards, trade between India and Burma expanded and there was increased contact with the Indian traders and their religious beliefs. Buddhism was widely accepted by the people around Thaton as more Buddhist missionaries arrived from Indian Buddhist centres. Thaton soon became an important centre for Theravada Buddhism.

In later centuries, Vajrayana Buddhism was introduced to the people in northern Burma. They practised it together with Hinduism and local folk beliefs. In the middle of the eleventh century, a powerful king, Anawratha, brought northern and southern Burma under his rule. As he was a strong supporter of Theravada Buddhism, he made it the national religion. He had Buddhist texts and



relics brought from Sri Lanka. He also began the construction of monasteries and stupas in the capital city of Pagan, and this was continued by his successors. Pagan soon developed into a centre of Buddhist culture.



In the succeeding centuries, Burma underwent several periods of wars and political unrest, but Buddhism continued to prosper under the patronage of various kings and became part of the life of the common people. In every village, schools were set up in the monasteries. Here monks taught the children basic Buddhist teachings as well as reading and writing.

The traditional structure of the Buddhist community suffered when Burma came under British colonial rule in the nineteenth century. However, Buddhism has regained its traditional place of importance in the life of the Burmese people since Burma became independent in the middle of the twentieth century.

Buddhism in Thailand

Before the thirteenth century, the region now called Thailand was composed of many small independent kingdoms. Buddhist influence had already been felt in this region as a result of contact with neighbouring countries. At the end of the thirteenth century, Theravada Buddhism gained the support of the Thai king, Ramkham-haeng. He invited Buddhist monks to teach in his capital city of Sukothai. He also established relations with Sri Lanka by sending monks there to study. Furthermore, he began the tradition

of appointing a Sangha-chief to oversee the administration of the monastic community. Under his patronage, all the people in his kingdom were said to have become Buddhists.

About half a century later, there was another devout and learned king called Luthai who was a strong supporter of Buddhism. He joined the Order for a period of time and is said to have initiated the Thai tradition of Buddhists becoming monks for a limited period of time, usually about three months.

In spite of the wars in the centuries following, Buddhism continued to grow in importance and enjoyed uninterrupted state support. The Thai Order is as influential today, as it was in the past. However, some reforms have been introduced since the turn of the present century. There is greater emphasis on Buddhist education and the monks are actively involved not only in teaching the religion, but also in providing secular education for the lay people. Many monks still teach in the primary and secondary schools that have been set up in the Buddhist monasteries throughout the country. Many others also pursue higher studies at Buddhist colleges and universities. Over the past few decades, some monks have been sent overseas to spread the teachings of the Buddha.

Buddhism in Cambodia

By the end of the fourth century, Indian influence had spread throughout the kingdom of the Cambodians. In the following two centuries, the rulers practised Hinduism but gave some support to the Buddhist communities, which practised mainly Mahayana Buddhism.

The Buddhist monks of the region were learned and in the fifth century, some were said to be invited to China to translate Buddhist texts from Indian languages to Chinese. In the seventh century,

Cambodia had a succession of rulers who patronised Hinduism and suppressed Buddhism. It was not until the ninth century that Buddhism began to receive some royal patronage from the rulers.

King Jayavarman VII, who ruled from the end of the twelfth century to the early years of the thirteenth century, was a devout Buddhist. Under him, Mahayana Buddhism became, for a time, the dominant religion of the kingdom. He built the new city of Angkor (called Angkor Thom), in the centre of the temple was a huge tower with four human faces carved on it. Surrounding the central tower were other smaller towers also carved with human faces. These faces portray the king as the “Buddha-king”.





Bayon temple, Angkor Thom.

It was also during the reign of Jayavarman VII that Burmese monks began to teach Theravada Buddhism among the common people. The Thais who invaded Cambodia in the fourteenth century also contributed to the spread of Theravada Buddhism. By the middle of the century, Theravada Buddhism had become widely accepted by the Cambodian people.

In the centuries that followed, Buddhism continued to be practised by the people of Cambodia. Even when the country came under French colonial rule in the mid-nineteenth century, Buddhism was still being patronised by the kings, though on a reduced scale. After Cambodia had gained independence, some progress was made in Buddhist education and the publication of texts. At present, however, owing to political unrest, the future of Buddhism in Cambodia is uncertain.

Buddhism in Laos

There lived in the middle of the fourteenth century, Fa Ngoun, a descendant of a royal family of Laos. He spent his earlier years in exile in Cambodia with his father. Fa Ngoun was looked after by a Cambodian monk who later took him to the court of the Cambodian king. There he married a princess who was a devout Buddhist. With the help of the king of Cambodia, he later returned to Laos to rule over it. At his wife's request, Fa Ngoun invited Buddhist monks from Cambodia to teach in his kingdom. Thus Buddhism was brought to the people in Laos.

In a later period, the Thai Buddhist tradition also influenced Buddhism in Laos. The structure of the Sangha in Laos followed closely that of Thailand. Many monks were also said to have gone to Thailand to study.

Buddhism in Vietnam

In the early centuries, there were a number of small states in the territory of present Vietnam. The northern state, being for several centuries under the domination of the Chinese empire, was influenced by Buddhism from China. The earliest monks were said to have come from China at the end of the second century C.E. Later, monks from India and Central Asia also arrived by land and sea. The Pure Land school of Buddhism was practised by the people who also worshipped the native deities. The Chan school of Buddhism, on the other hand, flourished in the monasteries and among Buddhist scholars. Its monks were respected by both the rulers and the common people for their literacy. Some of them became famous scholars, poets, writers and even royal advisers.

The southern states were exposed to Indian influence from the beginning of the Common Era. Both Mahayana Buddhism and

Hinduism were practised then. From the fifteenth century onwards, these southern states were gradually assimilated by the powerful northern state and as a result, the Chinese form of Buddhism also came to influence the south. Finally when Vietnam became unified as a nation, it was the Chinese form of Buddhism that was commonly practised.

At the beginning of the present century, Buddhism in Vietnam underwent some modernisation. Buddhist national organisations were set up and education was emphasised. However, this process was hindered by a continuous period of wars, and came to a virtual stop when the country came under Communist rule.

Buddhism in Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula

It is said that late in the fifth century, a Buddhist monk from India landed in a kingdom in central Java and converted its queen to Buddhism. She in turn converted her son and made Mahayana Buddhism the official religion of the kingdom.

At the end of the seventh century, Yi-jing, a Buddhist pilgrim from China, visited Sumatra which was part of the Srivijaya kingdom. He found that Buddhism was widely accepted by the people and Palembang, the capital of Srivijaya, was an important centre for Buddhist learning. Yi-jing studied there for some time before continuing on his journey to India.

In the middle of the eighth century, central Java was under the rule of the Sailendra kings who were Buddhists. They built various Buddhist monuments in Java, the most famous of which is the Borobudur. This monument was completed in the early part of the ninth century. It consists of a series of six square terraces above which are three circular platforms. Right at the top is a central stupa. The walls of the monument are carved with reliefs, depicting scenes



Buddhist sculpture at Borobudur, Java.

from the Buddha's life, the stories of His past lives and Mahayana Buddhist sutras. It is said that the ascent of the Borobudur symbolises man's progress out of Samsara to Nirvana.



Buddhist sculpture at Borobudur, Java.

In the middle of the ninth century, a Sailendra prince became king of Srivijaya. Under the Sailendra kings, Srivijaya grew in wealth and power. By that time, the kingdom already included Sumatra, Java and the Malay Peninsula. During this period of prosperity which lasted till the end of the twelfth century, Vajrayana Buddhism gained wide acceptance alongside Hindu practices, throughout the empire.

At the end of the thirteenth century, Islam was established in Sumatra and it soon spread to Java and the Malay Peninsula. As a result, Buddhism declined in popularity. By the end of the fifteenth century, Islam was the dominant religion in Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula. Buddhism was re-introduced to the Chinese, Sri Lankans and other immigrants who were Buddhists.

Buddhism in Singapore

The Chinese immigrants who arrived in Singapore in the beginning of the nineteenth century brought along their traditional religious beliefs, which were a combination of Buddhist, Taoist and Confucianist practices. Thus the temples that they built had Buddhist images such as Avalokiteshvara (Guan-yin), Maitreya and Ksitigarbha, as well as Taoist deities and ancestral tablets. These temples were mostly built and maintained by wealthy merchants or by different clans who had come from different provinces of China. There were no Buddhist monks staying in these temples and no teaching of Buddhism.



The Hall of Great Strength, Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery, Singapore

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the arrival of Chinese Buddhist monks in Singapore. Some of them stayed in the existing temples while others built their own. These Buddhist monks instructed lay followers in the Buddhist teachings and led them in chanting sessions and other religious activities in temples. At home, however, the lay followers tended to continue with their traditional ways of worship.

Soon after the arrival of the Chinese Buddhist monks, other Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka and Thailand also came to Singapore. With the support of their respective communities, the Sri Lankan and Thai monks established their own temples and helped to spread the Buddhist teachings. From then onwards, the Buddhists in Singapore have had more opportunities to attend public talks, classes on the Dharma and chanting sessions organised by the monks. The monks also helped in publishing and distributing Buddhist literature. Since the end of the Second World War, Buddhist temples and organisations have also provided social services by setting up homes for the aged, free clinics and a few Buddhist schools.



In the late sixties, the Nichiren Shoshu from Japan was introduced to Singapore while Vajrayana Buddhism was introduced about ten years later. These two schools, together with the Mahayana and Theravada schools introduced earlier, enjoy a considerable following among the local people.

summary

In the early centuries of the Common Era, Buddhism was introduced to the countries of Southeast Asia by Indian merchants and missionaries. All the three Buddhist traditions — Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana — were, at one time or another, practised in the different parts of Southeast Asia. The great monuments like Borobudur in Indonesia and Angkor Thom in Cambodia are evidence of the splendour of Buddhism in the region. Theravada Buddhism continues to flourish in Burma and Thailand while there are followers of all the three Buddhist traditions in Singapore.



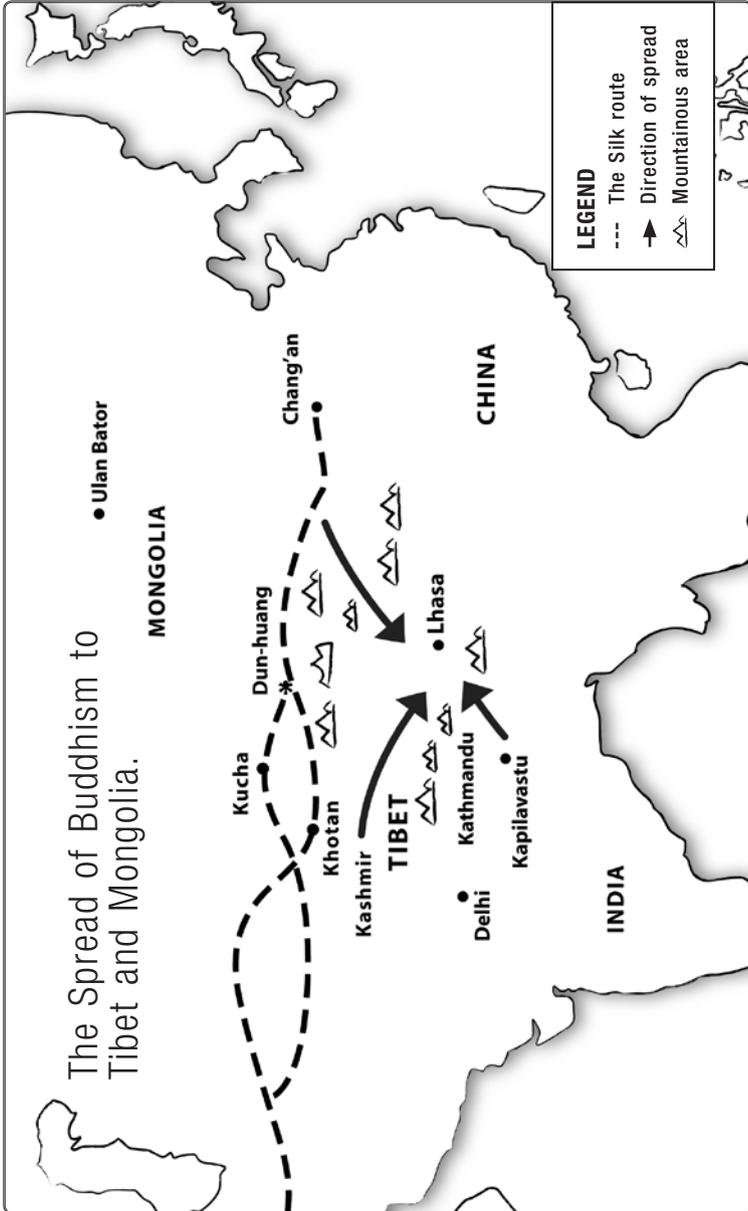
Buddhism Across the Himalayas

Although other places in Central Asia like Khotan had come under the influence of Buddhism even before the beginning of the Common Era, Tibet and Mongolia remained virtually untouched until much later. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, Tibet and Mongolia lay off the main caravan routes along which merchants and pilgrims travelled between India and China. Secondly, the Tibetan and Mongolian people who were nomads and warlike, were generally indifferent to the Teaching of the Buddha and the higher level of culture that came with it.

Introduction of Buddhism to Tibet

In Tibet, however, all this changed in the seventh century. The Tibetans, who had long been divided among many warring clans, were united under the rule of a great king, Srongtsan Gampo. His success in uniting the Tibetans brought him and Tibet new-found prestige in Asia. As a result, he was able to wed both a Chinese and a Nepalese princess. His Chinese and Nepalese queens were both Buddhists and before long he, too, became interested in Buddhism.

Srongtsan Gampo sent representatives to India and China to study the Teaching of the Buddha and to bring back Buddhist texts. The result of these missions strengthened the king's faith in the Buddhist religion. He had many Buddhist texts translated into Tibetan and encouraged the people to practise the Buddhist teachings. He also constructed many temples throughout Tibet. Thus Srongtsan Gampo was the first patron of Buddhism in Tibet. However, no





King Srongtsan Gampo and his wife, Princess Wen Cheng from China.

Tibetan monks were ordained during his reign. Moreover, some of the Tibetans regarded Buddhism as a foreign religion and were opposed to it.

The Growth of Indian Buddhist Influence in Tibet

In the eighth century, one of the later rulers, while hearing of the biography of Srongtsan Gampo, also developed an interest in the Teaching of the Buddha. He invited Shantarakshita, a famous Buddhist scholar, to Tibet. Shantarakshita was then the abbot of the great monastic university of Nalanda in India. He travelled to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, where he taught the Dharma for several months.

There were, however, many powerful people at the Tibetan court who were opposed to Buddhism and they put pressure on the king to expel Shantarakshita. The king discussed the matter with Shantarakshita and they decided that it was better for him to go to Nepal for the time being. Meanwhile, Shantarakshita

suggested to the king that Padmasambhava, a famous master of meditation, be invited from India. Padmasambhava was able to remove all opposition to Buddhism in Tibet. Soon, Shantarakshita also returned. Padmasambhava and Shantarakshita together helped to establish the teachings of the Mahayana and Vajrayana firmly in Tibet. Shantarakshita and Padmasambhava respectively represented the best of the Buddhist scholarship and meditative practices of India at that time. Their teachings, therefore, had a great impact on Tibet. Although Padmasambhava did not remain for long in Tibet, the Tibetans remember him as the “Precious Master” without whom Buddhism might not have been established in Tibet. Shantarakshita continued to teach in Tibet until his death.

During the time of these two great masters, great monasteries were built and the first Tibetans were ordained. Many of the first Tibetan monks achieved outstanding meditative powers. In the course of the next fifty years, many more translations of Buddhist texts were made and the earlier translations revised. A catalogue of the translations was also prepared. All this was accomplished by teams of Indian and Tibetan monks working together. By now India had become the primary source of Buddhist culture for the Tibetans.



Padmasambhava, the great teacher in Tibet.

The Later Transmission of Buddhist Teaching from India

In the ninth century, there was a short-lived persecution of Buddhism in Tibet and many Tibetans felt that the purity of the Buddhist teachings originally brought from India was lost. As a result, many Tibetans again travelled to India to study and efforts were made to invite Indian scholars to Tibet. The eleventh century saw a great increase in contacts between Tibet and India and a corresponding growth in Buddhist activity in Tibet. Of the many outstanding persons who contributed to the revival of Buddhism in Tibet, two may be mentioned. They are the famous Indian scholar, Atisha, and the great Tibetan meditator and poet, Milarepa.



Atisha, the famous Indian scholar.



Milarepa, the great Tibetan meditator and poet.

Atisha, who came from the east of India, was very learned. Before becoming an abbot of one of the great monastic universities of India, he had spent more than ten years in Srivijaya, one of the notable Buddhist centres of Southeast Asia. He came to Tibet in the later part of the eleventh century and remained there until his death thirteen years later. He had considerable influence on the later development of Tibetan Buddhism. Many of his teachings were included in the various Buddhist traditions of Tibet.

Milarepa, who lived in the eleventh century, was of a humble background. He studied diligently under one of the noted Tibetan teachers and translators who had returned from India. Soon, Milarepa came to be recognised as an

outstanding meditator who had gained extraordinary insight into the nature of things. He put his meditative experiences into songs which are remarkable both for their beauty and for the depth of their wisdom.

Over the course of several centuries, not only did many outstanding Indian masters visit Tibet, but also many Tibetans made the difficult journey over the Himalayas to study the Dharma in India. They brought back with them the Buddhist philosophy of India and also the knowledge of Music, Medicine, Logic and Art. Within a relatively short period, Tibetan society had been transformed. What had once been a primitive nation was changed into one noted for its learning and wisdom. Virtually the entire collection of Buddhist literature from India was translated into Tibetan. Hundreds of monasteries were established and numerous Tibetan works on Buddhism were written. By the thirteenth century, when Buddhism in India began to decline, Tibet was ready not only to preserve Buddhism, but also to transmit it to other lands.

The Later Development of Tibetan Buddhism

In the fourteenth century, yet another teacher influenced the development of Buddhism in Tibet. He was Tsong Khapa who was born in the northeast of Tibet. Tsong Khapa was noted for his careful adherence to the code of monastic discipline and for the quality of his numerous writings. He soon attracted many followers and in the years after his death, his sect gradually gained a very large following in Tibet.



Lama Tsong Khapa noted for the quality of his numerous writings.

Buddhism continued to flourish in Tibet from the fourteenth century, right

through to the present century. Learned scholars continued to teach the Dharma and write commentaries. They also wrote original works on Buddhism. Monks and lay followers continued to achieve extraordinary levels of meditation.

In the middle of the twentieth century, when Tibet came under the rule of the People's Republic of China, Buddhism was repressed. Many Tibetans fled to India and to the West to preserve their religion. In this way, through the Tibetan refugees, many people throughout the world came into contact with Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Today, there are Tibetan Buddhist centres teaching the Dharma in many lands. Recently, a liberalisation in the policy of the government towards religion in China has permitted a revival of Buddhism within Tibet also.

Introduction of Buddhism to Mongolia

The thirteenth century saw the rise of Mongolian power in Central Asia. Under Genghis Khan, an ambitious and brilliant chieftain, the Mongols soon made their influence felt throughout the region. By the middle of the century, links had been established between the Mongol court and Tibetan Buddhist masters.

At that time, an army under a Mongol prince threatened Tibet. Sakya Pandita, the most outstanding Tibetan religious teacher of the time, was asked to negotiate with the Mongols. Although Sakya Pandita hesitated to go because of his advanced age, he eventually agreed.

Sakya Pandita succeeded in converting the Mongol prince and his court to Buddhism. He began the work of translating the Buddhist scriptures into Mongolian and taught the Dharma to the Mongols until his death.

Later Sakya Pandita's nephew, Chogyal Phagpa, was invited by the famous Kublai Khan to visit the Mongol court in China, he became the personal religious teacher of the Khan. He stepped up the work of translating the Buddhist scriptures which had been started by Sakya Pandita. During the reign of Kublai Khan, the Mongol court came increasingly under the influence of Tibetan culture. Thereafter, a succession of Mongol Khans continued to look to Tibet for religious inspiration.

The Institution of the Dalai Lama

By the sixteenth century, the number of Tsong Khapa's followers in Tibet had grown dramatically and the Mongols came under the influence of the new sect. It was then that one of the Mongol rulers invited a chief monk from Tsong Khapa's sect to Mongolia and gave him the title of *Dalai Lama* (master whose wisdom is vast like the ocean).

The Dalai Lamas are believed to be embodiments of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara who, out of compassion for sentient beings, assumes human form. Upon the death of a Dalai Lama, a search is made for his successor, who is then recognised as the next embodiment of the Bodhisattva. Today as in the past, the Dalai Lama is held in high esteem by Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhists everywhere.

In the eighteenth century, the Manchus intervened to end a long period of political strife in Tibet. They appointed the then Dalai Lama as the ruler of Tibet. In this way, the Dalai Lamas became political as well as religious leaders. This situation lasted until the People's Republic of China assumed control of Tibet in the middle of this century.

Like the Tibetans before them, the Mongols were transformed by Buddhism from a primitive people to a nation respected for

its learning and wisdom. From the thirteenth to the twentieth century, Mongolia remained a stronghold of Buddhism. There, the Teaching of the Buddha was preserved in many monasteries as well as in the homes of the people. Although Mongolia today is under Communist rule, Buddhism survives in the hearts and minds of the Mongolians.

summary

Buddhism was introduced to Tibet in the seventh century. In the following century, Indian teachers firmly established it there. Three centuries later, more Indian teachers came to strengthen its growth. It continued to flourish with the help of great Tibetan masters.

Buddhism was introduced to Mongolia from Tibet in the thirteenth century. In the sixteenth century, the first Dalai Lama was appointed by the Mongol ruler. In recent years, many Tibetans have brought Vajrayana Buddhism to India and the West.



Buddhism in the West

Even before the seventeenth century, people in the West had already heard of the Buddha and His teachings. Early travellers, for example Marco Polo, who lived in the thirteenth century and Christian missionaries who had lived and worked in Asia, wrote accounts of this religion and its influence on the local people.

Introduction of Buddhism to Europe

In the eighteenth century onwards, a number of Buddhist texts were brought to Europe by people who had visited the colonies in the East. These texts aroused the interest of some European scholars who then began to study them.

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, a few Buddhist texts were translated into European languages. Thus Buddhist teaching came to be known to the European scholars. A few of them who were influenced by Buddhism, introduced Buddhist ideas into their own writings. Later, more and better European translations of Buddhist texts were made.

By the early part of the twentieth century, a large number of Buddhist texts had already been translated into English, French and German. This includes virtually the entire collection of Theravada scriptures as well as a number of important Mahayana texts.

Growth of Buddhism in Europe

Before the beginning of the twentieth century, the study of Buddhism was confined mainly to scholars and there was not much practice of the teachings. Later, this pattern began to change. A number of Europeans felt that merely reading about Buddhism was not enough, so they travelled to the East to acquire first-hand knowledge of the Buddhist practices and to experience the monastic life.

In addition, Buddhist organisations were founded in the major cities of Europe. One of these, the Buddhist Society of London, was established in 1924. It is the oldest and one of the largest Buddhist organisations in Europe. These organisations helped fuel the growth of interest in Buddhism through their meditation sessions, lectures and circulation of Buddhist literature.

By the early part of the twentieth century, a number of the Europeans, who had travelled to the East to study Buddhism, had returned. Some of them had become monks and they inspired and strengthened the Buddhist circles in Europe. They were soon joined by Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka and other Buddhist countries in Asia. In recent years, there has been a marked growth of interest in Buddhism in Europe. The membership of existing Buddhist societies has increased and many new Buddhist centres have been established. Their members include large numbers of professionals and scholars. Today, the major Buddhist traditions of Asia such as Theravada, Pure Land, Chan (or Zen), Vajrayana and Nichiren Shoshu, have a sizeable number of followers in Europe.

Introduction of Buddhism to America

As in Europe, scholars in America became acquainted with a number of Buddhist ideas in the nineteenth century. Some of the oldest universities in America had departments of oriental studies where scholars studied Buddhist texts.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants settled in Hawaii and California. These immigrants brought a number of Mahayana Buddhist practices with them and built numerous temples. The Japanese Buddhist immigrants who arrived later, not only built temples but also invited over to America, the Japanese monks who belonged to the various Mahayana Buddhist sects. However, Buddhist activities remained largely confined to these immigrant communities.

At the end of the nineteenth century, two outstanding Buddhist spokesmen, Dharmapala from Sri Lanka and Soyen Shaku, a Zen master from Japan, attended the *World Parliament of Religions* in Chicago. Their inspiring speeches on Buddhism impressed their audience and helped to establish a foothold for the Theravada and Zen Buddhist traditions in America. During this period, the Theosophical Society which teaches the unity of all religions also helped to spread some elements of Buddhist teachings in America.

Growth of Buddhism in America

It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that Buddhist ideas reached a wider section of the American society. American servicemen returning from East Asia after the Second World War and Korean War, brought with them an interest in Asian culture which included Nichiren Shoshu and Zen Buddhism. The latter gained considerable popularity in the nineteen-sixties among literary and artistic groups in America and this helped to

popularise Buddhism. When Tibetan refugees began arriving in America after 1959, they brought with them Vajrayana Buddhism. Soon it gained a substantial following there. During the post-war period, academic interest grew. Many new departments of Buddhist studies were established in the American universities.

Today, there exist numerous Buddhist centres spread across North and South America. As in Europe, virtually all the major Buddhist traditions are represented and continue to attract the interest of the Americans.

summary

Colonialism brought Europeans into contact with Buddhism in Asia. Soon Buddhist texts were brought to Europe for study. In the beginning of the twentieth century, some Europeans began practising Buddhism and a number of organisations were founded for this purpose. Today the study and practice of Buddhism continues in many European countries. In America, Buddhism was first studied in the nineteenth century. The Chinese and Japanese immigrants brought different Buddhist traditions to America. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Buddhist missionaries went to America. At present, academic and popular interest in Buddhism continues to grow. All the major Buddhist traditions have a sizeable following there.



Glossary

Abhidharma: The Psychology and Philosophy of Buddhism.

Ajanta: A place in West India where there are many caves famous for Buddhist painting and sculpture.

Amitabha: The Buddha of Limitless Light who presides in the Western Paradise.

Amitayus: The Buddha of Limitless Life. This is an alternative title for Amitabha Buddha.

Ananda: A cousin of the Buddha. He became a faithful attendant of the Buddha.

Anathapindika (Sudatta): A wealthy lay follower of the Buddha who bought over a grove belonging to Prince Jeta, in order to build a monastery for the Buddha.

Anawratha: A king of Burma (1040 – 1077) who supported Theravada Buddhism.

Anshigao: The monk who translated Buddhist texts in China in the second century.

Angkor Thom: An ancient city in Cambodia built by King Jayavarman VII towards the end of the twelfth century.

Arada: The first religious teacher under whom the ascetic Gautama studied when he began his search for Enlightenment.

Arhat: One who has no more desire, ill will and ignorance.

Asanga: A renowned Buddhist philosopher who lived in the fourth century. He was the elder brother of Vasubandhu.

Ashvajit: One of the first five disciples of the Buddha.

Asita: The sage who prophesied that Prince Siddhartha would become a Buddha.

Ashoka: The Buddhist emperor of India in the third century B.C.

Atisha: A Buddhist scholar from East India who came to Tibet in the eleventh century.

Avalokiteshvara: Literally, it means "the Lord who looks down upon the world with compassion". The Bodhisattva who embodies compassion.

Bayon: The Buddhist temple in the centre of Angkor Thom.

B.C.: Before Christ.

Bhikshu: A Buddhist monk.

Bhikshuni: A Buddhist nun.

Bimbisara: The King of Magadha and a lay follower of the Buddha.

Bodhgaya: The place where the Buddha attained Enlightenment.

Bodhidharma: The Indian monk who was said to have founded the Chan school of Buddhism in China in the early part of the sixth century.

Bodhi tree: The tree under which the ascetic Gautama meditated and attained Enlightenment. The word “bodhi” means Enlightenment.

Bodhisattva: One who has awakened the Thought of Enlightenment, and resolves to attain Enlightenment for the sake of all living beings.

Borobudur: The famous Buddhist monument in central Java completed in the beginning of the ninth century.

Buddha: The Enlightened One, who possesses perfect wisdom and compassion.

Buddhaghosha: A famous Buddhist scholar who came to Sri Lanka from India and made great contribution to the development of Theravada literature during the fifth century C.E.

C.E.: Common Era.

Chan: A Chinese school of Buddhism said to be been founded by Bodhidharma in China. It emphasised meditation. In Japan, it is known as Zen.

Chandaka: The faithful attendant of Prince Siddhartha. He accompanied the prince who rode quietly out of the city on the night of his renunciation.

Chogyal Phagpa: Nephew of Sakya Pandita who became the religious teacher of Kublai Khan in the later part of the thirteenth century.

Chunda: The blacksmith who offered the Buddha the last meal, before the Buddha entered Final Nirvana.

Confucianism: The teachings of Confucius.

Dalai Lama: Literally, it means “master whose wisdom is vast like the ocean.” It is the title given to the political and religious leader of the Tibetans.

Dao-an: The Chinese monk who lived in the fourth century. He invited Kumarajiva to China.

Devadatta: A cousin of the Buddha. He was at first a follower of the Buddha but later turned against Him.

Dharma: The Teaching of the Buddha.

Dharmakara: The Bodhisattva who later became Amitabha Buddha.

Dharmapala: A Sri Lankan who worked for the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the early part of the twentieth century.

Dipankara: The Buddha who predicted that Sumedha would become a Buddha by the name of Shakyamuni.

Dun-huang caves: The caves in Gansu, northern China, famous for their wall painting and sculpture.

Fa Ngoun: The Buddhist ruler of Laos in the fourteenth century.

Gautama: The family name of Prince Siddhartha.

Genghis Khan: The Mongol king who lived in the thirteenth century.

Guan Yin: The Chinese name of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. Literally, it means “one who hears the cries of the world”

Gunananda: The learned monk who started the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the later part of the nineteenth century.

Han Dynasty: The dynasty in China which lasted from 206 B.C. to 220 C.E.

Hiei, Mount: The mountain which became a centre of Buddhist learning in Japan.

Heian Period: The period from 784 to 1184 in Japan.

Honen: The teacher of Shinran.

Jayavarman VII: The Buddhist king of Cambodia who ruled from 1181 to 1219.

Jeta Grove: The grove which was bought by Anathapindika from Prince Jeta.

Jodo Shinshu: The Buddhist sect founded by Shinran

Kalinga: An ancient state in eastern India (modern Orissa) conquered by Emperor Ashoka.

Kamakura Period: The period from 1185 to 1333 in Japan.

Kanishka: The Buddhist king who ruled Kushan in northwest India and supported the fourth council in the first century C.E.

Kapilavastu: The capital of the Shakyan state.

Karma: Intentional actions of body, speech and mind.

Kashyapa brothers: The three matted-hair ascetics who, with their one thousand disciples, practised fire worship but later became followers of the Buddha.

Kaundinya: He was one of the five disciples of the Buddha. He was the first to understand the Buddha's Teachings.

Khotan: The city in Central Asia which became a centre of Buddhism in the second century B.C.

Koguryo: One of the three kingdoms in ancient Korea. It was in the north of Korea.

Koryo Dynasty: The dynasty in Korea from 935 to 1392.

Koshala: One of the kingdoms of India in the Buddha's time.

Kshema: The beautiful queen of King Bimbisara. She later became one of the outstanding woman disciples of the Buddha.

Kublai Khan: The Mongol king who ruled China from 1271 to 1294.

Kucha: The city in Central Asia which became a centre of Buddhism. It was also the home of Kumarajiva.

Kukai: The Japanese monk who introduced Vajrayana Buddhism to Japan during the Heian Period in the beginning of the ninth century.

Kumarajiva: The monk who came to China from Kucha, Central Asia in the fourth century. He translated many Buddhist texts. He lived from 343 to 413 C.E.

Kushinagara: The village where the Buddha passed away.

Kutadanta: The priest who was advised by the Buddha to observe the Five Precepts.

Kyoto: The capital of Japan during the Heian Period. It was earlier known as Heian.

Long-men caves: The cave temple Henan province, China.

Lotus Sutra: The Buddhist Sutra on which the Tian-tai school based its teaching (Saddharma-pundarika Sutra).

Lumbini Park: The birthplace of Prince Siddhartha.

Luthai: A learned Thai king of the fourteenth century who supported Buddhism.

Magadha: One of the sixteen major states of India in the Buddha's time, ruled by King Bimbisara, and then by his son, Ajatasattu.

Maha Kashyapa: One of the chief disciples of the Buddha, noted for his efforts in observing the strict disciplinary rules.

Mahasthamaprapta: Literally, it means "one who possesses great strength". The Bodhisattva who radiates the light of wisdom.

Mahayana: Literally, it means "the Great Way". It teaches that Buddhahood is the only worthy goal for all sentient beings.

Mahendra: A son of Ashoka who brought Buddhism to Sri Lanka.

Maitreya: The Bodhisattva who will be the future Buddha.

Manjushri: Literally, it means "gentle glory". The Bodhisattva who embodies wisdom.

Mantra: Sacred formula recited as an aid to memory and concentration.

Mara: The evil one, or the tempter.

Maudgalyayana: The second chief disciple of the Buddha, noted for his power of meditation.

Maya: The mother of Prince Siddhartha.

Milarepa: The outstanding meditator who lived in Tibet in the eleventh century. He is well-known for his songs which describe his meditative experience.

Nagarjuna: A renowned Buddhist monk in the second century in India. He composed many outstanding philosophical works.

Nalanda: Site of the great monastic university in northeast India, which flourished from the first to the twelfth century.

Nanda: The son of Prajapati, younger half-brother of Prince Siddhartha.

Nara Period: The period in Japan from 710 to 783 C.E.

Nichiren: The founder of the Nichiren sect. He lived from 1222 to 1282.

Nirvana: The ultimate goal of a Buddhist. It is the absolute freedom from all desire, ill will and ignorance.

Olcott, H. S.: An American who was actively involved in the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the later half of the nineteenth century.

Padmasambhava: The meditation master who introduced Vajrayana Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century.

Paekche: One of the three kingdoms in ancient Korea. It was in southwest Korea.

Pagan: The capital of ancient Burma.

Palembang: The capital of Srivijaya Empire.

Pali: One of the languages of the Buddhist canon.

Patacara: The woman who became mad with grief over the sudden death of her family members. She later became a nun.

Pataliputra: The capital of Ashoka's empire where the third council was held.

Prajapati: Sister of Queen Maya. She looked after Prince Siddhartha after his mother's death. Later, she requested the Buddha to allow her and other women to join the Order.

Pitaka: Literally, it means "basket". It is a collection of Buddhist teachings.

Praktimoshha: The code of discipline for monks.

Pure Land: The Western Paradise of Amitabha.

Rahula: The son of Prince Siddhartha.

Rajagriha: The capital of Magadha kingdom.

Ramkhan-haeng: The Thai Buddhist king of the thirteenth century.

Saicho: The Japanese monk who introduced the Tian-tai school to Japan in the ninth century.

Sailendra: The ancient dynasty that ruled central Java and built the famous Buddhist monument, Borobudur.

Samantabhadra: Literally, it means "completely auspicious". He is the Bodhisattva who embodies the quality of diligent practice of the way of the Bodhisattva.

Samsara: Cycle of repeated births and deaths.

Samurai: A Japanese warrior in olden times.

Sangha: The community of Buddhist disciples.

Sanghamitra: The daughter of Ashoka who went to Sri Lanka and established the Order of Nuns there.

Sanjaya: The religious teacher of Shariputra and Maudgalyayana before they became the Buddha's chief disciples.

Shantarakshita: The abbot of the monastic university at Nalanda. He went to Tibet to teach the Dharma.

Shariputra: The first chief disciple of the Buddha, noted for his wisdom.

Shravasti: The capital of the kingdom of Kosala

Shibi, King: The king who sacrificed his flesh in order to save the life of a pigeon.

Shinran: The founder of Jodo. He started the tradition of the married clergy in Japan.

Shintoism: The native religion of Japan.

Shotoku: The ruler of Japan who supported Buddhism during the early seventh century.

Shuddhodana: The king of the Shakyan clan, father of Prince Siddhartha.

Sigala: The young man who was taught by Buddha about the six social relationships.

Sigalovada Sutta: The sermon taught to Sigala by the Buddha.

Silla: One of the three kingdoms of ancient Korea. It was in the southeast of Korea.

Srivijaya: The ancient kingdom in Indonesian Archipelago, the capital of which was Palembang, once an important Buddhist centre.

Srongtsan Gampo: The Tibetan ruler of the seventh century who was the first patron of Buddhism in Tibet.

Stupa: A shrine containing the relics of the Buddha.

Subhadra: The last disciple converted by the Buddha himself.

Sudatta: Popularly known as Anathapindika. A wealthy merchant of Shravasti and a follower of the Buddha.

Sudhana: The boy who practised the perfection of energy by learning tirelessly from every situation and people he met with.

Sujata: The lady who offered the ascetic Gautama a bowl of milk-rice after his decision to stop extreme ascetic practices.

Sukothai: An ancient city of Thailand which flourished from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century.

Sumedha: The Bodhisattva who received the prediction from Dipankara Buddha that he would become a Buddha.

Sutta Pitaka: The collection of sutras.

Sutra: A discourse or sermon of the Buddha.

Svastika: The grass-cutter who offered the Bodhisattva a bundle of grass for his seat under the Bodhi tree before his Enlightenment.

Tai-xu: The Buddhist monk who introduced reforms in the Buddhist monastic community in China in the early part of the twentieth century.

Taoism: The teachings that originated from Lao-zi who was said to have lived in China in the sixth century B.C.

Thaton: The trading centre in southern Burma in ancient times.

Theosophical Society: The society which teaches the unity of all religions.

Theravada: Literally, it means “the Way of the Elders”. The school of Buddhism which uses Buddhist texts in Pali.

Tian-tai school: The Chinese school of Buddhism which based its teaching on the Lotus Sutra.

Tissa: The sick monk whom the Buddha personally attended to when his fellow monks neglected him.

Todaiji: A famous Buddhist temple in Japan, built during the Nara Period.

Tripitaka: Literally, it means “the three baskets”. It refers to the collection of the Buddha’s teachings, that is, Sutta Pitaka, Vinaya Pitaka and Abhidharma Pitaka.

Tushita Heaven: The heavenly plane where Maitreya now resides.

Udayin: A childhood friend of Prince Siddhartha who was ordained when he was sent to invite the Buddha to visit Kapilavastu.

Udraka: The second religious teacher whom the ascetic Gautama approached when he first started the search for Enlightenment.

Ullambana: The occasion when Buddhists make offerings to the Triple Gem and dedicate their merits to the deceased.

Upaka: The first person to whom the Buddha announced that he had attained Enlightenment and wished to spread the Truth to all.

Upali: A barber, whom the Buddha ordained just before ordaining the five hundred Shakyans nobles.

Upavasatha day: Literally, it means “new moon and full moon days” when Buddhists gather in the temple for communal observances and when the members of the Order recite the Praktimosha.

Uruvilva: The village near Bodhgaya where the ascetic Gautama practised extreme asceticism for six years.

Uruvilva Kashyapa: A famous matted-hair ascetic who practised “fire-worship”, but later accepted the Buddha as his master.

Utpalavarna: The second chief woman disciple of the Buddha.

Vaishali: The capital of the Vrijjian state.

Vajrayana: Literally, it means “the Diamond Way”. The school of Buddhism which uses meditation on special forms of the Buddha and mantras to gain Enlightenment more quickly.

Varanasi: The capital of the kingdom of Kashi. Today it is also known as Benares.

Vasubhandu: The well-known Buddhist philosopher who lived in India in the fourth century. He is the younger brother of Asanga.

Vesak: The occasion that commemorates the Birth, Enlightenment and Final Nirvana of the Buddha.

Vinaya: The rules concerning the monastic discipline of monks and nuns.

Vinaya Pitaka: The collection of rules of the Discipline.

Vishakha: A devout female lay follower of the Buddha.

Xuan-zang: The famous Chinese pilgrim who travelled to India from 625 to 645 C.E. He brought back Buddhist texts and translated many of them into Chinese.

Yasha: The son of a wealthy merchant in Varanasi, who became a disciple of the Buddha.

Yashodhara: The wife of Prince Siddhartha. Later she became a nun.

Yi Dynasty: The dynasty in Korea from the end of the fourteenth to the early twentieth century.

Yi-jing: The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who visited Palembang on his way to India in the seventh century.

Yun-gang caves: Caves in Shanxi, northwest China.

Zen: The school of Buddhism in Japan developed out of the Chan school in China.