

Life of the Buddha

A traditional account

Piya Tan, 2002

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1. BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

1.1 Buddhist India

- (a) The Central Gangetic plain was experiencing urbanization, economic growth (iron & transplanted rice); rise of centralized political power.
- (b) Many disillusioned people have polarized attitudes in life: **materialism** (there is only this life) and **eternalism** (belief in universal soul, etc.).

1.2 The Śākya

- (a) A tribe of nobles (kṣatriya), probably under the political hegemony of Kośala.
- (b) Prince Siddhārtha's parents: rajah **Śuddhodana** and **Mahā Māyā**
- (c) Mahā Māyā's dream of a white elephant. Soothsayers predict: world-ruler or world-renouncer.
- (d) Mahā Māyā passes away one week after Siddhārtha's birth. **Mahā Prajāpatī Gautamī** becomes foster mother of Siddhārtha.
- (e) **Asita**'s visit & confirms prediction.

2. YOUTH & MARRIAGE

2.1 Siddhārtha's spirituality

- (a) Compassion: (a) the royal goose incident (**Devadatta**); (b) the Ploughing Festival (the 1st Absorption).
- (b) Over-protectiveness (insulation) by the father.

2.2 Education & marriage

- (a) Academic & martial training.
- (b) Life of luxury and pleasure: the three lotus ponds and three palaces; women.
- (c) **Yaśodharā**.

3. THE GREAT RENUNCIATION

- 3.1 The four sights (old man, sick man, dead man, holy man): personification of the "three great evils" and their solution.
- 3.2 **Rāhula**, son of Siddhārtha.
- 3.3 Mental conflicts: the sleeping women; leaving the palace.

4. THE SEARCH FOR TEACHINGS

- 4.1 The journey across 3 kingdoms to the river Anomā.
- 4.2 Self-initiation as ascetic.
- 4.3 Rājagrha: Young prince **Bimbisāra**.
- 4.4 First teachers: **Ārāḍa Kālāma** & **Udraka Rāmaputra**.

5. THE PERSONAL SEARCH

- 5.1 Uruvilvā: self-mortification.
- 5.2 The five monks.
- 5.3 The Middle Way: analogy of the 3-stringed lute.
- 5.4 **Sujātā**'s offering of milk-rice.

6. THE GREAT ENLIGHTENMENT

- 6.1 Svastika offers grass.
- 6.2 **Māra** (the Evil One) tries to stop the Bodhisattva.
- 6.3 The Supreme Enlightenment. The Bodhi tree.
- 6.4 The 7 weeks after Enlightenment:

- (1) Bodhi tree: Dependent origination.
 - (2) Standing meditation, unblinking gaze at the Bodhi tree (out of gratitude).
 - (3) Walking meditation: The jeweled promenade.
 - (4) Sitting meditation: The jeweled chamber.
 - (5) Goatherd Banyan: Māra's daughters. The conceited brahmin.
 - (6) Mucalinda tree: the nāga Mucalinda.
 - (7) Rājāyatana tree: sitting meditation.
- 6.4 The first Buddhists: the Twofold Refuge (the merchants, **Trapaṣa** & **Bhallika**).

7. TEACHING THE DHARMA

- 7.1 The Buddha's hesitation to teach the Dharma.
- 7.2 Brahmā's entreaty: analogy of the lotuses in a pond.
- 7.3 First communication: **Upaka**.

8. THE MINISTRY

- 8.1 The Deer Park, Sarnath: the five monks.
- 8.2 The first discourse: the Middle Way, the Four Noble Truths.
- 8.3 The first enlightened monks: Saṅgha formed.

9. THE MISSION

- 9.1 **Yaśas** and his family; his 54 friends.
- 9.2 The Great Commission: the 60 monks sent forth.
- 9.3 The 30 young men.
- 9.4 The **Kāśyapa** brothers: Uruvilvā, Gayā, Nadi Kāśyapa.
- 9.5 King **Bimbisāra** of Magadha: the Bamboo Grove.

10. THE PUBLIC MINISTRY

- 10.1 The first 20 years: Arhants & great disciples.
- 10.2 The last 25 years: promulgations of Vinaya rules.
- 10.3 Position of women. The Order of Nuns.

11. THE CHIEF GREAT RENUNCIATES

- 11.1 Śāriputra & Maudgalyāyāna
- 11.2 Ānanda
- 11.3 Mahā Kāśyapa

12. THE LAST DAYS

- 12.1 The last journey: the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta.
- 12.2 The last meal.
- 12.3 The Buddha's final Nirvana.
- 12.4 The last rites & division of the relics.

RESOURCES

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