

The Buddha: Unsurpassed Perfect Enlightenment

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Siddhattha—Life as a Prince and Renunciation—with meditation teachers—Practice of severe austerities—his meditation before Enlightenment—the Three Knowledges—inspired verses after Enlightenment—who to teach? The five ascetics—Añña Kondañña, the first Arahant.

In spite of his father's endeavours, Prince Siddhattha, heir to the throne of the Sakyan kingdom, saw old age, disease and death and a religious wanderer in yellow robes who was calm and peaceful. When he had seen these first three things, which had been withheld from him in the time leading into manhood, he was shocked to realise that he too would suffer them. But he was inspired by the fourth and understood that this was the way to go beyond the troubles, and sufferings of existence. Even though his beautiful wife, Yasodhará presented him with a son who was called Ráhula, he was no longer attracted to worldly life. His mind became set upon renunciation of the sense pleasures and uprooting the desires which underlay them.

So at night he left behind his luxurious life, and going off with a single retainer, reached the Sakyan frontiers. There he dismounted from his horse, took off his princely ornaments, and cut off his hair and beard with his sword. Then he changed into yellowish-brown patched robes and transformed himself into a Bhikkhu or wandering monk. The horse and valuables he told his retainer to take back with the news that he had renounced pleasures and gone forth from home to homelessness.

At first he went to various meditation teachers but he was not satisfied with their teachings when he became aware that they could not show him the way out of all suffering. Their attainments, which he equalled, were like temporary halts on a long journey: but they were not its end. They led only to birth in some heaven where life, however long, was nevertheless impermanent. So he decided to find his own way by practicing bodily mortification. This he practised for six years in every conceivable way, going to extremes, which even other ascetics would be fearful to try. Finally, on the verge of life and death, he perceived the futility of bodily torment and remembered from boyhood a meditation experience of great peace and joy. Thinking that this might be the the way, he gave up depriving his body, and took food again to restore his strength. Thus, in his life, he

had known two extremes: one of luxury and pleasure, when a prince; the other of fearful austerity. Both, he advised his first Bhikkhu disciples, should be avoided.[1]

Having restored his strength, he sat down to meditate under a great Pipal tree, later known as the Bodhi (Enlightenment) Tree. His mind passed quickly into four states of deep meditation called *jhána*. In these, the mind is perfectly one-pointed and there is no disturbance or distraction. No words, no thoughts and no pictures, only steady and brilliant mindfulness. Some mental application and inspection is present at first, along with physical rapture and mental bliss. But these factors disappear in the process of refinement until, in the fourth jhanna, only equanimity, mindfulness and great purity are left. On the bases of these profound meditation states certain knowledge arose in his mind.

These knowledges which, when they appear to a meditator, are quite different from things which are learnt or thought about, were described by him in various ways. It is as though a person standing at various points on a track, which is roughly circular, should describe different views of the same landscape. In the same way, the Buddha described his Bodhi or awakening experience. Some parts of

this experience would have been of little or no use to others in their training, so these facts he did not teach. What he did teach was about *dukkha* or suffering, how it arises and how to get beyond it. One of the most frequent views into this “landscape of Enlightenment” is the Three Knowledges: of past lives, of kamma and its results, and of the destruction of the mental pollutions.

The wisdom of knowing his own past lives, hundreds of thousands of them, an infinite number of them, having no beginning—all in detail with his names and occupations, the human, super-human and sub-human ones— showed him the futility of searching for sense-pleasures again and again. He saw as well that the wheel of birth and death kept in motion by desires for pleasure and existence would go on spinning for ever producing more and more of existence bound up with unsatisfactory conditions. Contemplating this stream of lives he passed the first watch of the night under the Bodhi Tree.

The wisdom pertaining to kamma[2] and its results means that he surveyed with the divine interior eye all sorts of beings, human and otherwise and saw how their past kammās gave rise to present results and how their present kammās will fruit in future results—

wholesome kammās, developing one's mind and leading to the happiness of others, fruit for their doer as happiness of body and mind—while unwholesome kammās, which lead to deterioration in one's own mind and suffering for others, result in mental and physical suffering for the doer of them. The second watch of the night passed contemplating this wisdom.

In the last watch he saw how the pollution, the deepest layer of defilement and distortion, arise and pass away conditionally. With craving and ignorance present, the whole mass of sufferings, gross and subtle, physical and mental—all that is called *dukkha*—come into existence; but when they are abandoned then this burden of *dukkha*, which weighs down all beings and causes them to drag on through myriad lives, is cut off and can never arise again. This is called the knowledge of the destruction of the pollutions: desires and pleasures, existence and ignorance, so that craving connected with these things is extinct.

When he penetrated to this profound truth, the arising and passing away conditionally of all experience and thus of all *dukkha*, he was the Buddha, Enlightened, Awakened. *Dukkha* he had known thoroughly in all its most subtle forms and he discerned the causes

for it's arising—principally—craving. Then he experienced its cessation when the roots of craving had been abandoned, this cessation of *dukkha* also called Nibbána, the Bliss Supreme. And he investigated and developed the Way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*, which is called the Noble Eightfold Path. This Path is divided into three parts:

- I. **of wisdom**—Right View and Right Thought; **of moral conduct**—Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood; **of mind development**—Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Collectedness. It has been described many times in detail.[3]

We are told that, while experiencing the bliss supreme of Enlightenment, the following two verses occurred to the Buddha:

“Through many births in the wandering-on

I ran seeking but finding not

the maker of this house—

dukkha is birth again, again.

O house maker, you are seen!

You shall not make a house again;

all your beams are broken up,

rafters of the ridge destroyed:

the mind gone to the Unconditioned,

to craving's destruction it has come.“

(Dhammapada, verses 153-154)

Now that he had come to the end of craving and desire, a thing, so difficult to do, and after reviewing his freedom from the round of birth and death, he concluded that no one in the world would understand this teaching. Men are blinded by their desires, he thought, and his mind inclined towards not teaching the Dhamma. Then, with the divine eye, he saw that there were a few beings “with little dust in their eyes“ who would understand. First he thought of the two teachers he had gone to and then left dissatisfied, but both had died and been reborn in the planes of the formless deities having

immense life spans. They would not be able to understand about “arising and passing away.” Then he considered the whereabouts of the five ascetics who had served him while he practised severe bodily austerities. The knowledge came to him that they were near Benares, in the Deer-sanctuary at Isipatana; so he walked there by slow stages. Thus, he began the life of a travelling Bhikkhu, the hard life that he was to lead, out of compassion for suffering beings for the next forty-five years.

When the Buddha taught these five ascetics he addressed them as ‘Bhikkhus.’ This is the word now used only for Buddhist monks but at that time applied to other religious wanderers. Literally, it means ‘one who begs’ (though Bhikkhus are not allowed to beg from people, they accept silently whatever is given. See Chapter VI). At the end of the Buddha's first discourse[4], Kondañña[5] the leader of those Bhikkhus, penetrated to the truth of the Dhamma. Knowing that he had experienced a moment of Enlightenment—Stream-winning as it is called, the Buddha was inspired to say, “Kondañña truly knows indeed, Kondañña truly knows!” Thus he came to be known as Añña-Kondañña—*Kondañña who knows as it really is*.

Kondañña, bowing his head down to the Buddha's feet, then

asked to become a Bhikkhu, the first Buddhist monk to follow the Buddha. It is at this point that our account really begins.

See Appendix [I] Discourse on “Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dhamma.”

[2] Meaning, ‘intentional action.’ This word, in Sanskrit spelt ‘*karma*’ never means fate in a Buddhist context.

[3] See, *The Word of the Buddha* Nyanatiloka Maháthera (BPS Kandy). *The Eightfold Path and Its Factors Explained* by Ledi Sayadaw; Wheel, (BPS); *The Buddha's Ancient Path* by Piyadassi Thera (BPS)

[4] See Appendix [I], “Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dhamma.” [1]

Pronounce__ *Kondanya*, *Anyá*

Kondanya.

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