

# **The Buddha's Daily Routine**

as edited by

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Narada Maha Thera in *The Buddha and His Teachings* (1998) outlines the Buddha's daily routine:

“The Buddha can be considered the most energetic and active of all religious teachers that ever lived. The whole day He was occupied with religious activities except when attending to His physical needs.

“He was methodical and systematic in the performance of His daily duties. His inner life was one of meditation and was concerned with the experiencing of Nibbānic Bliss, while His outer life was one of selfless service for the moral upliftment of the world.

“Himself enlightened, He endeavoured His best to enlighten others and liberate them from the ills of life.

“His day was divided into five parts, namely, (i) The Forenoon Session, (ii) The Afternoon Session, (iii) The First Watch, (iv) The Middle Watch and (v) The Last Watch.

## **The Forenoon Session**

“Usually early in the morning He surveys the world with His Divine Eye to see whom he could help. If any person needs His spiritual assistance, uninvited He goes, often on foot, some times by air using His psychic powers, and converts that person to the right path.

“As a rule He goes in search of the vicious and the impure, but the pure and the virtuous come in search of Him. For instance, the

Buddha went of His own accord to convert the robber and murderer *Angulimāla* and the wicked demon *Ālavaka*, but pious young *Visākhā*, generous millionaire *Anāthapindika*, and intellectual *Sāriputta* and *Moggallāna* came to Him for guidance. (Narada 168)

“While rendering such spiritual service, it is necessary, if He is not invited to partake of alms by a lay supporter at some particular place, He, would go in quest of alms through alleys and streets, with bowl in hand, either alone or with disciples. Standing silently at the door of each house, without uttering a word, He collects whatever food is offered and placed in the bowl and returns to the monastery. Even in His eightieth year, when He was old and in indifferent health, He went on His rounds for alms in Vesāli.

“Before midday He finishes His meals. Immediately after lunch He delivers a short discourse to the people, establishes them in the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts and if any person is advanced, he is shown the Path to Sainthood. At times He grants Ordination to them if they seek admission to the Order and then retires to His chamber.

### **The Afternoon Session**

“After the noon meal He takes a seat in the monastery and the Bhikkhus assemble to listen to His exposition of the Dhamma. Some approach Him to receive suitable objects of meditation according to their temperaments; others pay due respects to Him and retire to their cells to spend the afternoon. After His discourse or exhortation to His disciples, He Himself retires to His private Perfumed Chamber to rest. (Narada 169)

“If He so desires, He lies on His right side and sleeps for a while with mindfulness. On rising, He attains to the Ecstasy of Great

Compassion (*Mahā Karunā Samāpatti*) and surveys, with His Divine Eye, the world, especially the Bhikkhus who retired to solitude for meditation and other disciples in order to give them any spiritual advice that is needed. If the erring ones who need advice happen to be at a distance, there He goes by psychic powers, admonishes them and retires to His chamber.

“Towards evening the lay followers flock to Him to hear the Dhamma. Perceiving their innate tendencies and their temperaments with the Buddha-Eye, He preaches to them for about one hour. Each member of the audience, though differently constituted, thinks that the Buddha’s sermon is directed in particular to him. Such was the Buddha’s method of expounding the Dhamma.

“As a rule the Buddha converts others by explaining His teachings with homely illustrations and parables, for He appeals more to the intellect than to emotion. To the average man, the Buddha at first speaks of generosity, discipline, and heavenly bliss. To the more advanced, He speaks on the evils of material pleasures and on the blessings of renunciation. To the highly advanced, He expounds the Four Noble Truths.

“On rare occasions as in the case of *Angulimāla* and *Khemā* did the Buddha resort to His psychic powers to effect a change of heart in His listeners. The sublime teachings of the Buddha appealed to both the masses and the intelligentsia alike... (Narada 170)

“Both the rich and the poor, the high and the low, renounced their former faiths and embraced the new Message of Peace. The infant Sāsana, which was inaugurated with a nucleus of five ascetics, soon developed into millions and peacefully spread throughout Central India.

## **The First Watch**

“This period of the night extends from 6 to 10 p.m. and was exclusively reserved for instruction to Bhikkhus. During this time the Bhikkhus were free to approach the Buddha and get their doubts cleared, question Him on the intricacies of the Dhamma, obtain suitable objects of meditation, and hear the doctrine.

## **The Middle Watch**

“During this period which extends from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. Celestial Beings such as Devas and Brahmas, who are invisible to the physical eye, approach the Buddha to question Him on the Dhamma. An oft-recurring passage in the Suttas is: “Now when the night was far spent a certain Deva of surpassing splendour came to the Buddha, respectfully saluted Him and stood at a side.” Several discourses and answers given to their queries appear in the Samyutta Nikāya.

## **The Last Watch**

“The small hours of the morning, extending from 2 to 6 a.m. which comprise the last watch, are divided into four parts.

The first part is spent in pacing up and down (*cankamana*). This serves as a mild physical exercise to Him. (Narada 171)

“During the second part, that is from 3 to 4 a.m. He mindfully sleeps on His right side.

“During the third part, that is from 4 to 5 a.m., He attains the state of Arahantship and experiences Nibbānic bliss.

“For one full hour from 5 to 6 a.m. He attains the Ecstasy of Great Compassion (*Mahā Karunāsamāpatti*) and radiates thoughts of loving-kindness towards all beings and softens their hearts.

“At this early hour He surveys the whole world with His Buddha-Eye to see whether He could be of service to any. The virtuous and those that need His help appear vividly before Him though they may live at a remote distance. Out of compassion for them, He goes of His own accord and renders necessary spiritual assistance.

“The whole day, He is fully occupied with His religious duties. Unlike any other living being He sleeps only for one hour at night. For two full hours in the morning and at dawn He pervades the whole world with thoughts of boundless love and brings happiness to millions.”  
(Narada 172)

## Reference

Narada Maha Thera. 1998. *The Buddha and His Teachings*. Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation.