The book cover features a dark purple background with a subtle, repeating pattern of stylized leaves and flowers. A large, stylized flame or leaf shape is on the left, and a smaller, detailed flower is in the center. The title is centered in white, underlined text.

THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

Radhika Abeysekera

THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

This book is for free distribution only.

Cover: Just as this small lamp helps to dispel the darkness, may this book dispel the darkness of ignorance from our minds.

THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

This book is dedicated to my mother and father, Mrs. S. Seneviratna and the late Mr. D. A. Seneviratna. They made this book a possibility by giving me a Buddhist upbringing. May they attain Nibbāna.

THE SMILE OF THE BUDDHA



*Why dost Thou smile sweet Master?
What hast Thou seen,
That brings Thee such a serene calm?
What is Thy secret unexplored?
That lights Thy countenance?
The world has known the Doctrine
Twice a thousand years – and five hundred more –
And yet the world knows not
The meaning of the cloudless smile.
The features, all unruffled and alight,
Must veil a mind of untold depths.
And yet, and yet, I wish
We understood the meaning of
The inscrutable smile!*

*The Buddha smiles, my son, because He knows
The end of toilsome round, and all life's woes.
What's won is won not ever lost again;
Its fruit is sure – beyond this present pain.
The goal is sure for you, that's won by me;
'Tis this that lends to Buddha's serenity.*

*Bhikkhu Kassapa
Sri Lanka*

FOREWORD

“The gift of Truth excels all other gifts”

I was the first reader of the *Life of the Buddha* written by Mrs. Radhika Abeysekera. She presents the Dhamma to children in a very attractive way. On the day I was in Winnipeg, I understood the value of her voluntary gift of Dhamma (Dhammadana) to the children.

The results of her Dhammadana resolved my questions about the Dhamma knowledge and disciplined behaviour of the children of the Winnipeg Buddhist community.

To teach the life story of the Lord Buddha would not take much time in modern times. Let the children study it in detail later, when they understand the Dhamma better. Radhika presents in brief the points of the Dhamma that the beginner needs to know in more detail later.

Her attempt to attract children by giving them an idea of the correct path is more helpful than detailing the life story of the Lord Buddha. When children understand the facts of the teaching, they will eventually be persuaded to read for themselves the other necessary parts of the life story of the Lord Buddha.

The important points of the Dhamma which should be known by children are well expressed using few words in this book. When children ask more about the Lord Buddha, then their parents should draw them to know more. That is the easy way to teach Dhamma to children.

This is the beginning of her writing career. Let us hope she continues to write more books to reintroduce our children to Buddhism. We appreciate her silent mission in the Dhammadana that excels all other gifts. May all beings be well and happy!

Ven. Kurunegoda Piyatissa (Maha Thero)

New York Buddhist Vihara

Kew Gardens. New York. U.S.A.

November 11, 1991

PREFACE

When we first came to Winnipeg, Manitoba, there was no facility available to send our children to learn the teachings of the Buddha. In May of 1989, the Vietnamese community, which had just purchased a temple, very generously gave us permission to use their new temple. Due to the Dharma Dāna of the Vietnamese community, for the first time in the history of Winnipeg, Manitoba, we were able to organise a Vesak celebration with Attangasila (observing the 8 precepts) and Bhakthi Gita (devotional songs) by the children. As part of the celebration I told the Sri Lankan children the story of Angulimala.

Both our children (ages 6 & 3) were fascinated by the story. Realising that they were ready for the teachings of the Buddha I started the Full Moon (Poya) Day Program. The Poya Day Program consisted of a Gilanpassa puja followed by a class for the children. As the other Sri Lankans in Winnipeg too could benefit by the program, it was open to all interested persons.

This book is the result of my Poya day classes. Our congregation grew from six children and a handful of adults to ten children and about fifteen adults. Now the children had acquired a fair knowledge of the teachings of the Buddha. However, they had no permanent record of what I taught them. I was afraid that as quick as they were to absorb the teachings of the Buddha, they would forget. In addition, our son, who is an avid reader, was asking me for more and more information about the teachings of the Buddha. Though I had many excellent books in both Sinhala and English, most of them were too advanced for him to read and understand on his own. This first book summarizes some of what I have taught in class. I intend to document the rest of what I have taught in subsequent books.

To benefit most from this book, a child should have some formal teaching of Buddhism. However, to make the book interesting to first-time readers, I have included all of the subjects that my class found most interesting. The brief description of the heavens and the life span in them resulted in many questions from the children, and led to the talk on the 31 planes of existence. It was also their questions that led to the class on rebirth, kamma and the advent of the Maithreya Buddha. It is hoped that the first-time readers too would be inspired to question, read and find out more about the teachings of the Buddha after reading this book.

Many people helped directly and indirectly in the production of this book. First, it is thanks to the Vietnamese community of the Chan Dao Buddhist Association that we Sri Lankans have a place to worship. May they all partake in the merits of this gift of Dhamma. I also would like to thank Venerable Piyatissa (Mahā Thero) of the New York Buddhist Vihara for checking the book for the accuracy of its material and writing the foreword. The

Venerable Piyatissa has been a great help to us since we came to North America, and helped us to celebrate Vesak in Winnipeg in 1990.

I also want to thank Sarath, my husband, who helped to edit and publish this book, and our

son, Chamal, who read the book many times to ensure that it can be read and understood by a child of eight.

This is the second edition of *The Life of the Buddha*. My good friend, Adrienne Bouchard Langlois, has offered her expertise in editing the contents of this second edition. It was also her inspiration that led to the use of technology in reproducing the pictures used in this book. Her encouragement and effort are a constant source of inspiration in my work. Her valuable contribution to this second edition is gratefully acknowledged.

May you all partake in the merit of this Dhamma Dāna.

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November 19, 1996

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THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

CHAPTER	TOPIC	PAGE
1.	Invitation of the Gods	1
2.	Queen Mahā Māyā's dream	2
3.	The birth of a Prince	3
4.	Ploughing festival	4
5.	The story of the swan	5
6.	His marriage	6
7.	The four signs.....	7
8.	The Great Renunciation	9
9.	The ascetic Gotama	10
10.	Sujātā's wish	11
11.	Enlightenment	12
12.	The seven weeks after enlightenment	14
13.	His first sermon	15
14.	The teachings of the Buddha.....	17
15.	The Parinibbāna of the Lord Buddha.....	21
16.	What they say about Him and Buddhism	23

Chapter 1

INVITATION OF THE GODS

Our Bodhisatta¹ was born in Tusita² Heaven as a Deva³ by the name of Svetaketu. The Devas in Tusita Heaven were happy. The time had come for the Bodhisatta to be born in the world for the last time. The Devas invited the Bodhisatta to be born on earth.

The Bodhisatta looked down at the world to make sure that the five requirements necessary for His final birth in the world were met. These five requirements are as follows:

1. **The right time** – The life span of human beings at a time a Buddha is born is between 100 and 100,000 years. If the life span is very short, human beings want to enjoy their short life to the fullest and tend to be very fond of material things. If the life span is very long, they tend to forget the impermanence of life. At this time the Bodhisatta found that the life span was one hundred and twenty years.
2. **The right continent** – All Buddhas are born in India (known as Jumbudipa at the time of the Buddha). This is because the people of India are spiritually more advanced than people in other countries, and so are more ready for a Buddha.
3. **The right area** – The city of Kapilavatthu was chosen as the city of the future Buddha, as there was a just and good king and many righteous people living there.
4. **The right caste** – A Buddha is always born in a high caste – Either a royal caste or a priestly caste. This is necessary, as often persons born in a low caste are not accepted by society.
5. **The right mother** – The mother of a Buddha has to be very pure. She is a person who has resolved to be a mother of a Buddha and observed the five precepts for many countless past lives. The chosen mother was Queen Mahā Māyā, wife of King Suddhodana of Kapilavatthu.

The Bodhisatta saw that the five requirements were met.

1. **Bodhisatta** – One on his way to perfection. This is the name given to a person who is trying to be a Buddha.

2. **Tusita Heaven** – One of the seven happy planes of life. The Devas in the Tusita Heaven have a life span of 576,000,000 human years. All Bodhisattas who have completed the ten perfections await the right time for their last birth in Tusita Heaven. The next Buddha, the Maithreya Buddha, is at present a Deva by the name of Natha in the Tusita Heaven.

3. **Devas** – Heavenly beings known in English as gods or divine beings.

Chapter 2

QUEEN MAHĀ MĀYĀ'S DREAM

One night Queen Mahā Māyā had a dream. She dreamt that the Devas from the four directions of the earth took her to Lake Anotatta on top of the Himalayan mountain. She was bathed in the lake and dressed in heavenly clothes and ornaments. A white baby elephant carrying a white lotus flower in its trunk trumpeted, and after circling around her three times, entered her body.

The next morning she told King Suddhodana of her dream. He consulted some wise men who, on hearing the dream said, “The Queen will have a wise and noble baby boy.” The king and queen were very happy for they had no children and were longing for a child.

Queen Mahā Māyā's dream

(Draw a picture of Queen Mahā Māyā sleeping in her chamber. Draw a baby elephant, carrying a lotus flower in its trunk, on a “cloud” as in her dream.)

Chapter 3

THE BIRTH OF A PRINCE

According to the custom of that time, Queen Mahā Māyā decided to visit her mother so that she could be with her at the time of the birth of her baby.

On the way she stopped at the Lumbini Pleasure Garden to rest. Under a sweet-scented Sal tree, on a full moon day in the month of May, in the year 623 B.C., the Prince was born.

The baby Prince took seven steps, and a lotus flower burst through the ground to receive His feet. He made the following announcement:

**“Aggo hamasmi lokassa
Jetho hamasmi lokassa
Settho hamasmi lokassa
Ayamanthima jathi
Natthi dani punabbhavo.”**

**“I am the Chief in the world
There is no equal to me
I am Supreme
This is my last birth
No rebirth for me.”**

It is said in the Anagata Vamsa that the next Buddha, Maithreya, will make a similar announcement at His birth.

The ministers took the Queen and the baby back to Kapilavatthu and King Suddhodana. Many wise men came to see the baby. They said that one day the Prince would either be a King of the world or a Supreme Buddha. The baby Prince was named Siddhārtha Gotama. Siddhārtha means “wish fulfilled” and Gotama was His family name.

Seven days after the birth of the Prince, Queen Mahā Māyā died. She was born as a Deva by the name of Matu-deva putta in the Tusita Heaven. Her sister, Mahā Prajāpathi Gotami, took care of the Prince.



The Prince announces His birth

Chapter 4

PLOUGHING FESTIVAL

Every year there was a big festival at the time the rice fields were ploughed. One day King Suddhodana took the little Prince to the ploughing festival. The Prince fell asleep. Seeing that the Prince was sleeping, His maids joined in the festivities of the day.

When they came back they found the Prince deep in meditation. He was meditating on His breathing in and breathing out. This meditation is known as breathing meditation (Ānāpāna Sati Meditation). This form of meditation is very important, as it was this meditation that was later used by the Buddha to attain enlightenment.⁴

The Prince deep in meditation
(Draw a picture of Prince Siddhārtha meditating)

4. **Enlightenment** – the supreme knowledge that leads to the end of rebirth.

Chapter 5

THE STORY OF THE SWAN

The Prince grew up to be a kind and gentle boy. One day He was walking in a grove when a swan that had been shot down fell near Him. The Prince picked up the swan, pulled out the arrow, and placed some soothing herbs on its wound. He then carried it back to the palace. His cousin, Devadatta, ran after Him to claim the bird, as it was he who had shot it down. Prince Siddhārtha refused to give Devadatta the bird.

Devadatta, angry at not getting the bird he had shot, complained to King Suddhodana. After listening to the young Princes, the King decided to have their dispute settled in court. At first the jury were angry that a children's petty dispute should be brought to court. However, King Suddhodana insisted on their settling the dispute saying, "These are our future rulers. It is best that this should be settled in court."

Devadatta gave his side of the story first, saying that he had shot down the bird, and that as such, the bird belonged to him. Prince Siddhārtha agreed that it was Devadatta who had shot down the bird, but said that it was He who had saved its life by applying soothing herbs. Prince Siddhārtha said, "If the bird had died, then it would have belonged to you. I saved its life by attending to it. Life belongs to the saviour of life, not to the destroyer."

After listening to Prince Siddhārtha's defence, the jury agreed with him that life belongs to its saviour, not to its destroyer. The bird was given to Prince Siddhārtha.

Prince Siddhārtha shows kindness
*(Draw a picture of Prince Siddhārtha attending to the
swan while Devadatta looks on)*

Chapter 6

HIS MARRIAGE

The Prince grew up in luxury. He was a good student, obedient, kind and generous. The gentle Prince was liked by all. It was time for the Prince to be married. Prince Siddhārtha chose His own cousin, Princess Yasodharā, as His bride. She too, wanted to marry Him.

At first Princess Yasodharā's father, King Suprabuddha, did not want his daughter to marry Prince Siddhārtha. He knew that some wise men had said that one day the Prince would give up His wealth and royal position and become a Buddha. He did not want Prince Siddhārtha to give up his daughter and kingdom. However, Princess Yasodharā wanted to marry Him and no other. The Prince and Princess were married with great ceremony. Both Prince Siddhārtha and Princess Yasodharā were sixteen years old at the time of their marriage. They were very happy together.



The marriage of Prince Siddhārtha and Princess Yasodharā
(Picture courtesy of Budu Maga)

Chapter 7

THE FOUR SIGNS

The Prince and Princess led an idyllic life together. King Suddhodana made sure that they had every luxury. He did not want the Prince to see or feel any sorrow, for he did not want Prince Siddhārtha to give up His kingdom and become a Buddha. King Suddhodana wanted his son to be the next king.

One day when the Prince was out riding with Channa, His charioteer, He saw a very old man. The man was very feeble, hunched over, and could hardly walk. Having never seen old age before, the Prince inquired from Channa as to what had happened to the man. He then found out from Channa about old age and that it would someday happen to all of us. The kind-hearted Prince was very sad and thoughtful about this new-found information.

On another day when He was out with Channa He saw a very sick man in great pain. The Prince, who had never seen such grave sickness, inquired from Channa as to what was wrong with the man. He was even sadder when He heard about sickness and pain and that it could happen to anyone.

The Prince was again out with Channa when He saw the funeral of a man. The dead man's friends and relatives were crying and carrying him for his burial. Having never faced death before, the young Prince was horrified to find that death was something we all had to face.

For many days the young Prince was disturbed by these sights: Old age, Sickness, and Death, common to all living beings. “Was there any way he could stop this life of old age, sickness and death that all mankind had to face? Was there any way that he could deliver mankind from pain and sorrow?” The young Prince pondered these questions.

The sad and thoughtful Prince was again out with Channa when He saw an ascetic, a person who had renounced the world and all his belongings and taken the life of a monk. What serenity, what peace of mind! The ascetic's face looked calm, free from worries. This, then, must be the answer, thought Prince Siddhārtha. He made up His mind to give up all of His wealth and kingdom to become an ascetic. He decided that He wanted to find a way to end this sorrow of old age, sickness and death, so that He could help mankind.

THE FOUR SIGNS (Cont'd.)

An old man, a sick man, a dead man, and an ascetic
(Draw a picture of the four signs)

Chapter 8 THE GREAT RENUNCIATION

Prince Siddhārtha was twenty-nine years old. It was a full moon day in the month of July. The Prince had decided that this was the day when He would leave the palace and become an ascetic, when the news came that Princess Yasodharā had given birth to a baby boy. The first word that the Prince said when he heard of the birth of His son was “Rāhu”. Rāhu means an obstacle. The baby prince would make Prince Siddhārtha’s decision to leave the palace and His loved ones even more difficult. An obstacle to His leaving had arisen. The baby was named Rāhula, by his grandfather.

Prince Siddhārtha went to His wife's sleeping chamber to look at her and His new-born son. Both were asleep. The princess's hand was covering the baby's face. The Prince knew that His wife would wake up if He tried to move her hand to see the baby's face. It would then be very difficult for Him to leave. “I must leave quietly and find a way to end this recurring life of old age, sickness, and death,” thought the Prince. “I must find this happiness for mankind, my wife, and son. Then I will come back to see my son.”

The Prince took one last look at His beloved wife and son. He then called Channa, His charioteer, and left the palace on His horse Kanthaka. He crossed the river Anomā and handed all His jewellery and rich clothes to Channa. He asked Channa to take them back to His family and tell them that He had gone to find a way to end death.

The Deva king Sakka handed Him the robes and bowl of an ascetic. His faithful horse Kanthaka did not want to leave Him. The sorrow of parting was too great for it. Kanthaka died of a broken heart and was born as a Deva in the Tāvātimsa⁵ Heaven. Channa went back to break the news of the Great Renunciation to the king. After the renunciation Prince Siddhārtha was known as the ascetic Gotama.

All Bodhisattas must be married and have a child in their last birth before enlightenment. It has been so with all the Buddhas of the past and will be so with all the Buddhas of the future. Otherwise, because a supreme Buddha is such a perfect being, so God-like, He would be mistaken for a God (Brahma). They in the Brahma⁶ world do not marry. The Buddha, however, is above all Gods. He is the perfect being, teacher of Gods and humans, and incomparable.

5. **Tāvātimsa Heaven** – One of the seven happy planes of life also known as the Heaven of the thirty-three Devas. It was in this Heaven that the Buddha taught the Higher Teachings (Abhidhamma) for three months.

6. **Brahma world** – There are sixteen happy planes of life where the beings have pleasures, but not the pleasures of the senses. Usually, those who have achieved the spiritual levels of the mental absorptions (Jhānas) are born in these planes of life.

Chapter 9

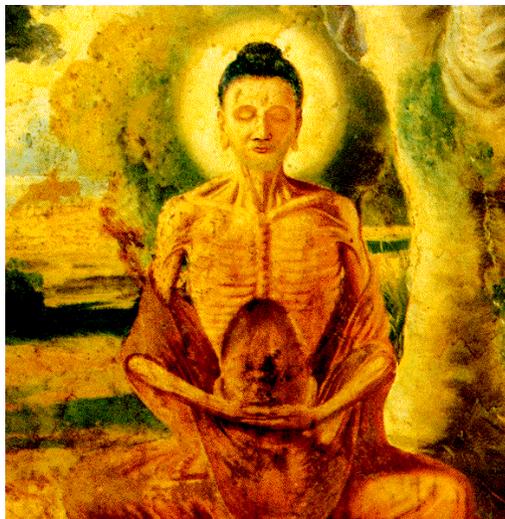
THE ASCETIC GOTAMA

The ascetic Gotama went to two well-known teachers to seek a way to defeat death. They were Alāra Kalāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. Very soon the ascetic Gotama had mastered all the knowledge of His teachers. However, neither of them could teach Him the way to end the cycle of birth and death.

The ascetic Gotama left the two teachers and was joined by five of His friends who were also searching for the truth. They were Kondañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma and Assaji. Together the friends gave up sensual gratification and tried to find the truth through self-mortification. At this time in India it was thought that the way to purify one's mind was through self-mortification. That is, by giving up eating, drinking and even breathing.

The ascetic Gotama tried all of this. His body wasted away due to lack of food. His beautiful golden skin became darkened and withered. His hair fell out for lack of nourishment. He had by now reduced the amount of food He ate to one mustard seed per day. He was so weak He could hardly move. The Devas said, “Surely the ascetic Gotama has passed away.”

The ascetic Gotama realised that He would not reach His goal through self-mortification. Slowly, He started to take nourishment again. He decided to follow the middle path: to avoid the luxuries He had as a prince and also to avoid the extreme sacrifice of His body. His five friends left Him, thinking that the ascetic Gotama had given up His holy life and search for the Truth.



The ascetic Gotama weak from lack of food
(Picture courtesy of Budu Maga)

Chapter 10

SUJĀTĀ'S WISH

The ascetic Gotama set off on His own and reached the river Neranjara. He started to meditate under a tree.

In this area there lived a noble lady by the name of Sujātā. She had taken a vow to the Deva whom she believed lived in this tree, and had prayed for a good son. On having her prayer answered, she prepared a dish of milk rice and went to the tree to offer it to the Deva. On seeing the ascetic so calm and beautiful she offered it to Him, thinking that He was the Deva. She said, “May your wishes be fulfilled just as mine have been.”

The ascetic Gotama ate the food, put the bowl into the river, and tested His mind-power by saying, “If I attain the supreme knowledge of enlightenment today, may this bowl float upstream.” The bowl floated upstream. This encouraged Him further.

Thereafter He went to Gaya and sat under a tree to meditate, determined to achieve the supreme knowledge on that day.



Sujātā offers milk rice
(Picture courtesy of Budu Maga)

Chapter 11

ENLIGHTENMENT

It was a full moon day in the month of May. Remembering how, as a small boy, He had meditated on breathing in and breathing out at the ploughing festival and reached the first mental absorption (Jhāna), the ascetic Gotama decided to use this form of meditation.

Māra, the feeling of desire and attachment, seeing that the ascetic Gotama was about to achieve the supreme knowledge, tried to tempt Him with images of His wife and other pleasures. However, the ascetic Gotama was determined and continued His meditation. Finally, He attained the Supreme knowledge known as enlightenment. He attained it in three stages by realising the Four Noble Truths.



Picture courtesy of Buddhist Cultural Centre

First, He reached the four mental absorptions of spiritual development. His mind was now like a polished mirror where everything is reflected in its true perspective. With a mind tranquil and pure, in the first watch (part) of the night He attained the ability to see into His past births. First one, then two, then hundreds, then thousands of His past lives. Then He saw world cycles destroyed and world cycles evolve. He saw His countless former lives in this endless chain of life: birth, decay, death; rebirth, life, decay, death. Thus he recalled the mode and details of His varied lots in former lives. He then realised that living beings will be born again after their death (rebirth).

In the second watch of the night The Holy One attained the ability to see other persons dying

ENLIGHTENMENT (Cont'd.)

and being instantly reborn in various places. He saw the crude and the noble, the beautiful and the ugly, the happy and the miserable, all passing according to their deeds from one birth to another. He then understood the results of kamma⁷.

After understanding the effects of one's actions, He directed His purified mind to the cessation of corruptions (evils). In the third watch of the night (early next morning), He realised what is now known as the Four Noble Truths. That birth is sorrow (dukka); the cause of sorrow (craving); the cessation of sorrow (Nibbāna); and the path leading to the cessation of sorrow (the Noble Eightfold Path). Realising this knowledge, He knew that He was now delivered from this recurring life of sorrow.

Ignorance was dispelled and wisdom arose, darkness vanished and light arose. The ascetic Gotama had attained enlightenment. He was now a Supreme Buddha.

The Gotama Buddha was thirty-five years old. It had taken Him six years after the Great Renunciation to achieve His goal. Finally, He had found the way to end this continuous chain of life and death. He had found the way to save mankind from old age, sickness, and death. Joyously the Gotama Buddha said:

**“Thro' many a birth in existence wandered I,
Seeking but not finding, the builder of this house⁸.
Sorrowful is repeated birth
O house builder⁹ thou art seen. Thou shall build no house again.
All thy rafters¹⁰ are broken. Thy ridge-pole¹¹ is shattered.
Mind attains the unconditioned¹².
Achieved is the end of craving.”**

7. **Kamma** – Intentional physical, verbal, and mental actions.

8. **House** – Body

9. **House builder** – Cause for rebirth – craving and attachment (tanha)

10. **Rafters** – Passions (kilesa)

11. **Ridge-pole** – Ignorance or delusion (avijja)

12. **Unconditioned** – Nibbāna – This is the fourth stage of saintliness that all Buddhists strive for. After you attain Nibbāna you are not born again.

Chapter 12

THE SEVEN WEEKS AFTER ENLIGHTENMENT

In the first week after enlightenment the Gotama Buddha meditated on His new-found knowledge and enjoyed His new-found happiness.

In the second week He paid respect to the Tree that had given Him shade during His long struggle for enlightenment, by standing at attention and gazing motionless at it. The Tree is now known as the Bodhi Tree: The Tree of Knowledge. A sapling from this original tree is now in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka. It is the oldest documented tree in the world.

In the third week, seeing that the Devas were still in doubt as to whether He had attained enlightenment, He created a golden bridge with His powers and meditated while walking up and down on it.

In the fourth week he created a jewelled chamber and meditated on the higher teachings (Abhidhamma). At this time His mind and body were so pure and perfect that an aura of six colours emanated from His person. They were blue, yellow, red, white, orange and a mixture of the five. Today the Buddhist flag is made up of these colours.

Each colour represents one noble quality of the Buddha as follows:

Blue	–	confidence
Yellow	–	holiness
Red	–	wisdom
White	–	purity
Orange	–	absence of desire
Mixed	–	all of these qualities

In the fifth week the beautiful daughters of Māra – Tanhā, Rathi and Ragā – tried to disturb His concentration by dancing.

In the sixth week He was meditating under the Mucalinda tree when there was a heavy rain. Mucalinda, the king of serpents, coiled round the body of the Buddha seven times and held his large hood over the Buddha's head so that He would not get wet.

In the seventh week the Buddha was meditating under the Rājāyatana tree when two merchants by the name of Tapassu and Bhallika offered him rice cake. This was the Lord Buddha's first meal after enlightenment. The two merchants took refuge in the Buddha and the Dhamma, and became the first lay disciples of the Gotama Buddha.

Chapter 13

HIS FIRST SERMON

The compassionate Gotama Buddha decided that He should teach His new-found knowledge to mankind so that they too could defeat the cycle of birth and death.

He saw that His first two teachers, Alāra Kalāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, had passed away. He chose His five friends next, and went to Isipatana where they were residing.

When the five friends saw the Buddha they decided to ignore him. They thought that the ascetic Gotama had given up the holy life, as He had moved away from extreme self-mortification. However, they could not ignore the radiance of His presence.

It was the full moon day in the month of July. At the deer park in Isipatana, the Buddha delivered His first sermon after enlightenment. Dhammachakka is the name given to His first sermon. The meaning of Dhammachakka is “The establishment of wisdom”. However, it is often referred to as the “Wheel of truth”. After hearing it His friend Kondaṅga reached the first stage of spiritual development known as Sotāpatti¹³.

The Dhammachakka sutta is very important, as in this first sermon the Buddha taught us about the Four Noble Truths and the Middle Path.

The Middle Path is what the Buddha followed to attain enlightenment. He gave up the extreme of wealth and luxuries He had had as a Prince and the extreme self-mortification of torturing His body by withholding the necessities for life. Instead, He used the Middle Path. He catered to the needs of His body rather than to the wants of His mind. This Middle Path that leads to the end of suffering is comprised of the Noble Eightfold Path – namely:

1. **Right Understanding**
2. **Right Thinking**
3. **Right Speech**
4. **Right Action**
5. **Right Livelihood**
6. **Right Effort**
7. **Right Mindfulness**
8. **Right Concentration**

13. **Sotāpatti** – The first stage of saintliness, also known as “stream enterer”. Those who have attained Sotāpatti will attain Nibbāna within seven more births.

HIS FIRST SERMON (Cont'd.)

Following The Eightfold Noble Path leads to the understanding of the Four Noble Truths which results in Nibbāna. The Four Noble Truths are:

1. **Dukkha – That which is difficult to endure – suffering or dissatisfaction**
2. **Cause of Dukkha – craving and attachment**
3. **End to Dukkha – Nibbāna (no more rebirth)**
4. **The way to end Dukkha – following the Eightfold Noble Path.**



The Buddha's First Sermon
(Picture courtesy of Budu Maga)

Chapter 14

THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA

During the next forty-five years the Buddha preached His new-found knowledge to help mankind and the Devas. He was known as Sathā Devamanussānam – teacher of Devas and humans. Some special features of the teachings of the Buddha are as follows:

1. The Buddha wanted us to study, investigate and understand His teachings, only accepting them when we found them to be moral and conducive to the well-being and happiness of mankind. The Buddha said, “Do not accept anything on mere hearsay, tradition, rumours, inference, preconceived notions, supposition, or because it seems acceptable. Do not accept anything because the ascetic who taught it is respected by all ...”.

Buddhism appeals more to the intellect than the emotion. It is concerned more with the character of the devotees than with their numerical strength. When the millionaire Upāli visited the Buddha with the idea of condemning His teachings, the Buddha patiently taught him the Dhamma. Impressed with His teachings, Upāli wished to join His followers. However, the Lord Buddha advised him saying, “It is well for a distinguished man like you to make a thorough investigation.” Upāli, overwhelmed with joy at this unexpected statement said, “If I had become a follower of any other teacher they would have proclaimed the fact that I, Upāli the millionaire, had changed teachers. The more pleased am I.” Upāli became a Buddhist by conviction but the Buddha with His boundless compassion advised him to support his former religious teacher as before.

2. The Buddha advised us that at no time should we ever insult or condemn the religion of another. Intolerance is the greatest enemy of religion. Denouncing unfair criticism of other faiths the Buddha states, “It is as a man who looks up and spits at heaven. The spittle does not soil the heaven, but comes back and soils his own person.” On another occasion the Buddha said, “If you find truth in any religion, accept that truth.”

3. The ordinary precepts that Buddhists follow are not commandments but modes of discipline (sikkhāpada) that they take of their own accord. In Buddhism we are not forced or commanded to do anything. We follow the teachings of the Buddha of our own free will because we understand and believe in them.

4. Buddhism teaches non-violence. In the Dhammapada (Law Verses) the Buddha said:

**“All fear the rod,
Life is dear to all.
Feeling for others as for yourself
You should neither slay,
Nor cause others to slay.”**

THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA (Cont'd.)

Following, understanding and accepting the teachings of the Buddha, Buddhists take the first precept 'pānātipātā veramani sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi' which means 'I undertake to observe the precept of abstaining from destroying living beings'.

To the unique credit of Buddhism, it must be said that throughout its peaceful existence of over 2500 years, not a drop of blood has been shed in the name of the Buddha. No mighty monarch has wielded his powerful sword to spread the Dhamma.

5. The Buddha taught us to be compassionate to all living beings. In the Karaniya Metta Sutta the Buddha said:

**“As a mother protects her only child,
Even at the risk of her own life,
Let one cultivate boundless thoughts of loving kindness.
Towards all living beings.”**

6. The Buddha taught us that we must show love and kindness to our enemies and those we do not like. He did not believe in revenge and an eye for an eye. In the Dhammapada the Buddha said:

**“Conquer anger by loving kindness.
Conquer evil by good.
Conquer the stingy by liberality.
Conquer the liar by truthfulness.”**

7. The Buddha advocated equality for all mankind. He attempted to abolish slavery and the degrading caste system in Indian society. He declared:

**“By birth is not one an outcaste,
By birth is not one a brahmin.
By deeds is one an outcaste,
By deeds is one a brahmin¹⁴.”**

According to the Buddha's teaching, caste or colour do not prevent one from becoming a Buddhist or joining the order of the Sangha (Buddhist monks). Fishermen and scavengers, together with warriors and brahmins were freely admitted to the order of the Sangha and given positions of high rank.

14. Vasala sutta

THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA (Cont'd.)

Upāli the barber was chief disciple in matters pertaining to the discipline of the Sangha (Vinaya). Sunita, who was honoured by kings as an Arahant,¹⁵ was a scavenger. Rajjumala and Punnā were slave girls.

8. The Buddha also raised the status of women by starting the order of the Nuns. He saw the good in both men and women. Gender is no barrier to spiritual development and religious service. At that time in Indian society women were often treated as inferior to men. When Queen Mallikā gave birth to a baby girl, the Buddha comforted the distraught King Pasenadi by saying, “A female child may prove even better than a male offspring.”

9. Rebirth and kamma are also integral parts of Buddhism. According to the teachings of the Buddha, life does not end at death. One is reborn instantaneously. Though many great teachers of the East advocate rebirth, it is not a belief exclusively for the East. Many great men in the West believe in rebirth. Among its advocates we have scientists like Thomas Huxley, who was responsible for introducing science to the 19th century British school system, Professor Gustaf Stromberg, the famous Swedish astronomer, Professor Julian Huxley, the distinguished British scientist, philosophers like Pythagoras and Plato, poets like Shelley, Tennyson and Wordsworth, and American industrialist Henry Ford.

Our life is a result of our kamma. We are not brought to this world by anyone but ourselves. It is the result of a cause. The cause is delusion (avijja). To understand this theory, we need to develop our minds through meditation.

Kamma means action. Vipaka means results. Good actions cause good results. Bad actions cause bad results. The Buddha said, “Whether you are in the sea, the air, or in a cave, you cannot hide from the effects of your bad kamma.” That is the Law of Kamma. It must be stressed, however, that it is the intention behind the action and not just the action alone that sets off the reaction (vipaka). As Buddhists we refrain from bad actions and perform good actions because we know that one day, either in this birth or in a future birth, the effects of our actions will come back to us. We know that not even the Buddha can save us from the effects of our bad actions.

As Buddhists, we understand that due to the Law of Kamma, bad things can happen to a good person just as good things can happen to a bad person. We see the bigger picture. We go back into our past lives and understand that these are the results of our past bad actions. As such, we do not blame any divine powers for our misfortunes. Knowing that we are now paying for the

15. **Arahant** – One who has attained Nibbāna

THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA (Cont'd.)

results of our past bad actions, we take heed and ensure that we improve and not make the same mistake again. We learn from our misfortunes by doing good and avoiding bad actions.

10. The Buddha taught us that you are your own saviour. No all-powerful God can help us to attain Nibbāna. No God can help us to escape from the effects of our own actions. As such, you make your own destiny. Mind is supreme. In Buddhism we learn to control our minds and our destiny. We rely on no one but ourselves. The Buddhas show us how. They are our teachers. It is up to us to follow Their teachings of the Noble Eightfold Path, to control and purify our minds through meditation and attain our own salvation. The teachings of all Buddhas can be summed up in three lines:

**“Do no evil
Do good
Purify the mind.”**

Draw a picture of yourself showing kindness to an animal or person

Chapter 15

THE PARINIBBĀNA OF THE LORD BUDDHA

The Buddha was eighty years old. The time was near for the passing away (parinibbāna) of the Lord Buddha. The Buddha had advised Venerable Ānanda, His attending monk, that He would be passing away in three months.

The Buddha proceeded to walk to the city of Kusinārā. On the way a man by the name of Pukkusa heard His Dhamma¹⁶ and offered Him two golden robes. As directed by the Buddha he robed the Buddha with one and Venerable Ānanda with the other. When the Buddha was robed Venerable Ānanda was surprised to see that the skin of the Holy One was exceedingly bright, so that the golden robe appeared dull in comparison. The Buddha informed Ānanda that the Tathāgata's¹⁷ skin becomes clear and exceedingly bright on two occasions: the night on which He attains Buddhahood and the night on which He passes away. He then announced that on the third watch of the night He would pass away in the Sala grove of the Mallas.

It was a full moon day in the month of May. The Lord Buddha reached the Sal garden of the Mallas and saw that the twin Sal trees were in full bloom even though it was out of season. He then said, “It is not thus that the Tathagata is respected, venerated, honoured and revered. Whenever a Bhikkhu or Bhikkuni, Upāsaka or Upāsikā lives in accordance with the Teachings, conducts himself dutifully and acts righteously, it is he who respects, reverences, venerates, honours and reveres the Tathāgata with the highest homage.”

The Buddha then lay down on a couch prepared by Ānanda, on His right side with His head facing north. At this time, Subhadda, a wandering ascetic, came to Him to clear up a doubt. Happy with the Buddha's teachings, he took refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, and requested permission to be a monk. He was the last personal disciple of the Buddha.

Just before the Buddha passed away many disciples came to pay their respects to Him. One monk, however, did not come. Instead, he remained in his abode, deep in meditation. On being asked the reason for his absence the monk said, “Lord, I knew that Your Reverence would pass away shortly and I thought that the best way to honour the Teacher was by attaining Arahantship before the passing away of Your Reverence.” The Buddha, pleased with his reply, said: “Excellent, excellent! He who loves me should act as this monk. He honours me best who practises my teaching best.”

16. **Dhamma** – His teachings

17. **Tathāgata** – Another word for Buddha

THE PARINIBBĀNA OF THE LORD BUDDHA (Cont'd.)

Finally, the Buddha addressed His disciples and said these words: “Subject to change are all component things. Strive on with diligence.” These were His last words. It was the full moon day in the month of May in the year 543 B.C. In the third watch of the night the Blessed One passed away.



The Parinibbāna of the Lord Buddha
(Picture courtesy of Budu Maga)

Chapter 16

WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT HIM AND BUDDHISM

It is now over two thousand five hundred years since the passing away of the Lord Buddha. The teachings of the Buddha remain true, a monument to His greatness. This is what some well-known persons, who have studied His teachings, say about Him and His teachings.

“The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, and a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.”

Prof. Albert Einstein

“Buddhist or no Buddhist, I have examined every one of the great religious systems of the world; and in none of those have I found anything to surpass in beauty and comprehensiveness the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha. I am content to shape my life according to that path.”

Prof. Rhys Davids

“Alone of all the great world religions, Buddhism made its way without persecution, censorship or inquisition. In all these respects its record is enormously superior to that of Christianity, which made its way among people wedded to materialism and which was able to justify the bloodthirsty tendencies of its adherents by an appeal to the savage bronze-age literature of the Old Testament.”

Aldous Huxley

“Of the great religions of history, I prefer Buddhism, especially in its earliest forms, because it has had the smallest element of persecution.”

Lord Bertrand Russell

“To go to Him for refuge, to sing His praise, to do Him honour and to abide in His Dhamma is to act with understanding.”

Poet of ancient India

WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT HIM AND BUDDHISM (Cont'd.)

“Indian pacifism finds its complete expression in the teaching of the Buddha. Buddhism teaches ahimsa or harmlessness towards all beings. It forbids even laymen to have anything to do with the manufacture and sale of arms, with the making of poisons and intoxicants, with soldiering or the slaughtering of animals.”

Aldous Huxley

“In Gotama the Buddha we have a mastermind from the East second to none so far as the influence on the thought and life of the human race is concerned, and sacred to all as the founder of a religious tradition whose hold is hardly less wide and deep than any other. He belongs to the history of the world's thought, to the general inheritance of all cultivated men, for, judged by intellectual integrity, moral earnestness and spiritual insight, he is undoubtedly one of the greatest figures of history.”

Sri Radhakrishnan

Gotama the Buddha

“The Greatest Man ever born.”

Great Poet R. Tagore

India

“In the Buddha you see clearly a man, simple, devout, lonely, battling for light, a vivid human personality, not a myth. He too gave a message to mankind universal in character. Many of our best modern ideas are in closest harmony with it. All the miseries and discontents of life are due, He taught, to selfishness. Before a man can become serene he must cease to live for his senses or himself. Then he merges into a greater being. Buddhism in different language called men to self-forgetfulness 500 years before Christ. In some ways He was nearer to us and our needs. He was more lucid upon our individual importance in service than Christ and less ambiguous upon the question of personal immortality.”

H. G. Wells

Three Greatest Men in History

“The more I know Him the more I love Him.”

Fausboll

(Danish scholar)

WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT HIM AND BUDDHISM (Cont'd.)

“I know nothing more grand in this world than the figure of the Buddha. It is the perfect embodiment of spirituality in the visible domain.”

Count Kaiserling

Travel Diary of a Philosopher

“The Buddhist moral code is one of the most perfect which the world has ever known.”

Prof. Max Muller

“The scriptures of the Saviour of the World,
Lord Buddha – Prince Siddārtha styled on earth –
In Earth and Heavens and Hells Incomparable,
All-honoured, Wisest, Best, most Pitiful (Compassionate);
The Teacher of Nirvāna and the Law.”

Sir Edwin Arnold

The Light of Asia

“May the Dhamma last as long as my sons and grandsons and the sun and the moon will be, and may the people follow the Path of the Dhamma, for if one follows the path, happiness in this and in the other world will be attained.”

Emperor Asoka of India

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I gratefully acknowledge the Ottawa Buddhist Association Newsletter for providing the picture of the face of the Buddha.

OTHER BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

RELATIVES AND DISCIPLES OF THE BUDDHA

This book introduces the reader to some of the close relatives and leading disciples of the Buddha. The thirty-four life stories highlight the contributions of these great disciples to mankind through the preservation of the Buddha Dhamma and include verses from their own teachings as found in the *Theragāthā* and *Therīgātā*. This book is enriched with illustrations by children in Canada and Sri Lanka. The children's perspective on the stories adds a touching depth which brings to life the great persons who preserved the Dhamma so that it would be available for them to study many years later.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN BUDDHISM (VOLUME 1)

This book includes questions asked by students of the Dhamma and covers such topics as: Why should I believe in rebirth? What is the Buddhist viewpoint on capital punishment? and Why are there inequalities among mankind? The purpose of this book is to introduce the child or beginner to some important concepts of the Dhamma in an interesting manner while encouraging them to question and understand the teachings before accepting them.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN BUDDHISM (VOLUME II)

This book is a continuation of the book Questions and Answers in Buddhism - Volume 1. The questions contained in this book were taken from speaking engagements at Interfaith conferences, University seminars, and Dhamma classes in Winnipeg. This book is for an advanced student of the Dhamma and covers such topics as: What is the Buddhist concept of Inner Peace? Why is Buddhism sometimes compared to science? How has Buddhism contributed to the position of women? and What is the role of Divine Beings in Buddhism?

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE BUDDHA

This book takes you in the footsteps of the Buddha from Lumbini where He was born to Kusinara where He passed away. It includes beautiful colour illustrations of the significant sacred places in the life of the Buddha and helps the reader to visualize the spirituality and exquisite beauty of these places. This book is addressed to all persons interested in the Buddha and the Dhamma and to persons who have an interest in history and ancient ruins.

PRACTISING THE DHAMMA WITH A VIEW TO NIBBĀNA

This book is addressed to advanced students of the Dhamma. The book is divided into two sections. The first section explains why we should practise the Dhamma with a view to Nibbāna. It explains how rare is the appearance of a Buddha and how very fortunate we are to be born at a time when the teachings of a Buddha are available. The book brings to light the fact that only a Supreme Buddha can show us the path to the total destruction of suffering. It is designed to encourage us to strive on with diligence and concentrated, continuous effort. The second section concentrates on how one practises the Dhamma with a view to Nibbāna. Once we have realized the urgency of practising the Dhamma, it is important to know how to practise the Dhamma with a view to Nibbāna. This book introduces the reader to the practise of generosity, morality, and meditation (Samatha and Vipassanaā), as taught by the Buddha.

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