

The Life of the Buddha

Seven weeks after enlightenment and the first Sermon

In the memorable forenoon, immediately preceding the morn of His Enlightenment, as the Bodhisatta was seated under the Ajapāla banyan tree in close proximity to the Bodhi tree, a generous lady, named Sujātā, unexpectedly offered Him some rich milk-rice, specially prepared by her with great care. This substantial meal He ate, and after His Enlightenment the Buddha fasted for seven weeks, and spent a quiet time, in deep contemplation, under the Bodhi tree and in its neighborhood.

The First Week - Under the Bodhi Tree

During the first week after enlightenment, the Buddha sat under the bodhi (=bo) tree experiencing the bliss of emancipation (*Vimutti Sukha*, i.e. The Fruit of Arahantship). The Buddha reflected on “The Dependent Arising” (*Paṭicca Samuppāda*) in the last night of the first week.

The Second Week - Gazing at the Tree

During the second week, in thanks and gratitude to the Bodhi tree that had sheltered him during his struggle for Buddhahood, He stood at a certain distance gazing at the tree with motionless eyes for one whole week. Following His noble example, His followers, in memory of His enlightenment, still venerate not only the original Bodhi tree but also its descendants.

The Third Week - Jeweled ambulatory

As the Buddha had not given up His temporary residence at the Bodhi tree the Devas doubted His attainment to Buddhahood. The Buddha read their thoughts, and in order to clear their doubts He created by His psychic powers a jeweled ambulatory (*ratana caṅkamana*) and paced up and down for another week.

The Fourth Week - The Jeweled Chamber

The fourth week He spent in a jeweled chamber (*ratanaghara*) contemplating the intricacies of the Abhidhamma (Higher Teaching). Books state that His mind and body were so purified when He pondered on the Book of Relations (*Paṭthāna*), the seventh treatise of the Abhidhamma, that six coloured rays emitted from His body. Six colours are blue (*nīla*), yellow (*pīṭa*), red (*lohita*), white (*odāta*), orange (*māñjettha*) and a mixture of these five colours (*pabhassara*). Today these six colours make up the Buddhist flag.

The Fifth Week – A Brahmin and Three Girls

Conceited (*huhunkajātika*) brahmin approached the Buddha and questioned: “In what respect, does one become a Brahmana and what are the conditions that make a Brahmana?” The Buddha replied:

“That brahmin who has discarded evil, without conceit (*huhunka*), free from Defilements, self-controlled, versed in knowledge and who has led the holy life rightly, would call himself a Brahmana.

According to the Jātaka commentary it was during this week that the daughters of Māra – *Tanhā*, *Rati* and *Ragā* – came to disturb Buddha’s meditation. They danced around the Buddha and tried to distract Him, but soon got tired and left Him alone.

The Sixth Week - The Mucalinda Tree

From the Ajapāla banyan tree the Buddha proceeded to the *Mucalinda* tree, where he spent the sixth week, again enjoying the Bliss of Emancipation. At that time there arose an unexpected great shower. Rain clouds and gloomy weather with cold winds prevailed for several days. A huge king cobra came out and coiled his body seven times around the Buddha to keep him warm and placed his hood over the Buddha’s head to protect him from the rain. After seven days the rain stopped and the snake changed into a young man who paid his respects to the Buddha. The Buddha then said:

"Happy are they who are contented. Happiness is for those who hear and know the truth. Happy is good will in this world and so is restraint towards all beings. Happy are they who have no attachments and have passed beyond sense-desires. The disappearance of the word "I AM " is indeed the highest happiness."

The Seventh Week - The Rājāyatana Tree

During the seventh week, the Buddha meditated under the rājāyatana tree. On the fiftieth morning, after seven weeks of fasting, two merchants came into his presence. They were called Tapussa and Bhallika. They offered the Buddha rice cakes and honey to break his fast and the Buddha told them some of what he had found in his enlightenment.

These two merchants, by taking refuge in the Buddha, became the first lay followers. There was no Sangha (order of monks and nuns) then. They asked the Buddha for something sacred to keep with them. The Buddha wiped his head with his right hand and pulled out some hair to give to them. These hair relics, called *Kesa Dhātu*, were later reputed to be enshrined by the merchants on their return home to what is now known as Sri Lanka, in the Girihadu Cetiya.

The Buddha's First Dhamma Sermon

The Buddha's first teaching was called the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, which means the Turning of the Wheel of Truth. It was given on the full-moon day of July, called *Āsālha*. This discourse was given to the five ascetics who were his former companions, at the Deer Park in Isipatana (now called Sārnath), near Benares, India. Many devas and brahmas were present to listen to the discourse.

2 Extreme paths that the Buddha rejected

1. Addiction to sensual pleasures (*kāmasukhallikānuyoga*). The Buddha described this extreme as base (*hīno*), vulgar (*gammo*), worldly (*pothujjaniko*), ignoble (*anariyo*), and profitless (*anattasamhito*).
2. Addiction to self-mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*). The Buddha remarks that it is painful (*dukkho*), ignoble (*anariyo*), and profitless (*anattasamhito*).

After realizing the error of both these two extremes, the Buddha discovered a new path or way. The Buddha termed this new system *Majjhimā Paṭipadā* – the Middle Way. This middle path produces spiritual insight and intellectual wisdom to see things as they truly are.

Four noble truths

1. The truth of suffering (*dukkha ariya sacca*)
2. The cause of suffering (*dukkha samudaya ariya sacca*) *taṇhā* – craving
3. The end of suffering (*dukkha nirodha ariya sacca*) *nirvāṇa* – enlightenment
4. The way to the end of suffering (*dukkha nirodhagāmini paṭipadā ariya sacca*) *ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga* - the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Buddha said that he was enlightened only after he understood these Four Noble Truths.

The Noble Eightfold Path

1. **Right understanding** (*sammā diṭṭhi*): know and understand the Four Noble Truths.
2. **Right Thoughts** (*sammā saṅkappa*): abstaining from three kinds of thoughts: thoughts of non-attachment or renunciation (*nekkhamma saṅkappa*), loving-kindness (*avyāpāda saṅkappa*) and harmlessness (*avihiṃsā saṅkappa*)
3. **Right speech** (*sammā vacā*) deals with refraining from telling lies; saying bad things about other people; harsh words and frivolous talks=gossiping.
4. **Right action** (*sammā kammanta*) deals with refraining from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.
5. **Right livelihood** (*sammā ājīva*) avoiding the deals with the five kinds of trade: trading weapons, living beings (breeding animals for slaughter), intoxicating drinks and poison.
6. **Right effort** (*sammā vāyāma*) has four parts using meditation:
 - (i) To try to stop unwholesome thoughts that have arisen
 - (ii) To prevent unwholesome thoughts from arising.
 - (iii) To try to develop good thoughts
 - (iv) To try to maintain good thoughts that have arisen
7. **Right mindfulness** (*sammā sati*) is also fourfold. It is mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings/sensations, mindfulness of thoughts passing through the mind and mindfulness of Dharma.
8. **Right concentration** (*sammā samādhi*) is concentration or one-pointedness of mind as developed in meditation.

These eight factors can be grouped into three smaller groups, as follows:

1. *Sīla* (morality) right speech, right action, right livelihood.
2. *Samādhi* (concentrated mind in meditation) right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.
3. *Paññā* (wisdom) right attitude, right understanding.

These three — morality, concentration and wisdom — are the three stages on the path to mental purity whose object is nirvana.