

The Life Story

# KONDANNA MAHATHERA

by

## Mingun Sayadaw



Delivering the Dhamasekkya Sutta  
To  
The Five Ascetics - *Panca-vaggi*

### Introduction:

*At the request of my very good Dhamma friend, who said: -“ I would very much like to have a role model in striving for my liberation.” In answer to his request, I have chosen **Mahathera Kondanna** as an exemplary role model, for he was the first of the first to have penetrated the truth of the Four Noble Truth, that paved his way to Arahatsip and then to Nibbana. My dear friend, Mahathera Kondanna started his aspiration, a hundred thousand aeons ago, before the **Baddha Kappa** at the time of **Buddha Padumuttara**. That’s how long it took Mahathera to attain his liberation, even for a **Maha savaka hood** (chief disciple position),*

*In the Buddha’s first discourse on the “**Four Noble Truths**”, Buddha delivered to the five ascetics- **Ven. Annasi Kondanna Ven. Vappa Ven. Bhaddiya, Ven. Mahānāma and Ven. Assaji** along with millions of Devas and Brahmas. The first in this human world was **Ven. Kondanna** to perceive the vision of Nibbana. There were millions of Devas and Brahmas that perceived the vision of Nibbana at the same time when the*

*First Four Noble Truth was delivered. The five ascetics were the first five human beings to have attained the arahatship after the Buddha's enlightenment.*

*Ven. Kondanna aspiration begun over a hundred thousand aeons ago, before the Baddha Kappa at the time of Buddha Padumuttara. When the future Ven. Kondanna first heard the Buddha Padumuttara prophesied a certain Bhikkhu – “as the first of all rattannu (long-standing) bhikkhus to realize the four Truths and to gain release from samsara in his dispensation.” Before Buddha Padumuttara., he made his aspiration and the Buddha gave his prophecy thus:*

*"A hundred thousand aeons from now there will arise an Exalted One, Buddha Gotama When Gotama Buddha delivers the first sermon 'the Wheel of the Law'; at the end of the sermon, the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, you will be established together with eighteen millions of Brahmas in Sotapatti-phala."*

*Ven. Mahathera Kondanna was the first to perceive the vision of Nibbana after hearing the discourse on the four Noble truths. He was the first to be ordained as the Bhikkhu and to start the community of Sangha whence the three jewels – Buddha, Dhamma and Sanghas – was first initiated in this world. He was the most senior Bhikkhu in the community of Gotama Dispensation. A cetaya (Cedi) to enshrine his relics - in his honor was erected by Buddha the first Maha Savaka.*

## **Ven. Kondanna past Aspiration**

Counting backward from this *Bhadda-kappa*, over a hundred, thousand aeons ago, there appeared the *Buddha Padumuttara*. Having appeared among the three classes of beings (Human, Deva and Brahmas), , Padumuttara Buddha in the company of a hundred thousand monks made his alms-rounds visiting a series of villages, townships and royal cities, in order to release many from suffering , arrived at his (native) city of *Hamsavati*. His father, *King Ananda*, heard the good news of the son's visit, and together with his subjects extended welcome to the Buddha. As the Buddha gave a sermon to the crowd headed by King Ananda, *some became Sotapannas (1), some Sakadagamis (2), some Anagamis (3) and the rest Arahats(4) at the end of the sermon.*

The king then invited the Buddha for the morning's meal, on the next day, he sent for the Buddha with a message about the meal-time and made a grand offering of food to the Buddha and his company of a hundred thousand monks at his golden palace. Padumuttara Buddha gave the sermon of appreciation of the meal and went back to the monastery. In the same way, the citizens gave their Mahadana the following day. The king gave the grand mahadana on the third day.

Thus the Mahadana performed alternatively by the king and the citizens went on for a long time.

At that time a good clansman, *the future Kondanna*, was born, in a prosperous household. One day, he saw the citizens of Hamsavati with flowers, perfumes, etc. in their hands heading to pay homage to the Buddha and he went along with them.

In the meantime Padumuttara Buddha declared his prophecy of a certain bhikkhu as the first of all *rattannu* (long-standing) bhikkhus to realize *the four Truths* and to gain release from *samsara* in his dispensation. When the clansman heard Buddha's prophecy of the Bhikkhu, he reflected:

**"Great indeed is this man! It is said that leaving aside the Buddha himself there is no other person before him who has realized the four Truths." What if I too become a monk like him realizing the four Truths before all others do in the dispensation of a coming Buddha!"**

At the close of the Buddha's sermon, the clansman approached the Buddha and pleaded to invite the Buddha, saying: "Please accept my offering of food tomorrow, Exalted Buddha!" The Buddha accepted the invitation by keeping silent.

Knowing clearly that the Buddha had accepted his invitation, the clansman paid his respect to the Buddha and returned home: the whole night he spent by decorating seats with fragrant festoons of flowers and also by preparing delicious food. The following day he offered the Buddha and his company of a hundred thousand monks at his house to a sumptuous food of *sali* rice with gruel and other side dishes. When the offering was over, he placed at the feet of the Buddha new and soft and thick pieces of cloth, made in the country of Vanga, enough to make three robes. Then he reflected as follows: "I am not a seeker of a small religious post but I am a seeker of a big one. A day's Mahadana like this may not be adequate if I aspire for a lofty designation. Therefore I shall aspire after it by performing Mahadana for seven days successively."

The clansman gave Mahadana in the same manner for seven days. When the meal-offering was over, he had his store-house of garments opened and put fine and nice clothes at the feet of the Buddha and

offered three-piece sets of robes to the hundred thousand monks. He then approached the Buddha and said: "Exalted Buddha, just as the bhikkhu whom you admirably declared to be the holder of the *etadagga* title, seven days ago, may I be able to become the first to penetrate the four Noble Truths in the dispensation of a coming Buddha." Having said so, he remained paying respect in at the Buddha's feet.

Hearing the clansman's words of aspiration, the Buddha Padumuttara scans his vision to check the clansman's future: "This clansman has done most significant acts of merit. Can his aspiration be fulfilled?"

As soon as the vision of the clansman's futures is reflected on distinctly, he knew no hindrances in way of fulfilling his aspiration, Padumuttara Buddha gave this definite prophecy:

"A hundred thousand aeons from now there will arise, Buddha Gotama When Gotama Buddha delivers the first sermon 'the Wheel of the Law'; at the end of the sermon, the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, you will be established together with eighteen crores of Brahmas in *Sotapatti-phala*."

### Story of two brothers: *Mahakala and Culakala*

Having performed acts of merit such as alms-giving for a long period of **a hundred thousand years**, through indefinite cycles of rebirth, the wealthy clansman, (the future Kondanna) was reborn in a celestial abode on his death. While he was passing between Deva world and human world, ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and nine aeons elapsed. (*He enjoyed only divine or human lives knowing no rebirth in any woeful states for 99909 aeons.*) After living through such a long duration, ninety-one aeons, when counted backwards from this Bhadda aeon, the future Kondanna, was born in the family of a householder and named *Mahakala* in a village near the gate of the royal city *Bandhumati*. His younger brother was known as *Culakala*.

At that time the Bodhisatta Vipassi (future *Vipassi Buddha*) was in Tusita celestial abode and took conception in the womb of Bandhumai, the Chief Queen of *King Bandhuma*. He later became the Vipassi Buddha, an Omniscient Buddha. At the request of Maha Brahma to preach, he pondered as to whom he should preach first. He then saw his

own younger brother Prince *Khanada* and the Purohita's son, the young Tissa. "These two," he decided, "are capable of penetrating the four Truths first." He also made up his mind thus: "I will preach to them. I will also do favor to my royal father." He then took an aerial journey from the Maha Bodhi and descended at the Deer Park called *Khema*. He sent for Prince Khanda and Tissa and gave them a sermon, at the end of which both of them were established together with eighty-four thousand sentient beings in Arahatsip.

The eighty four thousand clansmen who went forth along with the future Vipassi Buddha, hearing of the event, came to the Buddha and listened to the Dhamma and were duly established in Arahatsip. Vipassi Buddha appointed *Khanda Thera* and *Tissa Thera* Chief Disciples and placed them on his right hand side and his left respectively.

On receiving the news King Bandhuma became desirous of paying homage to his son, Vipassi Buddha, went to the Park, listened to the sermon and took the Three Refuges; he also invited the Buddha for the morning's meal and departed after paying respect to the Buddha. On arrival back at the palace he got an idea thus while sitting in his grand pavilion: "My older son has renounced the world and has become Buddha. My second son *Khanda* has become Chief Disciple on the Buddha's right-hand side. The young *Tissa*, has become Chief Disciple on the left. The rest of the eighty-four thousand monks used to surround and attend upon my son while they were all lay men. Therefore the Sangha headed by my son was under my charge before and so should they be now too. I alone will be responsible for the provision of them with the four requisites. I will give others no chance to do so." Thinking thus the king had the walls of catch-wood built on either side of the route from the gate of the monastery to the palace and had them covered with canvas; he had festoons hung which were as thick as the trunk of a toddy palm and decorated with gold stars; he also had canopies put up. As for the ground, he had it covered with exquisite spreads. On both sides of the route within the walls he had pots filled with water and placed near flowering bushes and had perfumes placed among flowers and flowers among perfumes. Then he sends for the Buddha with a message that it was now time for the meal. In the company of his monks, Vipassi Buddha came to the palace along the route and partook of his meal and went back to the monastery. Nobody

else had a chance just to see the Buddha. How could one have an opportunity to offer food and to honor him? Indeed nobody else could.

Then a discussion there took place among, the citizens:

"It has now been seven years and seven months since the arising of the Buddha in the world. But we have had so far no opportunity just to see the Buddha, what to speak of offering food, honoring him and listening to his sermon. 'Absolutely, we have no such privileges, at all. The king personally attended to the Buddha adoringly with the notion that *The Buddha is only my Buddha, the Dhamma is only my Dhamma and the Sangha is only my Sangha.*' The arising of the Buddha is for the welfare of the world of sentient beings together with Devas and Brahmas but not only for the king's welfare. Indeed it is not that the hell-fire is hot only to the king and is like a blue lotus to others. Therefore, the king should give us the Exalted One the Sanghas for us to do acts of merit let us fight for our right. let us therefore find a chief who will lead us."

Accordingly they went to the army general and openly told him of their plan and asked: "O General, will you be one of us or will you join the king?" Then the general said: "I will be one of you. But there is one condition: you must give me the first day for my service to the Buddha." And the citizens agreed to it.'

The general went to the king and said: "The citizens are angry with you, Great King." When asked by the king about the reason, he said: "Because you alone are attending to the Buddha and they do not have such a chance, so they say. Great King, it is not too late yet. If they were given permission to serve the Buddha, they would no longer be angry. If not, they said they would fight with the king." Then the king replied: "General, I shall wage war but by no means shall I give up the Sangha." "Great King," said the general, putting the king in a difficult position: Your servicemen are threatening that they will take up arms against you. Whom would you call up to encounter the looming war?" "Are you not my general?" asked the king persuasively. "I cannot fight being separated from the citizens, Great King," said the general.

The king then realized "The force of the citizens is great. The general too is one of them." He therefore made a request, saying "In

that case, friends, let me feed the Sangha only for another period of seven years and seven months." But the citizens rejected the request. The king reduced the duration of his proposed Dana step by step to six years, five years, and so on and finally to seven days. Then the people came to a unanimous decision, saying among them, "Now that the king has asked for seven days to perform the act of food offering, it is not good for us to be so stubborn in rivalry with him."

King Bandhuma gave away all his offerings in seven days, which were meant for seven years and seven months. For the first six days he did so without letting the people see; on the seventh day, however, he invited the citizens and showed them his grand offering of Dana, saying to sound them out; "Friends, will you be capable of giving such a grand Dana?" "Great King," retorted the citizens: "but your Dana took place only with our help, didn't it? And he asserted, "Yes, we are capable." Wiping the tears with the back of his palm, the king paid obeisance to the Buddha and said: "My dear son, Glorious Buddha, I have decided to support you and one hundred and sixty-eight thousand monks for life with the four requisites giving no assignments to others. But now I am compelled to allow the people to attend to you. In fact, they were angry with me and complaining about their deprivation of right of giving alms. My son, Exalted Buddha, from tomorrow onwards, please do them a favor!"

The next day, the general gave a grand Dana to the Buddha and the Sangha , as per agreement with the people.

### **Story of Saddhasumana**

On the day allotted to him, the general while supervising his grand Dana issued the order saying "Care must be taken so that no other person should get a chance to offer even a spoonful or ladleful of rice," and he placed sentries to keep watch around the area. That very day, a widow of a wealthy merchant of Bandhumati was crying in great distress (because she did not get a chance to offer her share of Dana for the first day); she complained, saying to her daughter who had just come back from the games she played with her five hundred female playmates: "My darling daughter, if your father were alive, I could have been the first to feed the Buddha." The daughter responded saying words of comfort: "O mother, please do not worry! I will do something

so that the Sangha headed by the Buddha would accept and partake of our meal first."

After that the daughter filled the gold bowl worth a hundred thousand with milk-food unmixed with water. She added butter, honey, molasses etc. to enrich the food. She covered it with another gold bowl turned upside down and tied both the gold bowls with garlands of jasmine so that it might look like a ball of flowers. When the Buddha entered the city she carried it herself on her head and left the house in a company of her many attendants.

On the way a dialogue took place between the wealthy lady and the watchmen:

**Watchmen:** Do not come here, daughter!

**Lady:** Dear uncles! Why do you not allow me to go?

(People of past good deeds speak endearing words. Others are not able to reject their repeated request.)

**Watchmen:** We are to keep watch by the general's order that nobody else must be allowed to offer alms-food, daughter.

**Lady:** But, uncles, do you see any food in our hands that warrants you to bar me like this?

**Watchmen:** We see only the ball of flowers.

**Lady:** Well, did your general then say even offering of flowers was not allowable?

**Watchmen:** As for an offering of flowers, it is allowable, daughter.

The lady then, saying to the watchmen, In that case please go away. Do not prevent us, uncles," went up to the Buddha and offered her gift with a request, "Please, Glorious Buddha, accept my offering of the ball of flowers." The Buddha glanced at a watchman, signaling him to bring the floral ball. The lady made obeisance and said:

**"Glorious Buddha may my life throughout *samsara* be free from want and worry. May I be lovable to many like this ball of jasmine flowers and be named *Sumana* in all my coming existences."**

**As the Buddha answered, "May you be well and happy;" the lady paid respect to the Buddha joyfully and departed.**

**The Buddha went to the general's house and took his seat prepared. The general brought rice gruel and offered it to the Buddha. The Buddha covered the bowl with his hand. The general thought that the Buddha did not accept the gruel because the monks had not all come yet. When all had come the general reported saying that all were present and seated. The Buddha said:. "We have already had a bowl of food which we received on the way. When the covering jasmines were removed from the bowls the milk-rice with puffs of steam was found. Then the general's young serviceman who had brought the floral ball said: "General, I have been cheated by a distinguished woman who told me that it was just a ball of flowers." The milk-rice was sufficient for all the monks beginning from the Buddha. Only after giving the milk-rice to the Buddha did the general hand over the offerings that were made by him. When the partaking of food was over, the Buddha delivered a sermon on auspiciousness and left.**

**When the Buddha had left, the general asked his men about the lady's name and they told her that she was the daughter of a wealthy merchant. "What a wise woman she is! If such a wise woman administers a household, it may not be difficult for the housefather to attain divine pleasures. Speaking in praise of the lady, the general managed to take her in marriage and placed her as the mistress of the house.**

**While taking charge of the wealth of both houses, her father's as well as the general's, she gave Dana to the Buddha till the end of her life, and when she expired, she was reborn in the celestial abode, the world of sensual pleasures. At that very moment, a rain of jasmines fell heavily, filling the whole divine city about knee-deep. "This divine damsel has brought her own name even by herself," so saying all the Devas named her "*Sumana Devi*".**

*Sumana Devi was away from woeful states for ninety-one aeons, taking rebirth in celestial and human abodes*; wherever she was reborn there rained down jasmines continuously and she continued to be known only as Sumana Devi or Sumana Kumari. In the dispensation of the present Buddha she was born of King Kosala's Chief Queen; simultaneously in the households of the king's various ministers all her maids were born on the day Sumana was. At that very moment it rained jasmines flowers pretty heavily about knee-deep.

Seeing that phenomenon the king thought, "My daughter must have done a unique act of merit in the past" and became overjoyed. "My daughter had brought her name by herself and he let her bear the very name Sumana. Pondering, "My daughter must not have been born alone," the king had her birth-mates searched all over the city and hearing that five hundred girls were born, the king took the responsibility of feeding, nursing and bringing up all five hundred. He also ordered that each month the five hundred girls must be brought and presented to his daughter.

When Princess Sumana was seven, the Buddha in the company of monks came to *Savatthi* as had been invited by the wealthy Anathapindika through a messenger, for he had completed the construction of the Jetavana monastery. Anathapindika went to King Kosala and said: "Great King, the Exalted One's visit to our city of Savatthi means auspiciousness for you and us. Therefore, please send Princess *Sumana* and her five hundred maids with water-filled pots, perfumes, flowers etc. to welcome the Exalted One. The king replied saying, "Very well," and did as told by the merchant. Under the orders of the king, Sumana approached the Buddha and paid him homage with perfumes, flowers etc. and stood at a suitable place. When the Buddha preached to Sumana on his way, she and all her companions were established together in *Sotapatti-phala*; so were the five hundred girls, In this way on the day the Buddha visited the monastery, while on the way, two thousand people became *Sotapanna Ariyas*.

When the princess came of age King Kosala gave her five hundred chariots and emblems of royalty so that she might use them on her travel, if any, with her five hundred companions. In those days there were three women who received five hundred chariots and royal emblems from their parents. They are (1) Princess *Cundi*, daughter of

King Bimbisara, (2) *Visakha*, daughter of the wealthy merchant Dhanancaya, and (3) *Sumana*, daughter of King Kosala This is the account of Saddhasumana.

As has been said, the day after the one on which the general got permission from the king and performed Dana to the Buddha on a grand scale, the citizens organized an offering that was greater than the king's and performed *Mahadana* to the Buddha and the Samgha. When the meal-offering by the whole city was accomplished, the villagers near the city-gate arranged their paying homage as it was their turn to do so.

Then the householder *Mahakala* discussed with his younger brother *Culakala*: "Our turn comes tomorrow to pay homage to the Exalted One. What kind of homage shall we pay?" "Brother," replied Culakala, "Please think by you of what is proper." Then Mahakala said: "Dear brother, if you follow my plan, our land of sixteen *pai* full of ripening sali paddy. Shall we take out newly developed paddy from the ears and cook milk-rice befitting to the Exalted One?" Culakala presented his view: "Brother, if we do so, nobody will be benefited. Therefore I do not agree to that."

Then Mahakala said: "If you do not agree to it, I wish to have my share of property." So the sixteen *pai* of land was divided into two halves, each measuring eight *pai* and a fence was erected in the middle of the two portions. Then Mahakala took out the tender grain from the ears, to which he added milk unmixed with water; he had it cooked and *catumadhu* put to it, and offered (1) the (first) food to the Buddha and the Sangha. *The strange thing was that the ears from which the grain had been taken out became full again with grain as before.* (It was a Dana of the first grain formed in their earliest stage of development.)

*Mahakala* similarly gave the following in charity: (2) the first portion of the paddy that had partially developed to yield newly appeared grain to be pounded; (3) the first portion of the paddy that had fully developed or ripened; (4) the first portion of the paddy that had been reaped; (5) the first portion of the paddy that had been made into sheaves; (6) the first portion of the paddy that had been piled up in sheaves; (7) the first portion of the paddy that had been threshed; (8) the first portion of the paddy that had been winnowed and (9) the first portion of the paddy that had been stored up in the granary.

In this way, each time he grew paddy he accomplished Dana of the first portion (agga-dana) nine times. Mahakala was able to continue doing charity from his paddy field, on and on but the amount of paddy even increased and became bigger than before. This indeed was (a) the Thera's wholesome deed in connection with his expressed aspiration made in the past.

## Adoption of Ascetic life by Kondanna

The virtuous householder Mahakala, *the future Kondanna Thera*, performed acts of merit in this way throughout his life, and he wandered from the human abode to the divine and *vice versa* and enjoyed divine and human luxuries. When our Gotama Buddha was about to arise, he was reborn in a wealthy Brahmin family in the Brahmin village of *Donavatthu* near the city of *Kapilavatthu*. On his naming day, the young Brahmin was given the name of *Kondanna*. While being brought up, he was educated in the three Vedas and was accomplished in physiognomy of a great man.

At that time our Future Buddha passed from the Tusita celestial abode and took his conception in the womb of *Mahamaya*, Chief Queen of King *Suddhodana* of *Kapilavatthu*, and was duly born. On the naming day the king presented one hundred and eight Brahmins with absolutely new garments and fed them with sweet pure milk-food. He selected from among them eight highly intelligent Brahmin wise men and let them be seated in serial order in the court-yard. He then had the little prince, the Bodhisatta, put lying on white linen and brought to the Brahmins who were to examine the baby's body marks.

The Brahmin, who occupied the first seat among the eight, raised his two fingers and predicted: "*If the baby remains a lay man he will become a Universal Monarch. If he lives an ascetic life he will definitely become a Buddha in the three worlds!*" In this way declared the remaining Brahmins of the first seven, each putting up two fingers. Of those eight Brahmins the *youthful Kondanna was the youngest*. When his turn came to predict he studied very carefully the marks on the body and he put up only one finger, boldly predicting: "*There is absolutely no reason for the prince to stay in the middle of a household. The prince will indeed become a Buddha!*"

After that the wise Brahmins went back to their respective homes and summoned their sons and gave instructions saying: "Dear sons, we have become old. We may or may not be living by the time prince Siddhattha, son of King Suddhodana, attain Omniscient Buddhahood. When the prince does, you dear sons should become monks in his dispensation."

King Suddhodana brought up his son in comfort by providing him with great protection, facilities and resources beginning with his appointment of attendants. When he became sixteen years of age, the prince enjoyed royal luxuries and at the age of twenty-nine when he became intellectually more mature, he saw the disadvantages of sense-pleasures and the advantages of renunciation. So on the day his own son *Rahula* was born, he performed a great act of renunciation by riding the royal steed Kandaka in the company of his personal officer Channa and by going through the city-gate that was opened by gods. By that single night he passed through the three cities of Kapilavatthu, Koliya and Devadaha, and on the bank of the river Anoma he put on the robe and other paraphernalia which were brought and offered by Ghatikara Brahma. So he arrived at the city of Rajagaha. After going on alms-round, he partook of his meal in the shadow of the Padava Hill. Though King Bimbisara invited him to stay on and promised to give his kingdom, he turned down the offer and while proceeding he reached in due course the grove of *Uruvela*. "Oh!" he exclaimed and uttered: "This flat ground is very pleasant? For the clansmen who wish to devote themselves to meditation, it is the ideal place." With this reflection, he sojourned in that grove and commenced his meditative practice of *Dukkara-cariya*..

By the time of the Bodhisatta Siddhatta's renunciation, all the wise Brahmins except Kondanna had deceased. The youngest Kondanna alone remained in good health. On hearing the tidings that the Bodhisatta had gone forth, he visited the sons of those deceased Brahmins and said: "It is said Prince Siddhattha had become an ascetic. No doubt the prince will attain real Buddhahood. If your fathers were alive they would go forth even today. Come if you wish to do so. Let us become monks in the wake of that great man." But the seven sons were not unanimous in their aspirations: three did not like the idea. Only the remaining four donned the robe under Kondanna's leadership.

After becoming ascetics, the Band of Five (*Panca-vaggi*) went on round for food in villages, towns and royal cities and reached the Bodhisattas place in due course. While the Bodhisatta was practicing his meditation of austerity for six long years, they entertained great hope, thinking, " He will soon attain Buddhahood!, He will soon attain Buddhahood!" So thinking they attended to the future Buddha, staying and moving about him.

In the sixth year, he came to realize that the practice of Dukkara cariya would absolutely not earn him the Noble Path and Fruition (*Ariya-magga-phala*) though he had passed the time by eating just a rice-grain, a sesame seed, etc. and had become emaciated and weary, he collected food in the village of *Senani* and ate whatever was available such as rice and hard cakes. Then the Band of Five as compelled by the law that dictates the lives of all Bodhisattas were fed up with the Bodhisatta and left him for *Isipatana* the Deer Park.



*Sujata Offered Milk Food to Buddha*

After the Band of Five had thus left him, by eating whatever was available such as rice and hard cakes, the Bodhisatta's skin, flesh and blood became normal in two or three days. On the full moon day, (the day he was to become enlightened) he took the excellent milk food offered by *Sujata*, wife of a wealthy merchant. He then floated the bowl along the current of the river Neranjara and came to decide that he was going to become a Buddha definitely on that very day. In the evening, having been spoken of in praise in all manner by the *Naga King Kala*, he went up to the Maha Bodhi the site where the great Bodhi tree was and sat down crossed-legged on the *Aparajita Throne*, the unshakable seat, facing the eastern universe. Having developed his fourfold exertion, he drove away Mara the Deity just before sunset, acquired *Pubbenivasa*

*Nana* in the first watch of the night, *Dibba Cakkhu Nana* in the middle watch and, in the last watch he was absorbed in the wisdom of *Paticca-samuppada doctrine*, reflected with his diamond-like great Vipassana Nana (*Mahavajira Vipassana Nana*) on its twelve factors forward and backward, up and down, and finally attained Buddhahood, having won unique Omniscience (*Asadharana Sabbannuta Nana*) which is the property of all Buddhas. On that very Throne under the Maha Bodhi tree did the Buddha pass seven days, being absorbed in the *Arahatta-phala Samapatti*.

In this way, the Buddha stayed in the seven places and on being requested by Sahampati Brahma, he considered asking himself, "*To whom should I preach first?*" Then he came to know that the religious teachers Alara and Udaka had deceased and when he continued to think out he got an idea thus: "*To the Band of Five I have been thankful very much. They served me while I was engaged in the austere practice. Should I preach to them first.*" Such an idea is conceived by all Buddhas. In fact, with the exception of Kondanna and crores of Devas and Brahmas,, there was none who could first grasp the four Truths in the dispensation of that Buddha. As for Kondanna, for his capabilities of grasping the four Truths first and foremost, because he had performed significant acts of merit for a hundred thousand aeons and had given the unique Dana of the first crop nine times to the Buddha and Sangha.

### (c) Attainment of unique spirituality

Taking his bowl and robe, the Buddha set out to the Isipatana Deer Park and duly reached the place of the Band of Five Bhikkhus. The Bhikkhus saw the Buddha coming and they made an agreement among themselves not to fulfill their obligatory duties, but as the Buddha was approaching nearer they could not keep their original agreement: one took the bowl and robe from the Buddha, another prepared the seat for him; still another brought water for washing the feet; the fourth washed the Buddha's feet; and the fifth brought the round fan made of palm-leaf to fan him; thus they each rendered their respective services.

When the Five Bhikkhus had taken their seats near the Buddha after doing their duties, the Buddha delivered the *Dhammacakkavattana Sutta* with three functions to the five

Bhikkhus with the *Mahathera Kondanna* as the principal listener in his presence.

### **A new name for the Thera: "Annasi Kondanna"**

At that time the Buddha thought: "As the ascetic Kondanna has first penetrated the four Truths that I have brought with thousands of difficulties, he deserves the name *Annasi Kondanna*," and so he uttered a solemn utterance:

*"Annasi vata bho Kondanno; annasi vata bho Kondanno!"*

("Oh, Kondanna has penetrated the Four Truths! Oh, Kondanna has penetrated the Four Truths!") Because of this solemn utterance, the Venerable Kondanna came to be known as "Annasi Kondanna, the Penetrating Kondanna from that time onwards.

### **(d) *Etadagga* title achieved**

In this way the *Venerable Kondanna became a Sotapanna* on the full moon day of Asalha (June-July) in the year the Buddha attained Buddhahood). The day after the full moon, *Bhaddiya Thera* did; two days after the full moon *Vappa Thera*, three days after the full moon *Mahanama Thera*, four days after the full moon *Assaji Thera* realised the same Fruition; Five days after the full-moon at the end of the delivery of the *Anatta-lakkhana Sutta*, all five members of the Band were established in *Arahatta-phala*. At that time Arahats among human beings numbered six; the Buddha and the Band of Five Theras.

From that time onwards, to the Ariya Magga and Phala the Buddha led fifty-five friends headed by *Yasa* the son of a wealthy merchant, thirty-three Bhadda Princes in the Kappasika grove, a thousand former matted-hair ascetics on the stone plateau of Gayasisa and others. After leading many people thus to the Noble Path and Fruition, on the full-moon day of Phussa (December-January) in the same year the Buddha arrived in Rajagaha and established Brahmin householders numbering a hundred and ten thousand headed by King Bimbisara in *Sotapatti-phala* and ten thousand such householders in the Three Refuges. Having

caused the abundant blossoming and fruition of his teaching with the eight wonders and three training, throughout the *Jambudipa*, the entire land of which he caused to be illuminated bright with the color of the robes and caused the environs to be blown by the rushing wind from the moving monks and other noble ones. Later on, once when he arrived at the Jetavana monastery of Savatthi City and while remaining there at the monastery and sitting on the Dhamma Throne, the seat for a Buddha, he delivered a sermon and in the course of his delivery, he became desirous of declaring that his eldest son *Kondanna was the best of all who first realized the four Truths; and he uttered:*

"Etadaggam bhikkhave mama savakanam bhikkhunam rattannunam yadidam annasi *kondanno*", "O monks, of my disciple monks who are of long standing (*rattannu*) Annasi Kondanna is the foremost."

Thus speaking in praise of the Mahathera, the Buddha conferred on him the *Rattannu Etadagga* title.

(Herein "*rattannu*" literally means "one who knows night time", that is to say one who has passed through the long duration of many nights since one's renunciation." *In the Buddha's dispensation there was none who realised the four Truths earlier than Kondanna.* Hence Kondanna was the one who knew many nights (i.e. who lived over the greatest number of years) since he became a monk. (According to this explanation, a *rattannu* individual means '*the senior most in monkhood.*'

Or, as Kondanna Thera realized the four Truths before all others did, since his realization he had passed through many a night. According to this the word in question means the earliest knower of the Four Truths.

Or, as every Arahant is conscious of day-time and night-time, he earns the epithet *Rattannu* 'one who is aware of the divisions of day and night time.' Because Kondanna Mahathera was the earliest of all Arahants, he stood out of from other *Rattannu* Arahants knowing the divisions of time).

## ***Annasi Kondanna Mahathera after his attainment of Arahantship***

The Mahathera Annasi Kondanna attained Arahatship on the fifth day after the full moon of Asalha. On the full-moon day of Phussa that year the Buddha arrived in Rajagaha and on the first waxing day of Magha (January-February) the future Chief Disciples (Sariputta and Moggallana) donned the robe. On the seventh day the Venerable Moggallana became Arahats and the Venerable Sariputta did so on the full-moon day. In this way when there arose complete categories of Arahats such as Chief Disciples, Great Disciples and Ordinary Disciples, in the Buddha's dispensation, all of whom going their alms-round (in a file arranged according to seniority). When the Buddha gave a discourse, he sat on the Dhamma Throne, the Buddha-seat decorated in the middle of the assembly. The Captain of the Dhamma, Sariputta Thera, sat on the right side of the Buddha and Moggallana Thera on the left side.

*At the back of the two Chief Disciples a seat was prepared for the Venerable Kondanna.* The remaining monks took their seats surrounding the Mahathera. Because Kondanna was the first to understand the four Truths in the Buddha's dispensation and because he was senior also by age, the two Chief Disciples were respectful to him, they regarded him as *Maha Brahma*, as a huge mass of fire, or as a highly poisonous serpent; they felt somewhat scared though they occupied the front seats. They were also shy and embarrassed. Kondanna Mahathera then reflected: "For the front seats these two Chief Disciples had fulfilled their Paramis for one Asankhyeyya and a hundred thousand aeons. Though they are taking those seats, they were less confident, shy and embarrassed. I shall do anything that would make them stay at ease." This was a reason [for his vacant seat,]

*Besides, Kondanna was a highly powerful Mahathera. Like the attributes of the Buddha, the Mahathera's attributes spread among the people in this universe as well as among the Devas and Brahmas of the ten thousand universes.* Therefore the divine and human beings visited and honored the Buddha with perfumes, flowers etc., and they immediately (after that) approached the Mahathera Kondanna and honored him, remembering, "*This Venerable One was the first to comprehend the unique doctrine of the four Truths.*" There is also a religious custom, according to which the visiting monk is to give a Dhamma-talk or to exchange greetings with them. As for the Mahathera, he was inclined only to remain blissfully in the attainment of Phalasangama (Ariya

*vihara*). Therefore to him Dhamma-talks given to and greetings exchanged with the visitors appeared superfluous. This was another reason.

For these two reasons, the Mahathera desired to stay away from the Master. As he foresaw that his nephew, the young *Punna*, son of the Brahmin lady Mantani would become a famous Dhamma-preacher (*Dhamma-kathika*), he went to the Brahmin village of Donavatthu and made his nephew a monk and helped him become a resident pupil (*antevasika*) with the thought that he would stay behind near the Exalted One. Then he approached the Buddha and made a request: "Glorious Buddha, to me a rural residence is not suitable. I am not capable of staying with the laity. Therefore kindly permit me to live in the *Chaddanta forest*." And the permission was granted by the Buddha.

Having obtained the permission from the Buddha, Kondanna Thera packed up his bedding, and taking his bowl and robe, he went to the *Mandakini* lake in the *Chaddanta forest*. In the region around Chaddanta, eight thousand elephants, who were experienced in serving Pacceka Buddhas and who were long-lived like spirits, became happy as they thought, "a large expanse of fertile field has come to us so that we might sow the seeds of meritorious deeds." So they shoveled a path with their feet and got rid of grass to make a walk for the Thera; they also cleared the walk of twigs and branches that might be in the Thera's way and after making the Thera's residence clean, the eighty-thousand elephants held a discussion among themselves thus:

"Friends, if we expect 'this elephant will do what is necessary to the Thera' or 'that elephant will do it for him,' the Thera will have to return to his dwelling from alms-round with his bowl washed as before as if he had been to a village of his relatives. Therefore let us serve him by taking turns so that there might be no negligence. We must be careful especially when it is an assignment of a particular one (without ignoring with the thought it is not mine)."

And so they took turns in serving the Thera. The elephant on duty would arrange water for washing the face, and twigs for brushing the teeth. The arrangement went on like this, The elephant whose assignment it was to serve, made fire by rubbing those dry firewood that could burn easily such as pine. By this fire he baked stones and

rolled them down by means of sticks into the water in the stone basins. After ascertaining the water is hot enough, he would place a tooth brush made of firewood stick. Then the same elephant assigned would sweep the meditation hut that was the Thera's dwelling both inside and out with a broom made of branches. He would also perform [other] duties including his feeding of the Thera ..

The Mandakini lake where the Thera resided was fifty *yojanas* wide. The middle area of the lake measuring twenty-five *yojanas* was entirely free from algae and other aquatic plants. The water was crystal clear. In its outer circle where the water was waist deep there flourished white-lotus thickets of half a *yojanas* width surrounding the lake of fifty *yojanas*; beyond the white lotus thickets existed red *paduma* lotus-thickets also of half a *yojanas* width; beyond them white-kumudra lotus-thickets ...; beyond them blue-lotus thickets ...; beyond them red lotus thickets ...; beyond them fragrant red paddy fields ...; beyond them creeper thickets full of such tasty vegetables as cucumber, gourd, pumpkin, etc. and measuring half a *yojana* in width; beyond them existed sugar-cane thickets also of half a *yojana* width encircling the lake. The sugar-cane stalks growing there were as thick as the trunk of an areca palm.

Beyond the sugar-cane thickets lay banana-tree thickets also of half a *yojana* width encircling the lake. Those who happened to have eaten two bananas or so would suffer, feeling stiff and uneasy; beyond the lay jack-fruit grove bearing fruit each being the size of a large jar; beyond that grove lay eugenia grove; beyond that lay mango grove; in this way there lay further groves of fruit trees. In short, it could not be said there were no edible fruit around the Mandakini lake. There were fruit of all kinds.

During the flowering period the wind blew, carrying the pollens from the blossoms and placed them on the lotus leaves. Drops of water fell on those leaves. By the heat of the sun the pollens were cooked and became solidified milk. It was called lotus-honey (comb). It was brought to the Thera by the elephants by turns.

The lotus stems were as thick as the tilling log. Those stems too the elephant took and gave to the Thera. The lotus stems were as large as a

drum head . Each joint of the stems contained about one pattha of lotus milk. That lotus milk too the elephants brought and fed the Thera.

The elephants mixed the lotus stock with honey and offered them to the Thera. The animals placed the sugar-cane plants as thick as areca palm on the stone slab and crushed them with their feet. The juice then flowed into stone cups and holes and was cooked by the heat of the sun and it became solidified sugar-cane cakes that were like solidified milk (*godan* stones). The elephant brought those sugar-cane cakes and offered them to their master.

On the Kelasa bill in the Himavanta lived a god named *Nagadatta*. The Venerable Thera sometimes went to the doorway of his mansion. The god filled the Theras bowl with pure milk food made of newly produced butter and powder of lotus-honey. The god gave a Dana of sweet smelling butter and milk by the lot for twenty thousand years during the life time of the Buddha Kassapa. Hence such pure milk food containing butter and powder of lotus-honey appeared to him as nourishment. In this way Kondanna Mahathera dwelt near the Mandakini lake in the Chaddanta forest. When he reflected on his life process (*ayu-sahkhara*) he found that it was coming to an end. When he further reflected as to where he should de cease, it occurred to him thus: "These eight thousand elephants who have served me for twelve years have done what is difficult to do. I am greatly thankful to them. I shall first go to the Exalted Buddha and seek his permission to pass into Parinibbana and shall do so in the meditation hut near these elephants." Having decided thus he traveled by air to the Veluvana monastery in Rajagaha and visited the Buddha. He bowed his head touching the feet of the Buddha and sucked them in his mouth; he also pressed them with his hand forcefully. He then mentioned his name in his supplication to the Buddha: "Glorious Buddha! Konndana I am, Speaker of good words? I am Kondanna."

(Herein the reason for Kondanna Thera's mention of his own name was this: at that time among the monks around the Buddha some elderly Thera knew him but younger ones did not. Therefore it occurred to the Mahathera: "The youthful monks who do not know me might offend me with the thought 'Who is this white-haired, bending, toothless and failing old monk? Who is he that is talking with the Exalted Buddha? Those young monks who wronged me might land in a woeful

state. If I mention my name, those who previously did not know me will now realize who I am. Thus the two groups of monks—one older and aware of my name and the other younger and coming to know me now—will be pleased and faithful at the thought, "Ah, here is a Great Disciple (*Maha savaka*) who has renounced like the Exalted Buddha throughout the system of ten thousand worlds and this would lead them to the realm of Devas. In order to close the road to the woeful states and open that to the Deva abodes for the beings, the Thera disclosed his name in his announcement to the Buddha.)

At that time, a thought arose in the mind of the *Thera Vangisa* thus:

"This Venerable Annasi Kondanna visited the Exalted One after twelve long years; he touched the feet of the Exalted One with his head and suck the feet with his mouth. And he also pressed them with his hand. Mentioning his name he also said, 'Glorious Buddha! Kondanna I am. Speaker of good words! I am Kondanna', What if I should sing appropriate verses in praise of the Thera in the presence of the Buddha." So he rose from his seat, adjusted his robe so that it covered his left shoulder, raised his joined hands towards the Buddha and addressed him thus: "Glorious Buddha, these clear verses (*patibhana gatha*) came into my head! Speaker of good words, these clear verses came into my head!"

Thereupon the Buddha granted his permission, saying: "Dear son Vangisa, you may have clear verses in your head as you wish."

Accordingly, Vangisa Thera sang appropriate verses in praise of the Venerable Kondanna Thera in the presence of the Buddha as follows:

*1. Buddha'nu buddho so thero*

*kondanno tibbanikkamo*

*Labhi sukha-viharanam*

*vivekanam abhinhaso.*

"That Thera who is known by his clan name Kondanna and who has visited the supremely glorious Buddha is distinguished as Buddhānu'buddha, for he is the first who understood the four profound

Truths, having contemplated intelligently after the Buddha. He is endowed with unique, forceful energy of right exertions. He achieves without interruptions the three forms of seclusion, the means of blissful living"

*2. Yam savakena paitabbam*

*satthu sasana karina*

*Sabbassa tam anuppattam,*

*appamattassa sikkhato.*

"The Sangha of noble disciples who follow the Buddha's exhortation should attain the four Paths., the four Fruitions, the Analytical Knowledge etc. through their wisdom. That top personality of glory, the Venerable Kondanna Mahathera, attained them all—the Paths, the Fruitions, the Analytical Knowledge etc. ahead of several other disciples as smoothly supported by necessary facilities, for he has possessed mindfulness and practiced assiduously in the threefold training."

*3. Mahanubhavo tevijjo*

*ceto pariyaya kovido*

*Kondanno buddhadayado*

*pade vandati satthuno.*

"The Mahathera who is known by his clan name Kondanna, who is highly powerful, who clearly possesses the threefold Knowledge of *pu*, *di* and *a*, who is the owner of *cetopariya abhinna* as he knows all the mental activities, who has inherited first and foremost the nine supramundane legacy of the Buddha, has respectfully paid homage at the Buddha's lotus feet by touching them with his head, sucking them (in his mouth), and gripping them with his hands indeed."

By the time these verses had been sung, silence reigned in the assembly. Knowing of' the silence, Kondanna Thera exchanged a few words with the Buddha and asked for permission: "Exalted Buddha,

my life process has come to an end. I am going to pass into Parinibbana."

"Where will you pass into Parinibbana, my dear son Kondanna?" questioned the Buddha. The Thera replied: "Glorious Buddha the elephants who served me for twelve years have done something that is difficult to do. Therefore I shall pass into Parinibbana somewhere around the elephants by the lake in the Chaddanta forest." The Buddha granted his permission by keeping silent.

(Herein when Kondanna Thera requested permission to attain Parinibbana if he were not to grant permission it might tantamount that the Thera took delight in the round of suffering in the three worlds which he himself had taught to be something sickening. On the other hand if he were to grant permission, it might mean that the Buddha encouraged him to die. In order to avoid these two ends therefore the Buddha, following the neutral way, asked Where would you pass into Parinibbana?")

Thereupon the Venerable Mahathera made obeisance to the Buddha and spoke: "Exalted Buddha, formerly when you were practicing *dukkara-cariya* we visited you for the first time to attend to you. In other words, my first obeisance took place in the Deer Park. Now this is my last !" While many people were lamenting, the Thera paid homage to the Buddha, came out from his presence and, standing at the doorway, admonished the people: "*Do not be sad! Do not lament! There is none among those conditioned, be they Buddha or Disciples, who will not come to destruction.*" While the people were looking on him, the Thera went up to the sky and descended near the lake in the Chaddanta forest, where he bathed. Thereafter he put on the robe properly, put away his bedding and spent the three watches of the night engaging in meditation of Phala-samapatti. (He was absorbed in the Phala-samapatti for the whole night.) Just before morning came with its very brilliant light, the Mahathera entered the Anupadisesa Parinibbana.

No sooner had the Thera entered Parinibbana than all the trees in the Himavanta burst open with flowers and fruit both top and bottom and they bent down as well. The elephant whose turn it was to serve the Buddha performed his usual duties early by placing water for washing the face and tooth-brush made of twigs and stood at the end of the wall

without knowing the Theras Parinibbana. Not seeing the Thera coming though he had waited till sunrise, the elephant began to wonder: "The noble Thera used to take an early walk and used to wash his face. But now he has not come out from his dwelling even at sunrise. What could be the reason For this?" So he opened the door of the dwelling wide enough to see into it, he saw the Thera sitting. He stretched out his trunk to investigate whether there was in-breath or out-breath and he came to know there was neither. Then coming to know that the Mahathera had entered Parinibbana, he put his trunk in his mouth and trumpeted aloud. The sound of his trumpet echoed all over the Himavanta.

The elephants held a discourse in unity. The Thera's body was put on the largest elephant. The others surrounded him, each carrying branches that had fully blossomed. After repeatedly going around the Himavanta and paying homage, they conveyed the remains to the lake in the Chaddanta forest.

Then Sakka summoned the *Deva Visukamma* and gave him an order:

"Dear Visukamma! Our elder brother, the Venerable Kondanna, has passed into Parinibbana. Let us do homage to him. Create a coffin measuring nine *yojanas* and adorn it with a pinnacle!" Visukamma created as he had been asked. The remains of the Thera was put in the coffin and returned to the elephants.

Carrying the coffin together and repeatedly moving around the whole Himavanta measuring three thousand *yojanas* the elephants paid homage. From the elephants the coffin was taken by Devas of the sky who performed funeral rites. Thereafter the coffin was taken by Devas of rain-clouds, Devas of cold-clouds, and Devas of hot-cloud, Catu maharaja Devas, Tavatimsa Devas and so on. In this way the pinnacled coffin containing the Thera's body reached up to the realm of Brahmas. Again the Brahmas handed it over to the Devas and in this way the coffin got back to the elephants.

Each Deva or Brahma brought two sandalwood pieces, each being about the breadth of four fingers. The pile of such sandalwood pieces was nine *yojanas* high. Upon the pile of sandalwood was put the coffin

carrying the Thera's body. Five hundred monks came traveling through the air and recited the Dhamma throughout the night. The Mahathera Anuruddha gave a sermon in the Assembly. *Many Devas realized the four Truths and were released [from samsara ] thereby.*

The night saw the burning of the remains. On the following morning at dawn the pile of burning fragrant wood was extinguished and the monks filled the water-filter with the relics as white as jasmine buds and brought and handed it over to the Buddha who was readily waiting and welcoming at the doorway of the Veluvana monastery.

### **Growth of a *cetiya* out of the earth**

Holding the filter containing the relics, the Buddha delivered a discourse befitting that occasion and causing religious emotion [in the minds of those present], after which he stretched out his hand towards the earth. Instantly, a colossal *cetiya* resembling a huge silver bubble emerged penetrating the real earth. The Buddha enshrined the relics of the Mahathera Kondanna with his hands in that *cetiya*. It is said that the *cetiya* exists even today.

This is the story of Kondanna Mahathera.

Source - [The Great Chronicles of the Buddha](#)

<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/buddhism/gcobbku1.htm#1>

Ananta Metta

Maung Paw