

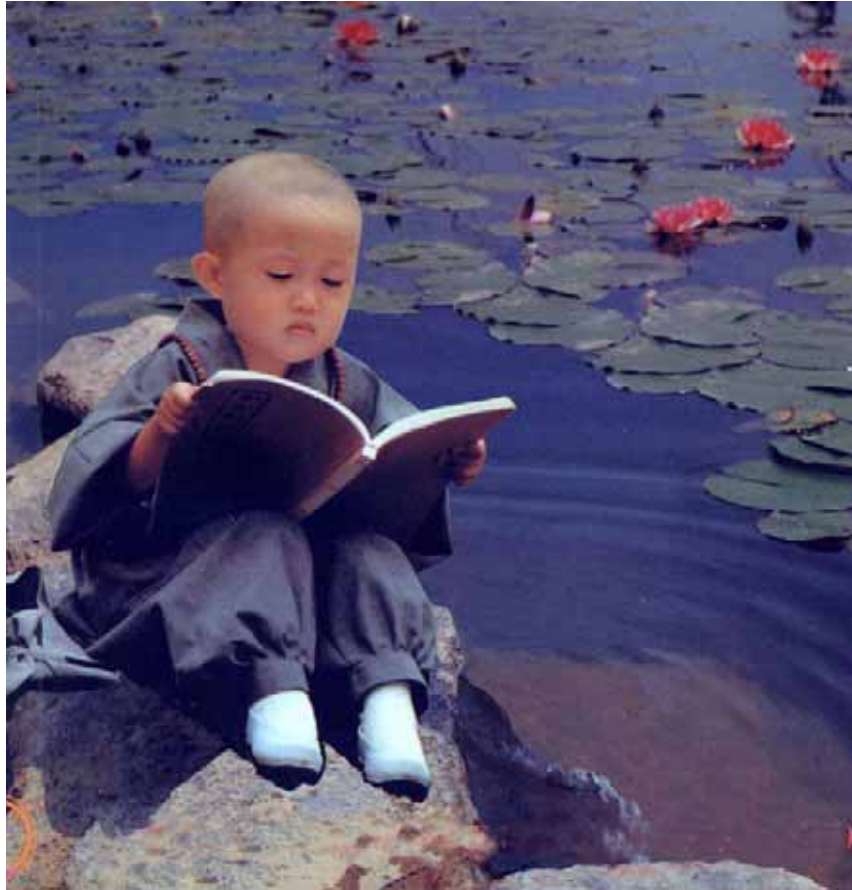
BUDDHISM

**Buddhist Studies
Grade – II**



**To
The Children of America
A GIFT OF DHAMMA**

BUDDHISM
Buddhist Studies
Grade – II



By
Jing Yin
Ken Hudson

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Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa

Praise to that Lord, Arahant, and perfect Buddha.



Shwedagon Sandawshin

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Preface

Buddhism Key Stage 2 is the second publication in our series of Buddhist textbooks, and is devised for pupils between the ages of seven and eleven. This edition is produced under the guidelines stipulated in the syllabus prescribed in the UK by the revised National Curriculum of 1994.

The subjects covered in this book are an extension of the theme on the Triple Gem presented in Buddhism Key Stage 1, with the contents augmented to include additional information on the life of the Buddha, his teachings, the development of Buddhism and its characteristics as a religion. Although Buddhist thoughts are formally introduced at this Key Stage, their meaning is confined to an elementary level and explained in the context of everyday experience of pupils in this age group. The brief Introduction is intended to bring into context the spirit behind what the pupils are about to learn, and the selection of Buddhist stories to illustrate the Dharma and Precepts covered in the main contents. As both Pali and Sanskrit words appear in the text, a list of their equivalents is provided at the end of the book for easy reference.

Buddhism Key Stage 2 is accompanied by a Teacher's Guide which lists instructional objectives, vocabulary and essential points of the text in each Unit. There is also supplementary information and guidance on approach to provide a more effective teaching-learning situation. As it is believed that pupils of this age group are more likely to benefit in the learning process through active participation, activities and discussion topics are suggested in the hope of making these lessons on Buddhism more interesting and mentally stimulating.

We look forward to receiving feedback from both teachers and pupils on this edition with a view of improving the material in the next. Buddhist Education Foundation (UK) Ltd



Introduction We know that as a child, the Buddha was troubled by some of the same thoughts as children have today. Children wonder why they get sick. They wonder why their grandfather died. They wonder why some people are poor, while others are rich. They wonder why their wishes do not come true. Children also wonder at the beauty and happiness of life.

Buddha knew what was in the hearts of children and mankind; he showed us how to live a happy and peaceful life. Buddhism is not about learning strange beliefs from faraway lands. It is about looking at and thinking about our own lives. It shows us how to understand ourselves and how to cope with our problems. Buddhism is not based on superstition. It teaches us to rely on our own efforts if we want to better ourselves. The Buddha taught tolerance of other faiths and compassion to all living creatures.

**This book is reproduced for the Buddhist children of America
as**

A Gift of Dhamma

by

**Kusalakari Monastery
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Fremont
California, USA**

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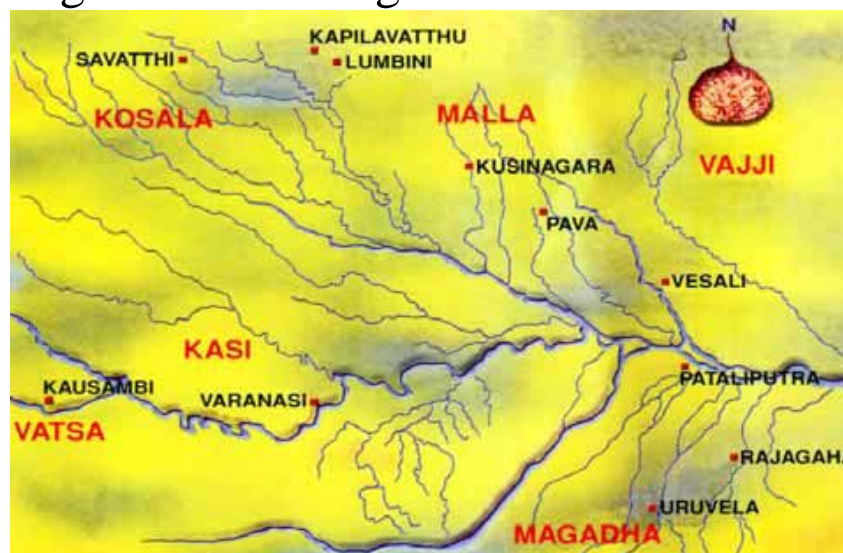
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The Buddha

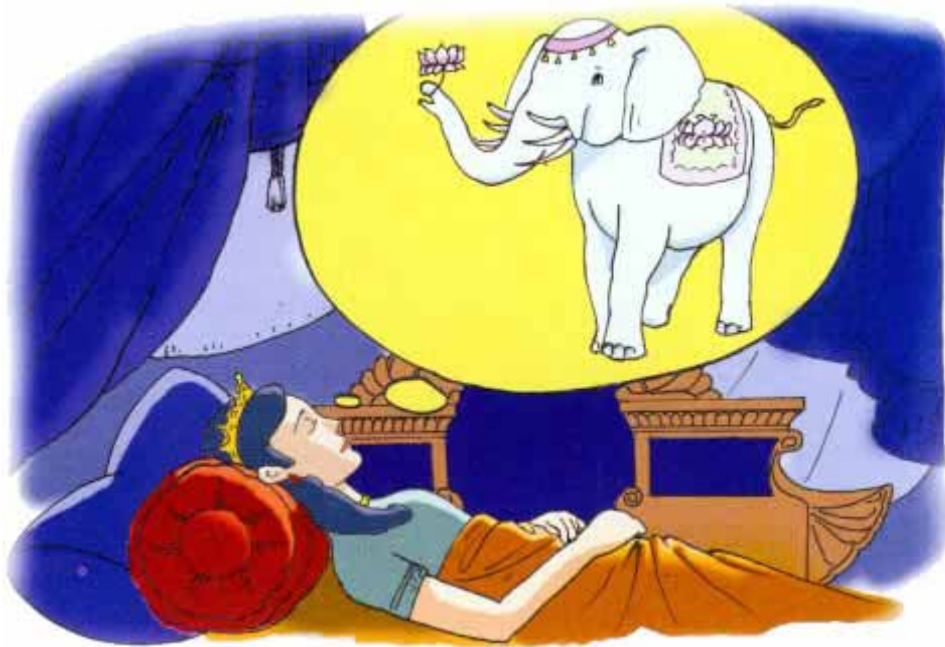
1. The birth of the prince

A long time ago, at the foot of the **Himalayan Mountains**, there was a small kingdom called **Kapilavattu**. Here, the righteous and mighty King **Suddhodana** ruled over the **Sakya clan**. His capital city was a delightful place, where a mass of joyful people with handsome features and flashing eyes crowded the squares and market places. Young girls walked gracefully along the streets, wearing their sparkling jewelry. All kinds of people traveled along the roads — noblemen in chariots, merchants on elephants and peasants on foot. Children played in the gleaming river and holy men and villagers bathed along its shores. The city was decorated with large gardens filled with beautiful flowers, peacocks and cool ponds. Brave warriors on horseback guarded the kingdom.



The Central Ganges Plain in Northern India

The dream of Queen Maya The king had a beautiful wife named Maya, who was kind and loved by everyone. The king and queen were very happy, except for one thing. They did not have any children. On a full-moon night, Queen Maya dreamed of a big white elephant with six tusks. The wise men predicted, ***“You will give birth to a wonderful child.”*** Everyone in the kingdom celebrated when they heard that a child was to be born to their queen.



The birth in Lumbini Park Queen Maya returned to her parents’ home to give birth as that was the custom in India. The king had the roads along the way cleaned and decorated with flowers and bright silk banners fluttering in the warm breeze from the hills.

When the royal party came to **Lumbini Park**, the queen said, “*We shall stop and rest for the night in this grove of beautiful trees.*” It was the month of May. The flowers in the park were in full bloom, scenting the air with a sweet smell. Birds chirped their lovely songs and butterflies darted along the path where the queen and her attendants walked. The daylight began to fade and a silvery full moon rose above the treetops.

Queen Maya stopped under a **sala-tree**. She reached up to a branch to pluck a flower. As she did, a shining baby boy was born from her. His body shone with a dazzling light and he was perfect in every way. A soft rain fell and the night air was filled with heavenly music. Showers of perfumed petals rained down. Everyone was delighted at the birth. The deer and other animals in the park, sensing something special, came and looked in wonder at the prince.



To everyone's amazement, the baby prince spoke a verse, *"I am the highest in the world. I am the foremost in the world. This is my last birth."* Then he smiled and took seven steps in each of the four directions. Lotuses sprang open under his feet as he walked.

Afterwards, the royal party returned to the palace. When the king saw his son, he said, *"I am filled with great joy. Let everyone in the world rejoice."*

Asita's prediction.

In the distant mountains lived Asita, a wise man who could see into the future. One day he saw a bright glow all around the palace and knew that a mighty prince had been born. He came down from the mountain and went to the palace. The proud and happy king showed him his amazing son.



“Rejoice, O King and Queen, a very special child has been born to you!” **Asita** said joyfully. Then he went into deep thought. Suddenly he began to shed tears. The king was troubled. He asked, “Will some misfortune befall the Prince?”

Asita answered, “*I foresee no harm to the child. He is born to bring happiness to the world. He will be a great leader among men. I shed tears of joy that he has been born in our land. Many wonderful things will happen. I shed tears of sadness because I shall soon die and not be able to honor him or learn from him. He will go forth in the world and become a Buddha.*” The holy man said no more, he went back to his cave in the snow-capped mountains. The king and the queen were very upset when they heard this.

The baby was given the name Siddhartha, which means “a wish fulfilled”, and his family name was **Gautama**.

2. Childhood of the prince

Within seven days after the birth of her baby, Queen Maya died. The Prince was brought up under the loving care of his stepmother, Pajapati. He grew up to be a happy child, thinking of her as his mother.

The Rose-Apple tree It was an ancient Indian tradition that every spring, the king took part in the Ploughing Festival with his subjects. The king would plough the first row in the fields for the spring planting.

That year, the king took the prince to the Ploughing Festival. Everyone was happy to see them. The men and

boys shouted with joy as the king's golden plough cut into the earth. Next, the royal ministers ploughed a row with their silver ploughs, and then the peasants took over the rest of the ploughing with their wooden ploughs. There were one thousand ploughs in all. As the peasants worked, sweat poured from their brows. They yelled and whipped the panting oxen that struggled to pull the heavy ploughs.

Suddenly, the sky was filled with black crows circling over the freshly ploughed fields. "*Caw! Caw!*" they cried as they swooped down and plucked worms out of the earth with their sharp beaks. The prince tugged at his father's arm, "*Can't anyone stop them?*"

The king laughed heartily, "*It is only natural!*"

The prince wandered off and sat under the shade of a rose-apple tree, meditating. He concentrated on his breath. His breath was like a bridge between his body and mind. When he concentrated on his breath for a while, his body became relaxed and his mind became quiet and peaceful.

When his father saw the prince sitting in meditation, he remembered Asita's words. He wondered whether the prince's kind, gentle and thoughtful nature would one day lead him to give up the world after all.

The wounded swan

One day when the prince and his cousin Devadatta were walking in the woods, they saw a swan. As quick as a flash, Devadatta drew his bow and shot the swan down. The prince rushed to the wounded swan and pulled out the arrow. He held the bird in his arms and stroked it. Devadatta shouted angrily at the prince, "*Give me the swan! I shot it! It belongs to me!*"



“I shall never give it to you. You will only kill it!” said the prince firmly. They argued over the swan for some time, until Siddhartha made a suggestion. *“Let’s ask the ministers of the court and let them decide.”*

The ministers all had different views. Some said, *“The swan should be given to **Devadatta**.”*

Others said, *“It should go to the prince.”*

At last one minister who was especially wise stood up and said, *“A life belongs to the one who saved it, not to one who will destroy it. The swan goes to the prince.”*

The prince took care of the swan until it could fly again. Then he turned it loose so it could live freely with its own kind.

Devadatta was not happy. He shook his fist at his cousin, *“One day, I will get even with you!”*

3. Youth and education of the prince

Going to school

Siddhartha was now eight years old. He was happy because this was his first day of school. He got up early and scrubbed his face very clean and neatly combed his hair. He heard footsteps down the hall. He stood up on his toes so he would look taller and smiled from ear to ear. He was ready to meet his teacher. The wisest teacher in the kingdom had been chosen and Siddhartha was eager to learn many things. He had his long writing stick and slate ready.

A gentle man with sparkling eyes entered the room. He spoke in a kind voice, “*My name is **Visvamitra**. I shall teach you about the sun, moon and stars in the heavens. We shall gather rocks and learn the signs for rain. You will learn to copy the calls of animals and learn how they live. I shall teach you to write verses about the seasons and much more. You will also learn good manners.*”

Meeting Kanthaka

One day the king came into the classroom, “*Siddhartha, I have a surprise for you. Look out the window.*” Siddhartha clapped his hands with joy, for there, poking its head through the window, was a snow-white horse.

“*Oh, thank you! What a wonderful present!*” At first the horse was afraid so Visvamitra taught Siddhartha how to feed it and stroke its head. “*I shall call you **Kanthaka**.*” Soon Kanthaka was encouraging Siddhartha to run and play with him.

Siddhartha studied harder than ever now so that he would have time after his lessons to ride with his teacher. They would ride quietly through the forests and follow animal tracks high into the foothills. Often they would come across animals that were hungry or hurt.

Visvamitra taught Siddhartha how to take care of them. He learnt to ride Kanthaka very well. They leapt across wide rivers and raced like the wind.

Training as a warrior

The king shook his head and said to Visvamitra, “My son is too kind-hearted. I want him to become a fearless warrior so he can defend the kingdom. It is time for him to learn to fight.”

The prince learnt to shoot arrows and drive chariots. He was taught how to use swords and clubs and how to wrestle. All this training made him strong. He was always a good sport and never boasted of his strength as the other young princes did. His playmates played fighting games, but Siddhartha never joined them. They jeered at him for being a coward and told the king, “Siddhartha is not a good fighter.”

Elephants were used in war at that time so the prince learnt the art of riding them. He treated them kindly, unlike other princes who were cruel to them.

One day Visvamitra spoke to the king, “I have taught Siddhartha that all he needs to know to become a future king. He is brave and strong, yet gentle. He is wise and treats everyone fairly. As a student, he has been considerate towards his classmates and has never failed to pay due respect to his teacher.”

The three palaces

Siddhartha's kind and thoughtful nature greatly disturbed the king, who often thought about the prediction of Asita. He decided to make absolutely certain that his son did not see any sign of unhappiness that would one day make him give up his royal pleasures. The king did everything he could to make his son happy. He told [Queen Pajapati](#), "I shall have three royal palaces built for the prince. The first will be built from perfumed wood. It will be warm in the winter season. The second will be built of cool marble, to be used during summer. The third will be of brick, for the rainy season."

To make life even more pleasant, the king created beautiful parks with lovely pools where swans and fish swam and lotus flowers bloomed. He told the servants "Clear away all the old flowers and dead leaves in the garden." He did not want the Prince to see anything ugly.

All the servants in the palaces were young, healthy and beautiful. Royal entertainers had been ordered to sing and dance all day. They were never to appear tired or unhappy. No one was allowed to talk about pain or suffering.

The king ordered walls to be built around the palaces. He instructed the guards, "Siddhartha is not to leave without my consent!"

4. The four sights

At the age of sixteen, Prince Siddhartha married a beautiful young princess called [Yasodhara](#). She loved and cared for him. He continued to live a princely life for nearly thirteen years after his marriage. He was protected from all the

problems of life outside the palace gates. He had all the comforts that a prince of his day could desire. They 19 lived in a world where there was nothing but happiness and laughter. One day, however, he wished to discover the world outside his palace.

When the king knew about this, he gave an order to the people in the city, “Have the houses along the road to the city cleaned and decorated. Make the roads sweet with incense and have the people dressed in colorful clothing. Make certain that all the beggars, the old and the sick stay indoors until the prince has left.”



Old age The prince’s faithful charioteer, Channa, drove him out through the South Gate. When the faithful crowds saw their beloved prince, they threw flowers on

the road and bowed in admiration. Siddhartha was delighted to see them so happy.

At that moment, an old man appeared at the side of the road. The prince was surprised to see an old man. He asked his charioteer, *“What kind of person is this with white hair and bent back? His eyes are dim, his body wobbles. He leans on a cane and walks feebly. Has his body changed or has he always been like this? Tell me, Channa.”*

Channa dared not answer truthfully, *“This has nothing to do with you. Please don’t trouble yourself about it.”*

The prince kept questioning Channa. *“Is he the only one to whom this has happened? Or are we all to become like this?”*

Then Channa spoke the truth, *“It is so, my Lord. Once he was young and strong with black hair and fine teeth. As time goes by, our bodies will age too. It happens to everybody.”*

Hearing these words, the prince shivered. His hair stood on end. He trembled with fear, as does a shocked animal fleeing from a bolt of lightning. He shook his head, *“How can people find delight in the pleasures of the world when old age brings it all to ruin?”* The prince told the charioteer, *“Quickly turn the chariot around and go back. Knowing that old age will call for me, how can I enjoy these gardens and groves?”* Obeying his command, Channa drove as fast as the wind and quickly returned to the palace.

Sickness

Siddhartha could not forget the sight of the old man. He thought about him day and night and could find no peace in his heart. He spoke his thoughts only to Yasodhara, *“When I saw the old man, all the wonderful things of the city seemed to fade away. The beauty and laughter in the palace is no longer real to me. I want to visit the city again to see life as it really is, to see how the common people go about their daily lives.”*

The king could not bear to see his son unhappy so he gave his consent for another visit. Siddhartha and Channa disguised themselves as noblemen and drove out through the East Gate into the city. For the first time, the prince saw how people lived in his kingdom. He walked happily among the blacksmiths and potters at their work. He talked to the rich merchants in their splendid shops and to the bakers selling bread. Suddenly, the prince saw a sick man who was lying on the ground, moaning and grabbing his stomach. The prince ran to him and rested the sick man’s head on his lap. *“Channa, what’s wrong with this man?”*

“Lord, do not touch this man! He is sick with the plague. Put him down or you will catch it yourself.”

“Is this the only man that is sick? Are others sick like this, Channa? Will my wife and father also fall ill?”

“Yes, my Lord. This is how things are in the world,” said Channa. *“Everyone in the world gets sick sometimes. It can happen anytime.”*

Hearing this, the prince felt great pity in his heart, *“The thief of sickness can come at any time. Yet everyone seems so happy and delighted.”* Then he got into the chariot and had Channa turn around to go home.

Death

Siddhartha returned to the palace with a heavy feeling of despair in his heart. When the king saw his son in such misery, he sent him to visit a park outside the North Gate. This time Siddhartha saw a dead body. Since Siddhartha had never seen a dead person, he asked Channa, *“What is wrong with that man?”*

“O Lord, he is dead. He does not feel anything.”

Siddhartha asked, *“Will I, the son of the king, die like this man?”*

“Yes, every living thing must die. No one can avoid death.”

Siddhartha was shocked. He sighed, *“People all know that they will die, yet they go through life as if nothing will ever happen to them.”* He ordered the charioteer to turn back home. *“This is no time for a pleasure ride. Life can end at any time. How can I just think of enjoying myself?”*

At the palace, Siddhartha mulled over what he had seen. *“It is frightening to know that everyone will die one day and no one can avoid it.”*

The holy man

Siddhartha now knew how the people outside the palace lived. Beggars lined the streets, begging for food. Hungry children dressed in rags roamed the streets. The old, sick and poor people waited for a lonely death. At the same time, the rich lived in fine houses without caring about how the poor lived.

Siddhartha asked himself, *“What hope is there for these people? Even the rich will suffer from old age, sickness and death. Everyone born into this world will suffer. Their suffering begins right at birth. I must find a way to help them.”*

On their last visit outside the palace, the prince and Channa rode their horses out through the West Gate. They passed by a holy man in ragged robes. Seeing how quiet and peaceful he was, the prince asked, *“Who is that?”*

Channa explained to him, *“He is a wandering holy man. He has left his home and left behind fame and riches. He leads a simple life and is at peace with himself. He hopes to find the truth and overcome the suffering that troubles the world.”*

Siddhartha smiled. *“I shall become like him.”*

Suddenly, a messenger from the palace caught up with them and shouted, *“A son has been born to the prince!”* Siddhartha was happy about his son, but now it would be harder for him to fulfill his wish to become a wandering holy man. He named his son **Rahula**.

5. Renunciation

Leaving the palace

The king said to Siddhartha, *“I am growing old and am no longer able to rule the kingdom alone. It is time for you to rule.”*

Siddhartha said, *“I shall gladly do so if you can promise me three things — that I would never become old, that I would never get sick, and that I would never die. If you cannot fulfill these wishes, then let me go.”*

The king knew that he could not make such promises. Still he could not bear to part with his son. *“Guard the gates day and night so the prince cannot escape,”* he ordered the guards. But this did not make the prince change his mind about seeking the truth.

One night, Siddhartha quietly entered the chamber where Yasodhara and Rahula were sleeping. He wanted to have one last look at his wife and son. He did not wake them up for fear that Yasodhara would try to persuade him to stay. With great sadness, he left the room. His decision to leave the palace did not mean that he did not love his wife and son; it meant that his love for the beings in the world was greater.

In the still of night, Siddhartha and Channa quietly slipped away from the palace, riding Kanthaka. The palace guards had fallen asleep. Kanthaka jumped over the city wall, carrying Siddhartha and Channa on his back. Once out of the city, Siddhartha stopped for a last look at Kapilavatthu, the place he had spent so many

happy years, now bathed in moonlight. His decision had been made.

A wandering holy man

All night, they traveled south. At dawn, they came to the banks of a river. Kanthaka crossed it in one leap. Once across, Siddhartha said, “We’re safe here. Let us stop and rest.” Siddhartha took his sword and cut off his princely locks. Then he exchanged his royal clothes for the garment of a hunter who was passing by. He handed his hair and royal ornaments to Channa saying, “Return to the palace with Kanthaka and give these to the king. Tell him that what I am doing is for the benefit of all beings.” Siddhartha was twenty-nine years old. From then on he was known as the sage, [Gautama](#).

When the king heard the news of his son becoming a sage, he said to his guards, “Go and bring the prince back.” Gautama had been wandering from one place to another, so it took the guards a while to find him. When they saw him, they begged, “Please return to the palace.”

Gautama refused. “Only after I have realized the truth and found the way to help end suffering of the world shall I return.” Five of the men remained with him.

6. The quest

Searching for teachers Gautama wandered along the Ganges River looking for spiritual teachers. [Alara](#)

Kalama and *Uddaka* were considered to be the best teachers in meditation at that time so Gautama went to study with them. First he studied under Uddaka, then under Alara Kalama. Very soon he had learnt all they had to teach, but he had not learnt to end suffering. He said to himself, “I must find the truth on my own.”



Six years of hardship

With his five companions, Gautama went to a forest near the village of *Uruvela*. Here, several holy men were living in extreme poverty and tormenting themselves with severe exercises. They believed that if they put their bodies through torment they would understand the truth. Some slept on beds of nails. Some stood on their heads. They all ate so little they were just skin and bones. Gautama found a quiet spot on the banks of a

nearby river. There he practiced the most severe hardship. He slept on a bed of thorns. He ate only one grain of wheat and one sesame seed a day. At times, he would eat nothing at all. His body wasted away until there was only a layer of thin skin covering his bones. Birds made nests in his matted hair and layers of dust covered his dried-up body. Gautama sat completely still, not even brushing away insects.

7. Enlightenment

The song of the lute

One evening, a group of young girls on their way home passed by Gautama who was sitting in meditation. They were playing the lute, a musical instrument, and singing. He thought, “When the string of the lute is loose, its sound won’t carry. When the string is too tight, it breaks. When the strings are neither too loose nor too tight, the music is beautiful. A loose string means a life of pleasure. A tight string means a life of self torture. I’m pulling my strings too tightly. I cannot find the Way of Truth living a life of luxury or with my body so weak.” Thus, he decides to give up self-torture.

Sujata

Soon after, while bathing in the river, Gautama was so weak that he fainted and fell. Sujata, a young village girl who lived by the river, saw him and brought him a bowl of rice and milk. “Eat this,” she said. “It will give you strength.” Gautama smiled, “If you had not given me

food, I would have died without finding the true way to happiness.” After the meal, he immediately felt stronger and continued his meditation.



When his five companions saw him eat, they were disgusted and said, “*Gautama has gone back to an easy life.*” With that, they left him.

Gautama remembered meditating under the rose-apple tree when he was a child. “*I shall meditate as I did before. Perhaps that is the way to become enlightened.*” From then on he began to eat daily. Once again, his golden skin glowed with health.

The long struggle

Still seeking a way to understand the truth of life, Gautama set out for [Buddhagaya](#) (near Gaya in modern Bihar). Near a grove, he found a huge tree. A young

grass cutter walked by and offered him a bundle of grass. He made a seat of the grass at the foot of the [Bodhi tree](#). Then he walked around the tree three times and sat down facing east.

Silently Gautama vowed, “Even if my flesh and blood were to dry up, leaving only skin and bones, I will not leave this place until I find a way to end all sorrow.” He sat under the Bodhi tree for forty-nine days. He was determined to discover the source of all pain and suffering in the world. [Mara](#), the evil one, tried to scare him into giving up his quest. First Mara sent rain, hail and wind that lasted for days. Gautama was not moved.

Next, Mara tried to lure Gautama into having selfish thoughts. He sent visions of his very beautiful daughters who danced and sang before Siddhartha. They were hoping to remind him of the pleasures of palace life and entice him to return. Gautama was not moved.

When this did not work, Mara sent his fierce demon armies. The sight of them turned Siddhartha’s blood and cracked his bones. Still he did not move. As the demons’ weapons got close to Siddhartha, they turned into soft petals that floated to the ground. The demons threw bolts of lightning and flaming rocks at his silent figure, but they were deflected by a shield of light. Mara urged his armies on, but the Buddha’s goodness protected him from all their attacks.

Victory at last

During this struggle that happened in his mind, Gautama was able to see things as they truly were. Now he had finally found the answer to suffering: “The cause of suffering is greed, selfishness and stupidity. If people get rid of these, they will be happy.”

Mara visited Gautama one last time, still trying to confuse him. He asked Gautama, “How can you prove that you are worthy to become an enlightened one? What art your virtuous deeds? Who is your witness?”

Calmly the seated Gautama touched the earth with his right hand. The Earth thundered, “I am his witness!” Defeated, Mara fled.

During a full-moon night in May, Gautama went into deep meditation. As the morning star appeared in the eastern sky, he became an enlightened one, a Buddha. He was no longer Siddhartha Gautama the prince. He looked the same, yet one could see about him the signs of a Perfect One. His body glowed with golden light and emitted the colors of the rainbow. The heavens rained down perfumed blossoms and the earth trembled.

He was thirty-five years old. From now on he would be known as the Buddha, the Enlightened One. He realized that all beings could do what he had done. He exclaimed, “How wonderful! All beings can become Buddhas.”

Under the Bodhi Tree

The Buddha remained in deep meditation below the tree because he was free at last. Then he stood up and gazed at the tree in gratitude, to thank it for having given him shelter. From then on the tree was known as the Bodhi tree, the tree of Enlightenment.



8. Chief monks

The first five monks

The Buddha then went searching for the five companions who had abandoned him. He found them in the Deer Park near [Benares](#). They thought the Buddha had given up the quest for Enlightenment when he accepted Sujata's offering of food. Therefore, when they saw him coming towards them now, they said, "*Here comes Gautama. Let's not talk to him.*" However, as the Buddha came near, a radiant light shone around him. His presence was so impressive that the five holy men forgot what they had agreed upon. All of them got up to meet him. One took his bowl while another prepared a seat for him. A basin of water was fetched for him to wash his feet. Then the Buddha told them, "I have attained enlightenment and have come to tell you what I have found. Don't call me Gautama anymore. I am now the Buddha." They felt sorry that they left him and begged his forgiveness. Then they listened to the Buddha speak his first teachings. He said, "All suffering and pain, fear and hatred come from greed. One who has no greed has no worries. What has he to fear?" As he spoke, they began to understand.

After they had fully understood the teachings, they asked the Buddha to ordain them. The Buddha agreed and ordained them by saying, "[Come monks! Lead a religious life to make a complete end to suffering.](#)" They shaved their heads and put on dark yellow robes. Thus, the Sangha was formed.

The first sixty monks

The expansion of the Sangha began with the ordination of Yasa, the son of a rice merchant who lived in [Varanasi](#). He led a life of luxury, but found it boring and meaningless. After hearing the Four Noble Truths from the Buddha, it was like being awakened from a dream. He realized that life is about suffering and that beauty and enjoyment do not last. Yasa decided to stay with the Buddha and become his disciple. He asked, “O Lord, may I be ordained?” In reply the Buddha said, “Come monk. Lead the holy life.”

Fifty-four of Yasa’s friends followed his example and they sought out the Buddha. They too were impressed by his teachings and asked to be accepted as monks. The Sangha then numbered sixty members in all.

When the first sixty disciples had become Arahats, that is, people who have overcome desire, ill will and ignorance, the Buddha decided that it was time for them to go out and spread his teachings to the world. He said to them, “Go forth to teach out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare and happiness of people. Let not two of you go the same way. Spread the truth to all people.”

The sixty disciples were instructed to go to sixty different places to spread his teachings. They brought to the Buddha many people who wished to be admitted into the Sangha. During that period, everyone had to be ordained by the Buddha himself. Thinking that such an

arrangement would be inconvenient for his disciples, he made a rule that allowed all monks to ordain new comers or novices. This rule is still followed by Buddhist monks today.

Kassapa

When road conditions were suitable for travel, the Buddha went to Rajagaha. On the way, he stayed with three holy men who were brothers. They lived in huts at the edge of a grove and practiced the ancient religion of fire worshipping. Their leader, Kassapa, had one thousand followers. They wore their hair in matted locks.

Since they worshipped fire, the Buddha spoke to them about fire. “The real fires in life are greed, hatred and stupidity. If you want peace, you must put out these fires.” The three Kassapa brothers and their one thousand disciples cut off their tousled locks and became monks.

Sariputta and Moggallana

Moggallana was a quiet child and liked to play alone until he met Sariputta, who was quite the opposite. Sariputta was never shy and talked to everyone. In spite of their differences, they were good friends and always found things they liked to do together. They played games, ran in the meadows, and took long walks in the woods.

Moggallana often joined Sariputta in the town square where they listened to many religious teachers talk about their ideas. They vowed, “When we grow up, we will search for the truth. Whoever finds it first will share it with the other.”

One day when Sariputta was already a grown man, he happened to see [Assaji](#), one of the first five monks, walking in the city. Assaji was calm and dignified, and his face glowed with happiness. Sariputta asked him, “Who is your teacher? Will you take me and my friend to him?” He ran to get his friend, Moggallana, and together they went to hear the Buddha teach. They also decided to become monks.

Since then, thousands of people have joined the Sangha and led a holy life. They in turn have taught millions of people how to live wisely and happily.

9. Chief nuns

Pajapati became a nun. In the fifth year after his Enlightenment, the Buddha returned to Kapilavattu with his disciples when he heard that his father was seriously ill. After his father passed away, Queen Pajapati told the Buddha, “Yasodhara, my ladies-in-waiting and I wish to become nuns.”

At first the Buddha refused and explained, “The life we lead is far too harsh for women. The Buddha’s teachings can be followed anywhere. It is not necessary to leave the comfort of your home and family.” After that, the Buddha went to Vesali.

However, [Pajapati](#) was not discouraged by the Buddha's comment. She cut her hair, put on a yellow robe and accompanied by [Yasodhara](#) and other Sakyan women, walked to Vesali. The long journey caused their feet to swell. Looking weary and with their clothes covered in dust, they finally arrived at the monastery where the Buddha was preaching. In tears, Pajapati spoke to [Ananda](#), a personal attendant of the Buddha, "Please ask the Buddha to let us become nuns."

It was Ananda who saw their determination to join the Order. He asked the Buddha, "*Can women lead a holy life and become Arahats if they become nuns?*"

The Buddha answered, "Yes Ananda, they can even in this very life. Tell Pajapati and the others that I will accept them into the Order."

This was how Pajapati, Yasodhara, and their companions became the first nuns. Thus, the Order of Nuns was formed.

Vaidehi became Ksema

[Vaidehi](#), the queen of King [Bimbisara of Magadha](#), was a beauty, and she admired beautiful things. The king often urged her, "Come with me to meet the Buddha." The queen would say, "I prefer the beautiful surroundings of the palace."

"In that case, I will bring the beauty of the forest to you," replied the king. And he did just that. He had poets compose poems about the loveliness and peacefulness of the forest where the Buddha was

staying. The poems were sung at the palace to entertain the queen.

The poems touched her heart and she became enchanted by them. One day she asked King Bimbisara to take her to the forest to see its beauty. There, sitting under a flowering tree, was the Buddha. A maiden even more beautiful than the queen was fanning him. “I have never seen anyone so beautiful!” exclaimed the queen as she moved nearer to get a closer look.

As Vaidehi was gazing at her, the beautiful maiden began to turn into an ugly old woman with wrinkled skin and grey hair. She grew older and older, weaker and weaker until she sank to the ground and died. Although this was only a vision, Vaidehi hid her face in horror. The Buddha pitied her and said, “Beauty does not last. Those attached to beauty are like a spider entangled in its own web — the spider has no way out. Not being attached is true freedom.”

Vaidehi understood, and gave up her desire for beauty. She followed the Buddha and became a nun by the name of Ksema ([Kema](#)).

10. Outstanding Lay Followers

Yasa’s father had been searching for Yasa after he had left home and entered the Sangha. Eventually, he came upon the Buddha who explained Dharma to him. He listened with growing enthusiasm and became *the first lay follower to take the Threefold Refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.*

At the invitation of Yasa's father, the Buddha and Yasa went for a meal at his house. The Buddha talked about Dharma after the meal and Yasa's mother was also listening. She was so impressed that she took the Threefold Refuge and became *the Buddha's first woman lay follower*.

Anathapindika

In Savatthi, there lived a very wealthy merchant by the name of Sudatta. Generous in nature, he often gave food and shelter to orphans, the old and the poor. Hence, he was popularly known as Anathapindika, which means "giver of alms to the unprotected."

While Anathapindika was doing some business in Rajagaha, he heard about the Buddha. So eager was Anathapindika to meet the Buddha that he got up and set off to see him in the middle of the night. On the way, he had to walk through a cemetery but he continued his journey in spite of his fear.

By daybreak, he reached the park where the Buddha was. He was so glad to see the Buddha that he at once prostrated himself before him and said, "I hope the Buddha is living at ease."

"Yes, always at ease he lives. Untouched by desire, he has entered the ideal state of Nirvana. While being free from all attachments, he has removed all suffering. In his mind, he is calm." the Buddha replied.

After hearing the Buddha's words, Anathapindika took the Threefold Refuge and became a lay follower.

He invited the Buddha to a meal and requested him to visit his home-town of Savatthi. The Buddha accepted this invitation.

Back in Savatthi, Anathapindika went around looking for a suitable place for the Buddha to stay. He spotted a grove belonging to Prince Jeta, which seemed ideal for a monastery. However, Prince Jeta was reluctant to sell the grove even for the high price of a hundred thousand pieces of gold. When Anathapindika persisted in asking the price of the grove, the prince decided to discourage him. He imposed a condition of sale which he thought Anathapindika would find impossible to satisfy. Prince Jeta declared that he would sell the grove for the amount of gold pieces needed to cover every inch of it.

Taking the prince's words in earnest, Anathapindika immediately instructed his men to bring the gold pieces and lay them on the ground of the grove. Except for the space occupied by the trees, the whole grove was soon completely covered. Prince Jeta was struck by Anathapindika's determination to fulfill his condition on the sale. When he came to know that the grove was being bought for the Buddha, he said to Anathapindika, "The land is yours but the trees are mine. I give away the trees as my share of the offering to the Buddha."

In honor of the prince, the grove was known as the Jeta Grove. There, Anathapindika built a monastery for

the use of the Buddha and his disciples. This was later known as Anathapindika Monastery.

Visakha

Visakha was declared by the Buddha to be foremost among those who had devoted their services to the Order. When she was seven years old, the Buddha happened to visit the place of her birth. Since then, she was always happy to hear the teachings of the Buddha.

When she grew up, she married the son of a wealthy man in Savatthi. She offered daily alms to the monks and nuns when they came to her house. In the morning and afternoon, she visited the monastery to care for the needs of the monks and nuns, as well as listen to the sermons of the Buddha.

One day, she happened to visit the monastery wearing a very costly headdress. Out of respect for the Buddha, she removed it before seeing him and handed it over to a servant, who forgot to take it with him. Ananda found it and showed it to the Buddha who asked him to keep it for her. When Visakha came to know that it was with Ananda, she decided not to take it back but to sell it for the benefit of the Order. The Buddha asked her to build a monastery in the eastern part of Savatthi with the money from the sale. The monastery she built became very famous.

Visakha was outstanding among the women lay followers. Being a devout lay follower, she played an important role in the affairs of the Order of Nuns, and

from time to time, she was asked by the Buddha to sort out disputes among the nuns.

11. The Buddha's Last Days

The Buddha had taught the truth for forty-five years. His every action had been for the sake of others. Now he was eighty years old. Despite his age, he prepared to make one last journey. He said, "I have little time to live. I wish to return to my homeland where I grew up." He and his disciples traveled slowly, resting often. Along the way, many people came to see him and to ask for advice. The Buddha was happy to teach anybody who came to him. They all listened and bowed respectfully.

The Buddha spoke of his death

On the journey, the Buddha was offered a meal of mushrooms (a dish of wild boar's flesh) by Chunda, a blacksmith. He became ill after the meal, but insisted on continuing as far as Kusinagara. Ananda, his faithful attendant, wept to see the Buddha so ill. The Buddha comforted him saying, "Do not grieve, Ananda. I am old and feeble and cannot live forever. It is natural for everything that is born to die. In three months I shall pass into final Nirvana, a state of ultimate peace and happiness. Call all the monks and nuns together."

The disciples wept and begged their teacher to remain in the world. With tears in his eyes, Ananda asked, "When

the Buddha is no longer in the world, who is there to teach us?”

“What more is there to teach, Ananda?” the Buddha asked. “I have taught you all I know. There is nothing that I have kept hidden. My teachings are your teacher now. Follow them and you will be true to me.”

In a sala grove near Kusinagara, the Buddha humbly said, “I can go no further Ananda, prepare a resting place for me between these two large sala trees.” He lay down on his right side with his head to the north. The two sala trees bloomed out of season and rained their blossoms all around him.

Last respects

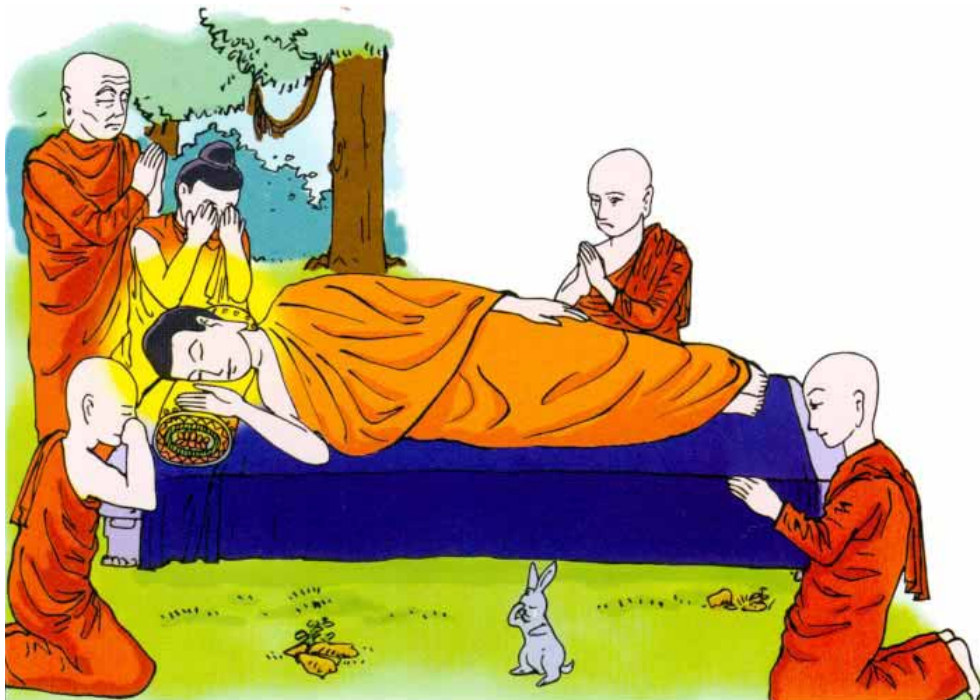
Hearing that the Buddha was dying, people came from afar to pay their last visit. Even as he lay there in pain, he continued to teach until his last moment.

At dusk when the grove was cast in purple shadows, the Buddha entered into final Nirvana. Before departing, he spoke his last words. “Everything is subject to change. Remember to practice the teachings earnestly.”

All his disciples and villagers gathered around him and wept. According to custom, his body was placed on a pyre and burned. **Shining, jewel-like relics** were found in the ashes. They were divided into eight parts and placed in monuments called stupas.



The Buddha passed away in 543 BCE at the age of eighty. Since then, his teachings of compassion and wisdom have been passed on from generation to generation, from country to country, and from heart to heart, right down to the present day.



The Dharma

Dharma means the teaching of the Buddha. What is the basis of the Buddha's teaching? It is the Four Noble Truths. They are:

- 1. The Truth of Suffering (*Dukkha*)**
- 2. The Truth of the Cause of Suffering**
- 3. The Truth of the End of Suffering**
- 4. The Truth of the Path leading to the End of Suffering**

When we get sick, we go to a doctor. A good doctor first finds out what illness we have. Next he finds out what has caused it. Then he decides what the cure is. Finally, he prescribes the medicine that will make us well again. In the same way, the Buddha showed that there is suffering in the world. He explained the cause of this suffering. He taught that this suffering could be ended. Finally, he showed the way leading to the end of suffering. This is the Four Noble Truths. Look at Table 1 to see the connection between a good doctor and the Buddha.

1. The First Noble Truth: Suffering (*Dukkha*)

The Buddha's discovery of the solution to the problem of suffering began with the recognition that life is suffering. This is the first of the Four Noble Truths. If people examine their own experiences or look at the world around them, they will see that life is full of

suffering or unhappiness. Suffering may be physical or mental.

Physical suffering Physical suffering takes many forms. People must have observed at one time or another, how their aged relatives suffer. Most of them suffer aches and pains in their joints and many find it hard to move about by themselves. With advancing age, the elderly find life difficult because they cannot see, hear or eat properly. The pain of disease, which strikes young and old alike, can be unbearable. The pain of death brings much suffering. Even the moment of birth gives pain, both to the mother and the child who is born.

The truth is that the suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death are unavoidable. Some fortunate people may now be enjoying happy and carefree lives, but it is only a matter of time before they too will experience suffering. What is worse, nobody else can share this suffering with the one that suffers. For example, a man may be very concerned that his mother is growing old. Yet he cannot take her place and suffer the pains of aging on her behalf. Also, if a boy falls very ill, his mother cannot experience the discomfort of his illness for him. Finally, neither mother nor son can help each other when the moment of death comes.

Mental suffering

Besides physical suffering, there are also various forms of mental suffering. People feel sad, lonely or depressed

when they lose someone they love through separation or death. They become irritated or uncomfortable when they are forced to be in the company of those whom they dislike or those who are unpleasant. People also suffer when they are unable to satisfy their needs and wants. Teenagers, for example, feel frustrated and angry if their parents refuse to let them go to a late-night party or spend large sums of money on expensive fashionable clothing or toys. Adults, on the other hand, may be unhappy if they are unable to gain wealth, power or fame.

Other types of suffering

Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods or famine, can cause a lot of suffering to people. People also have to face hardship caused by war and social injustice.

Problems can happen even in the classroom. When you try to study, and yet the room is too noisy or your friends try to disturb you, you may feel unhappy or angry. Sometimes, problems may happen to you personally. When you do not pass an exam, this would make you feel unhappy or disappointed.

These problems are unwanted. People try their best to avoid them and to be free from them.

2. The Second Noble Truth:

The cause of suffering.

The cause of suffering is desire based on greed and selfishness.

The Buddha saw that the cause of suffering is selfish desire and greed. People want all kinds of things and want to keep them forever. However, greed is endless, like a bottomless pit that can never be filled. The more you want, the more unhappy life is. Thus, our limitless wants and desires are the cause of our suffering.

Many children who have had a taste for chocolate will keep asking for more. When they do not get it, they will feel upset or even angry. Although they know that eating too much chocolate may cause them to have a bad stomach or toothache, they still want more.

The things we want most can cause us the most suffering.

3. The Third Noble Truth:

The end of suffering

To end suffering, selfish desire must be removed. Just as a fire dies when no fuel is added, so unhappiness will end when the fuel of selfish desire is removed. When selfish desire is completely removed, there will be no more suffering. Our mind will be in a state of perfect peace. We shall be happy always. Buddhists call the state in which all suffering is ended Nirvana. It is an everlasting state of great joy and peace. It is the greatest happiness in life.

4. The Fourth Noble Truth:

Path leading to the end of suffering

The way to end suffering is to follow the **‘Noble Eightfold Path’**:—

1. Right Understanding means to have a correct understanding of oneself and the world. Although we may have our own view of the world, it may not always be right. If we understand things as they really are, we would be able to live a happier and more meaningful life. For example, students who understand that it is to their own benefit to learn would work hard to learn more and do better. When they do well, everyone will be happy, including their parents and teachers.

2. Right Thought means to think in the right way. Those who harbor thoughts of greed and anger will easily get into trouble. But if we think correctly, we would end up doing the right things. For example, if students harbor the right thoughts, they will know that being lazy may make them fail in exams. This would mean spending another year doing the same things. So they would decide to work hard rather than be grumpy about schoolwork.

3. Right Speech means to avoid lying, tale telling, gossiping, backbiting, idle talk and harsh words. Harsh words can wound more deeply than weapons, while gentle words can change the heart of a hardened criminal. This shows the effect on others in the way we speak. The Buddha said, “Pleasant speech is as sweet as

honey; truthful speech is beautiful like a flower; and wrong speech is unwholesome like filth.” Therefore, we should speak words that are truthful, meaningful and with good will.

4. Right Action means not to harm or destroy any life, not to steal and not to use sex in a harmful way.

5. Right Livelihood means not to live on work that would in any way bring harm to living beings. Buddhists are discouraged from engaging in the following five kinds of livelihood: trading people, weapons, animals for slaughter, intoxicating drinks and drugs. The Buddha said, “Do not earn your living by harming others. Do not seek happiness by making others unhappy.”

6. Right Effort means to do our best to become a better person. Examples of this are to work hard at school and to drop bad habits such as laziness, quick temper, smoking and drugs.

7. Right Mindfulness means to be always aware and attentive. We should always be aware of what we think, say and do. We must concentrate on everything we do before we can do it well. For instance, if we concentrate in class, we would not miss anything the teacher says.

8. Right Meditation means to keep the mind steady and calm in order to see clearly the true nature of things.

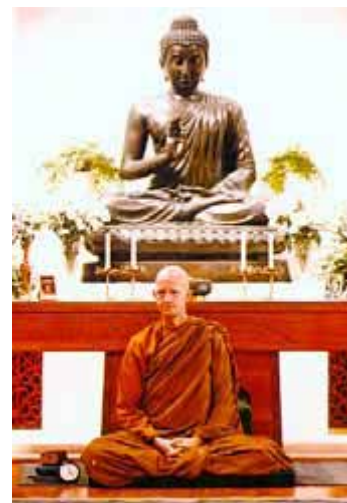
This type of mental practice can make us become more understanding and a happier person.

The Noble Eightfold Path can help us prevent problems or deal with any problems we may come across in our daily life. If we follow it, we are on the way to less suffering and more happiness.

The Sangha Buddhist monks and nuns have left the family life to practice the Buddha's teachings. They usually own only a few things, such as robes, an alms bowl and a razor to shave their heads. They aim to give up the need for material possessions. They concentrate on their inner development and gain much understanding into the nature of things by leading a pure and simple life.

The Sangha

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Shaven head

While most people want to have beautiful hair any spend lots of time and money on hairstyles, Buddhist monks and nuns shave their heads. They are no longer concerned with outward beauty, but with developing their inner beauty. Monks and nun are easy to recognize with their shaven heads. The time they would have spent on caring for their hair is spent on more important activities like meditating, or chanting.

Alms bowl

Offering food to monks and nuns is a part of Buddhist practice. In Asia, it is not unusual to see monks walking towards the villages early in the morning carrying their alms bowls. They go from house to house until someone offers them food.



Since monks and nuns do not choose their food, they learn to be grateful for whatever they are given. This practice helps them not to be greedy. It also gives the [laity](#) an opportunity to practice giving. Going out to collect food is less common in some countries so the laity goes to the monastery to make offerings of food.

Clothing

In the beginning, monks and nuns had only three robes. When Buddhism spread to colder countries, like China and Japan, they needed to wear more layers of clothes to

keep warm. Their robes are simple and made from cotton or linen.



The color of the robe normally depends on the country and the Buddhist tradition that is followed there. For instance, in Sri Lanka and Thailand, yellow or brown robes are worn mostly, while black is worn in Japan. In China and Korea, grey and brown robes are worn for work. More elaborate robes are used for ceremonies. Dark red robes are worn in Tibet.

Robes and alms bowls are very important for monks and nuns. The Buddha said, “Just as a bird takes its wings with it wherever it flies, so the monks and nuns take their robes and bowls with them wherever they go. They are content with robes to cover their body and an alms bowl to hold their food.”

A day in a monastery

In the daily life of work and religious practice, the monks and nuns conduct themselves properly and with discipline. Each day begins early for monks and nuns. Long before the sun rises, they attend morning ceremonies and recite parts of the Buddha's teachings. Later on, there may be a period of meditation and study.



Members of the Sangha have many responsibilities to fulfill, despite leading simple lives. They work very hard and are happy with the work they do. During the day, they go about teaching the Dharma. They also write Buddhist books and make Buddha images. They take care of the temple and gardens. They prepare for ceremonies. They give advice to the laity. They help with community projects and care for the elderly and the sick.

There are more chanting and meditation sessions in the evenings. Monks and nuns may give talks on the teachings of the Buddha. They choose not to take evening meals, but use the time instead for study or meditation.

Gwo Cheng, from China, lives in a monastery in the United States. She is ten years old and is training to become a nun. She talks about her daily life, *“At first it was hard to get up early and sit in meditation, but now I am used to it. I am much healthier than I was before! We have a school right here at our monastery. We study the same subjects as other schools do. We are also taught how to be a good person. I am a novice, which means that I am in training to become a nun. I don’t need to decide until I am twenty. There are several novices here. We’re not expected to do everything that the nuns do, but we do our best. After school, we help with the temple duties. I really like gardening! Many people ask me if we novices ever have any fun. Yes, we do! We are very good friends and enjoy studying together. We go on walks and picnics and sing Buddhist songs. The nuns are always thinking of fun things for us to do. We also get to see our families who can live here or just come to visit.”*

The Threefold Refuge

When travelers are caught in a storm, they need to find shelter. Once they have found it and they feel safe, they call out to others, “*Come, and take refuge with us under this shelter! It’s safe here!*” When people see trouble in life, they may also want to find shelter. Some of them take refuge in the **Buddha** (the founder), **Dharma** (the teachings) and the **Sangha** (monks and nuns). Together they are called the **Triple Gem** as they represent qualities which are precious like gems. You take refuge once you recognize the value of the Triple Gem and when you are confident that it can help lead you towards happiness or enlightenment. You are then known as a Buddhist. It is the understanding of the Buddha’s teachings that makes you want to take refuge, not just faith alone.

Now, let us take an example of a traveler who wants to visit a distant city where he has never been. He will need a guide to lead him towards his destination. He will need a path to follow. He may also wish to have traveling companions on the trip. A Buddhist working towards getting happiness and enlightenment is like a traveler trying to reach that distant city. The Buddha is his ‘guide’, Dharma his ‘path’ and the Sangha his ‘traveling companions’.

Taking Refuge in the Buddha

The Buddha, having reached enlightenment, is seen as the best guide for Buddhists heading towards the same

goal. Therefore, all Buddhists take refuge in the Buddha. The Buddha knew what is good and what is not good for all beings. In pointing out the path that leads to the end of suffering, he made the Threefold Refuge for Buddhists to follow.

Taking Refuge in Dharma

The Dharma that Buddhists take as their refuge is like a path that has been well laid down. Such a path may include signposts to show directions, bridges for crossing rivers and steps for climbing mountains. In the same way, Dharma includes the rules of good conduct to help Buddhists avoid bad actions and ways to help them overcome difficulties. It also teaches them how to overcome ignorance and gain Enlightenment.

Taking Refuge in the Sangha

Taking Refuge in the Sangha is like having good traveling companions. They care for each other when they are sick and encourage one another when they are tired. The Sangha, like ideal traveling companions, help the laity to cleanse their bad ideas and correct their behavior through good advice and proper guidance. They also encourage the laity to continue their journey to happiness or Enlightenment.

Becoming a Buddhist

There is a very special ceremony for taking the Threefold Refuge. A Buddhist monk or nun says the following three times and you recite it after him or her:

*“I go to the Buddha for refuge.
I go to Dharma for refuge.
I go to the Sangha for refuge.”*

Once you have done this sincerely, you have become a Buddhist.

The Five Moral Precepts

When children become pupils of a new school, they have to follow the rules of that school. When people become Buddhists, they willingly follow the Five Precepts which are the rules for Buddhists. The Five Precepts are:

- 1. Avoid Killing*
- 2. Avoid Stealing*
- 3. Avoid Misusing Sex*
- 4. Avoid Lying*
- 5. Avoid Using Intoxicants*

The First Precept: Avoid killing

The Buddha said, “Life is dear to all.” All beings fear death and value life, we should therefore respect life and not kill anything. This precept forbids not only killing

people but also any creature, especially if it is for money or sport. We should have an attitude of loving-kindness towards all beings, wishing them to be always happy and free. Caring for the Earth, its rivers, forests and air, is also included in this precept.

The Second Precept: Avoid stealing

We have the right to own things and give them away as we wish. However, we should not take things that do not belong to us by stealing or cheating. Instead, we should learn to give to help others, and always take good care of the things that we use, whether they belong to us or to the public. In a broader sense, this precept means being responsible. If we are lazy and neglect our studies or work, we are said to be ‘stealing time’. This precept also encourages us to be generous. Buddhists give to the poor and the sick and make offerings to monks and nuns to practice being good. Buddhists are usually generous to their parents, teachers and friends to show gratitude for their advice, guidance and kindness. Buddhists also offer sympathy and encouragement to those who feel hurt or discouraged. Helping people by telling them about the Dharma is considered to be the highest form of giving.

The Third Precept: Avoid misusing sex

Avoiding the misuse of sex is respect for people and personal relationships. Much unhappiness arises from

the misuse of sex and from living in irresponsible ways. Many families have been broken as a result, and many children have been victims of sexual abuse. For the happiness of ourselves as well as others, sex should be used in a caring and loving manner.

When observing this precept, sexual desires should be controlled, and husbands and wives should be faithful towards each other. This will help to create peace in the family. In a happy family, the husband and wife respect, trust and love each other. With happy families, the world would be a better place for us to live in. Young people should keep their minds and bodies pure to develop their goodness. It is up to them to make the world a better place in which to live.

The Fourth Precept: Avoid lying

We should respect each other and not tell lies or gossip. This would result in fewer quarrels and misunderstandings, and the world would be a more peaceful place. In observing the fourth precept, we should always speak the truth. The Fifth Precept: Avoid using intoxicants

The fifth precept is based on self-respect.

It guards against losing control of our mind, body and speech. Many things can become addictive. They include alcohol, drugs, smoking and unhealthy books. Using any of these will bring harm to us and our family.

One day, the Buddha was speaking Dharma to the assembly when a young drunken man staggered into the room. He tripped over some monks who were sitting on the floor and started cursing aloud. His breath stank of alcohol and filled the air with a sickening smell. Mumbling to himself, he staggered out of the door.

Everyone was shocked at his rude behavior, but the Buddha remained calm, “Great Assembly!” he said, “Take a look at this man! I can tell you the fate of a drunkard. He will certainly lose his wealth and good name. His body will grow weak and sickly. Day and night, he will quarrel with his family and friends until they leave him. The worst thing is that he will lose his wisdom and become confused.”

By observing this precept, we can keep a clear mind and have a healthy body.

The Laity

The Buddhist Community consists of two groups of people, the [Sangha](#) and the [Laity](#). The word ‘Sangha’ means ‘friendly community’. It usually refers to the Buddhist monks and nuns. They live in monasteries. The laity includes Buddhist men and women who do not become monks and nuns. They usually live at home with their families.

The first step to becoming a member of the Laity is to go for refuge in the Triple Gem (the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha). Then, they willingly observe the Five Precepts in their daily life.

The laity plays an important role in Buddhism, as they care for and support the Sangha. They build the temples and monasteries. They give offerings of food, clothing, bedding and medicine to the Sangha. In return, the Sangha carries on the work of Buddhism and teaches the laity on the Dharma. In this way the Sangha and the laity benefit each other and together, they keep Dharma alive.

Whether one is a member of the Sangha or the laity, all Buddhists should do their best to live an honest life, show compassion to all living beings and set a good example. Even when they are working or meditating, it should be for the benefit of others as well as for themselves.



Symbols in Buddhism

When visiting a monastery, the five main objects that can be found there are [Lotus Flowers](#), [Dharma Wheels](#), [Buddhist Flags](#), [Bodhi Tree](#) and a [Stupa](#). In addition, the images of the Buddha are the most popular objects in a monastery. Each of these bears a special meaning in Buddhism.

Lotus Flower ‘*The lotus has its roots in the mud, Grows up through the deep water, And rises to the surface. It blooms into perfect beauty and purity in the sunlight.*’ The lotus flower represents purity because it is not dirtied by the filth of the mud in which it grows. Those who follow the Buddha’s teachings aim to be like the lotus. They hope to remain pure in a world of impure temptations.



The Dharma Wheel Once we start driving the car, the wheels of the car will keep rolling until it reaches the destination. Ever since the Buddha first started teaching Dharma, the Truth has spread continuously and all over the world. This will continue until all beings are freed from their



suffering. The Dharma Wheel is a symbol of the continuous spreading of the Buddha's teachings to help people live more happily.

Buddhist Flag According to Buddhist records, as the Buddha sat under the Bodhi Tree, six rays of light emitted from his body after his Enlightenment. Based on this, the Buddhist flag indicates that all the different races in the world can live happily under the shield of the Buddha's wisdom.



The sixth color is the combination of blue, yellow, red, white and orange.

Bodhi Tree The Bodhi Tree is a pipala tree, a kind of fig tree found in India. It became known as the Bodhi Tree after the Buddha had attained Enlightenment underneath it. Today, it is used to represent the wisdom of the



Buddha. It is therefore called the Tree of Wisdom, and is respected all over the world by Buddhists. To honor the Bodhi Tree is a way of showing gratitude for the wisdom realized by the Buddha.

Stupa

A stupa is a monument where the sacred remains of the Buddha or noble monks are kept so that people can pay their respect to them. Today, a stupa serves as a symbol for Buddhists to recall the good conduct of the Buddha and noble monks (Arahat).



Stupa in India



**Shwedagon
Sandawshin
Stupa in Myanmar**

Buddhist Shrines and Images

People often feel the need to remember the things they love and respect in a form that they can see. For instance, a photograph is kept in order to remember a loved one. The national flag is a reminder of the loyalty people feel towards their country.

The photograph and national flag are examples of symbols in remembrance of the qualities of the people or things that are being represented. They form the focal point of one's feelings of love, respect and loyalty.

In the same way, the shrine found in Buddhist homes or monasteries is a focal point of Buddhist observances. At the centre of the shrine, there is usually an image of the Buddha. This image may be made of a variety of materials such as 60 marble, gold, wood or clay. The image is a symbol that helps people to remember the qualities of the Buddha.

The shrine may also have such objects as a volume of Buddhist scripture to represent the Dharma. Some shrines may display other items such as images, pictures or photographs of Buddhist monks and masters to represent the Sangha.

When Buddhists stand before a shrine, the objects they see on it help to remind them of the qualities that are found in the Buddha and the Sangha. This inspires them to work towards cultivating these qualities in themselves.



Myanmar Theravada Shrine



Chinese Mahayana Shrine

Buddhist Festivals

Buddhists have many festivals throughout the year. The following three are common to all Buddhists. During these festivals, people can take refuge, take precepts or leave their home life to become monks and nuns.

Buddha Day (*Vesak*)

For the Buddhist community, the most important event of the year is the celebration of the birth of the Buddha. It falls on the full-moon day in May. This occasion is observed by millions of Buddhists throughout the world. It is called *Vesak* in Sri Lanka, *Visakha Puja* in

Thailand. On this day, Buddhists in some countries like China and Korea would take part in the ceremonial bathing of the Buddha. They pour ladles of water scented with flower petals over a statue of the baby Buddha. This symbolizes purifying their thoughts and actions.

Vasak Celebration in Taiwan



Vasak Celebration in London

The temples are elegantly decorated with flowers and banners; the altars are full of offerings. Vegetarian meals are provided for all. Captive animals, such as birds and turtles, are set free from their cages. This is a very joyous day for everyone.

Dharma Day

(Asalha Puja) Asalha Puja, known as “**Dharma Day**”, is celebrated on the full-moon day in July. This day commemorates the very first time the Buddha taught Dharma to the five monks in the Deer Park at Benares, India.



Sangha Day (Kathina)

Sangha Day or Kathina is usually held in October. In the Theravada or Southern tradition, monks go on a three-month retreat during the rainy season. After the retreat, the laity offers robes and gifts to them. This day symbolizes the close relationship between the monks and the lay people. On almost all of these special occasions, Buddhists celebrate these events by taking the Threefold Refuge, accepting observance of the Five Precepts, offering flowers and incense to the Buddha, chanting Sutras, meditating, offering alms to the monks and nuns and listening to Dharma talks.



Buddhism in the World

The Buddha is the founder of Buddhism. He lived and taught in northern India some 2,500 years ago. He had shown people how to live wisely and happily and his teachings soon spread all over India. The Buddha passed away in **543 BCE**, but his teachings have spread from India throughout Asia, and beyond. People in the West had heard of the Buddha and his teaching as early as the 13th century when Marco Polo (1254–1324), the Italian traveler who explored Asia, wrote accounts on Buddhism in his book, ‘Travels of Marco Polo’.

Ananda Metteya By courtesy of the Buddhist Society, London



From the 18th century onwards, Buddhist texts were brought to Europe and translated into English, French and German.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Alan Bennett, an Englishman, went to Burma to become a Buddhist monk. He was renamed Ananda Metteya. He returned to Britain in 1908. He was the first British person to become a Buddhist monk. He taught Dharma in Britain.

Since then, Buddhist monks and nuns from Sri Lanka, Thailand, Japan, China and other Buddhist countries in Asia have come to the West, particularly over the last seventy years. Many of these teachers have kept to their original customs while others have adapted to some extent to meet the demands of living in a western society.

In recent years, there has been a marked growth of interest in Buddhism in Europe. The membership of existing societies has increased and many new Buddhist centers have been established. Their members include large numbers of professionals and scholars. Today, Britain alone has over 140 Buddhist centers found in most major cities.



Buddhist Stories

Since the teachings of the Buddha are difficult to understand, the Buddha often used stories to illustrate them. The following ten stories help to explain the Dharma mentioned in this book.

Kisa Gautami

The First Noble Truth — Suffering (Dukkha)

Kisa Gautami was a young woman from a rich family who was married to a wealthy merchant. When her only son was about a year old, he suddenly fell ill and died.

Overcome with grief, Kisa Gautami took the dead child in her arms and went from house to house asking people if they knew of a medicine that could restore her child's life. Of course no one was able to help her. Finally, she met a follower of the Buddha, who advised her to see the Buddha. When she carried the dead child to the Buddha and told him her sad story, he listened with patience and compassion.



He said to her, “*There is only one way to solve your problem. Go and get me five mustard seeds from any family in which there has never been a death.*” Kisa Gautami set off to look for such a household but without success. Every family she visited had experienced the death of one person or another. At last, she understood what the Buddha had wanted her to find out for herself that death comes to all.

Accepting the fact that death is inevitable, she no longer grieved. She took the child’s body away and later returned to the Buddha to become one of his followers.

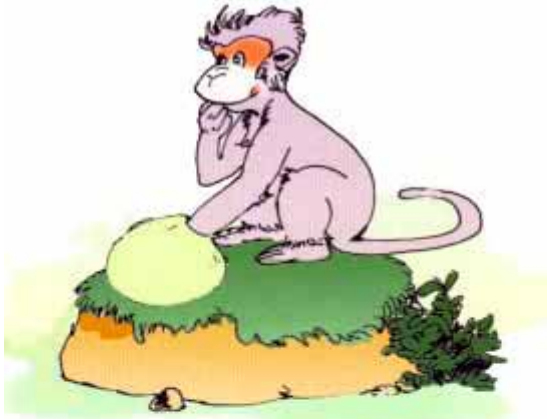
The Buddha taught us to recognize that suffering is a fact of life and that no one can avoid it, as stated in the First Noble Truth.

The Monkey Trap The Second Noble Truth — The cause of suffering

In China, monkeys are caught in a very special way. The trapper first takes a coconut. He then makes a hole on its side just big enough for a hand to go through when it is not clenched into a fist. He then places some peanuts in the coconut and puts it in a spot where monkeys usually visit. Before leaving the coconut behind, he would scatter some peanuts around the coconut. Sooner or later, a curious monkey would come

along. It would first eat the peanuts on the ground. Then, it would find the coconut and see that it is full of peanuts. When it puts its hand into the hole to help itself to the peanuts, it would be unable to withdraw its hand, which is now a fist

full of peanuts. No matter how hard it struggles and pulls, it would not get free. It would cry out loud and become very anxious. All the monkey has to do is to let go of the peanuts to get free, but it would not want to do that. In this situation, the monkey is easily caught by the trapper.



We are like the monkey. We want to be free from suffering, but we are not willing to let go of our desires, which so often get us into trouble. This is the Second Noble Truth.

A Happy Monk

The Third Noble Truth — The end of suffering

There was once a man of wealth and high position who realized that suffering was the same for rich and poor alike. So he became a monk to practice meditation in order to develop his mind. Soon, this old monk had a following of 500 monks. One of these monks always wore a smile, unlike the others who usually looked serious. The old monk was the only one who knew his source of happiness, and this happy monk was soon made his chief assistant. A year later, while they were spending the rainy season in the royal garden at the king's invitation, the old monk was asked to stay in residence at the palace. The happy monk became the new leader of the group. One day, this happy monk went to pay the old monk a visit at the palace. All he would stay to the old

monk on seeing him was, "*What happiness!*"

What happiness!"



The king, who happened to visit the old monk at that time, felt insulted when he was not greeted by this happy monk, who was not even aware of the king's entrance. Seeing the king's displeasure, the old monk said to him: *“Have patience, my king, and I will tell you the source of this monk's happiness. Not many people know of it. He was once a king like you. But having given up his kingly life for that of a monk, he had found his present joy! Sitting alone in the forest, he had nothing to fear and no need for armed guards to surround him. Free from the worry over wealth and power, his wisdom now protects himself and others. He has found such inner peace in meditation that he cannot help saying: “What happiness! What happiness!”* The king finally understood what true happiness was. He honored the two monks before returning to his palace.

Unattached to wealth and power, happiness increases. This is the Third Noble Truth.

Raft The Fourth Noble Truth — Path leading to the end of suffering

A man who was escaping from a group of bandits came to a vast stretch of water that was in his way. He knew that this side of the shore was dangerous and the other side was safe. However, there was no boat going to the other shore, nor was there any bridge for crossing over. So he quickly gathered wood, branches and leaves to make a raft, and with the help of the raft, he crossed over safely to the other side.



The Noble Eightfold Path taught by the Buddha is like the raft. It would take us from the suffering of this shore to the other shore of no suffering.

You Cannot Dirty the Sky

Right Speech — Avoid using harsh words in speech

One day, an angry man with a bad temper went to see the Buddha. The man used harsh words to abuse the Buddha. The Buddha listened to him patiently and quietly, and did not say anything as the man spoke. The angry man finally stopped speaking.

Only then did the Buddha ask him, *“If someone wants to give you something, but you don’t want to accept it, to whom does the gift belong?”*



“Of course it belongs to the person who tried to give it away in the first place,” the man answered.

“Likewise it is with your abuse,” said the Buddha. “I do not wish to accept it, and so it belongs to you. You would have to keep this gift of harsh words and abuse for yourself. And I am afraid that in the end you will have to suffer for it, for a bad man who abuses a good man can only bring suffering on himself. It is as if a man wanted to dirty the sky by spitting at it. His spittle can never make the sky dirty, it would only fall onto his own face and make it dirty instead.”

The man listened to the Buddha and felt ashamed. He asked the Buddha to forgive him and became one of his followers.

Only kind words and reasoning can influence and transform others.

The Brave Quail The First Precept — **No killing**

In a forest near Varanasi, there once lived some quails. The shady grove in which they nested was also the favorite grazing ground of a herd of elephants. A wise and righteous elephant was the leader of that herd. One day, one of the quails laid some eggs.

Soon the fledglings were hatched, but the quail was worried they might be trampled to death by the elephants. The elephant leader assured the quail that the fledglings will not be harmed by his herd because he would stand over the nest when the other elephants grazed.



But he warned the quail that a rogue elephant that was coming their way might bring them harm. Soon after the good elephant and his herd had left, the rogue elephant arrived. The mother quail begged at his feet for mercy. Despite this, the rogue elephant lashed his trunk at the nest and killed all the fledglings. Grief over her dead children made the quail bold and set her thinking hard. She went to tell the crow about this, and asked him to peck out the elephant's eyes. Then she went to an ant to tell her sad story, and the ant offered to lay eggs in the empty sockets of the elephant's eyes. She further went to the frog to unfold her plans: When the ants hatch from the eggs, the rogue elephant will be badly stung. He will run blindly looking for water to ease his pain. If the frog croaked from the steep precipice nearby, the elephant would follow the sound and go to the edge of the cliff. One step further towards the sound would send him hurtling down to his death.

This was exactly what happened later.

This story is a good lesson to all the strong ones who want to harm the weak and the helpless.

Habit of Committing Adultery

The Third Precept — No sexual misconduct

There was once a man who had the habit of committing adultery. Even though he had been arrested a number of times for his misconduct, he did not change his ways. In

desperation, his father brought him to the Buddha for advice. The Buddha pointed out that a person who indulges in sexual misconduct creates problems and suffering for himself as well as others. He not only squanders his money and loses his reputation but also creates enemies for himself.

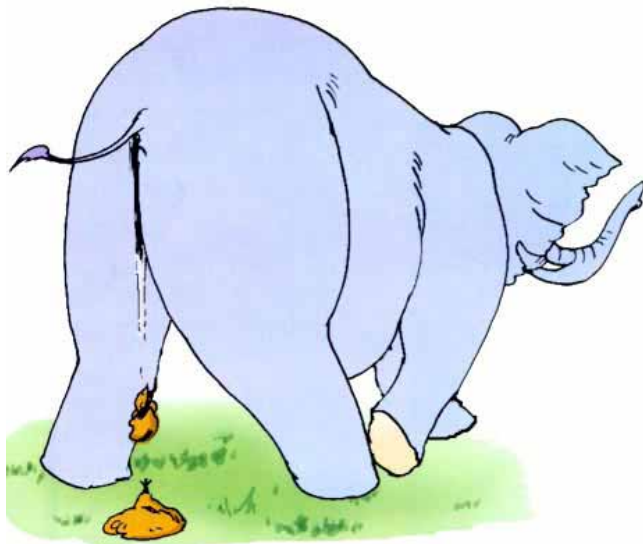
Serious consequences often result from sexual misconduct, but they are usually overlooked at the time when it is being committed.

A Fly and an Elephant

The Fifth Precept —

Avoiding intoxicant drinks and drugs

One day, a dump fly tasted a bit of liquor left in a coconut shell.



After that, he felt heavier and stronger than before. So he went back to the dump again. As soon as he landed on the dump, the dump heap



was lowered a little. The fly thought, “*Look, I am so strong.*”

At this time, an elephant happened to pass by. The fly said, “*My dear friend, have you come here for a fight? I am ready today.*” The elephant walked over to the dump. He did not say a single word but just gave a big thump with its hoof and killed all the flies.

Taking intoxicant drinks and drugs will make us lose our senses like the fly. That is why the Buddha wanted us to refrain from using them.

A Layman who violates the Five Precepts

The importance of keeping to the precepts

Once there was a layman who received the Five Precepts. At first, these precepts were very important to him and he strictly observed them. After a time, however, his past habits came back and he longed for a taste of alcohol. He thought, of the five precepts, the one against drinking is really unnecessary. “*What’s wrong with a tot or two?*” He bought three bottles of wine and started to drink. As he was drinking the second bottle, the neighbor’s little chicken ran into his house. “*They’ve sent me a snack,*” he thought. “*I’ll put this chicken on the menu to help send down my wine.*” He then grabbed the bird and killed it. Thus, he broke the

precept against killing. Since he took the chicken without the owner's permission, he also broke the precept against stealing. Suddenly, the lady next door walked in and said, *"Say, did you see my chicken?"*

Drunk as he was, and full of chicken, he slurred, *"No... I didn't see any chicken. Your old pu... pu... pullet didn't run over here."* So saying, he broke the precept against lying. Then he took a look at the woman and thought she was quite pretty. He molested the lady and broke the precept against sexual misconduct. Not keeping to one precept that he thought was not important had led him to break all the precepts.

"As an acrobat clears the ground before he shows his tricks, so good conduct (keeping the precepts) is the basis of all good qualities." (Questions of King Milinda)

The Elephant Nalagiri

Loving-Kindness

Devadatta was one of the Buddha's disciples and also his cousin. He therefore expected to become the future leader among the monks. To his surprise, the Buddha treated him like everyone else. This made him so angry that he plotted to harm the Buddha. In the village, there was an elephant known to be a man-killer. Her name was **Nalagiri**. One day, Devadatta gave Nalagiri some alcohol to make her go wild. He then drove the elephant onto the path where the Buddha was walking. As soon as Nalagiri caught sight of the Buddha, she rushed

towards him in a mad fury. People scattered in fright in all directions. They shouted, “*Mad elephant! Run for your lives!*”

To everyone’s surprise, the Buddha faced Nalagiri calmly as he raised his hand to touch her. The huge creature felt



the power of the Buddha’s com-*passion* and readily went on her knees in front of him, as if bowing humbly.

Loving-kindness can turn hostility into respect.

Glossary

Arahat - a person who has overcome desire, ill will and ignorance

Asalha Puja - a festive Buddhist event also known as Dharma Day, celebrated in July to commemorate the first time the Buddha taught the Dharma

Buddha - one who has attained full enlightenment; also known as the Perfect One.

Dharma - the teachings of the Buddha

Dukkha - suffering or unhappiness

Kathina a festive Buddhist event also known as Sangha Day, usually celebrated in October when the laity would make offerings to the monks and nuns

Mahayana the form of Buddhism prevalent in Tibet, Mongolia, China, Japan and other places in the Far East; commonly known as the Northern Tradition

Mara - the evil one

Nirvana - a state of ultimate peace and happiness

Sangha - a community of monks or nuns

Theravada - the form of Buddhism prevalent in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam and Burma; commonly known as the Southern Tradition.

Vesak - a festive Buddhist event also known as Buddha Day, celebrated in May to commemorate the Buddha's birthday

Visakha Puja - the name used in Thailand for Buddha Day

List of Pali/Sanskrit words

Buddhist texts were originally written in the two Indian languages Pali and Sanskrit. Pali is commonly used in the Theravada (Southern tradition) and Sanskrit is commonly used in the Mahayana (Northern tradition). There are words of both languages in the book.

Pali	Sanskrit	Pali	Sanskrit
Alara Kalama	Arada Kalama	Moggallana	Maudgalyayana
Ananda	Ananda	Nalagiri	Nalagiri
Anathapindika	Anathapindada	Nibbana	Nirvana
Arahants	Arhats	Pajapati	Prajapati
Asalha Puja	Asalha Puja	Rahula	Rahula
Asita	Asita	Rajagaha	Rajagrha
Assaji	Ashvajit	Sakyan	Shakyan
Bimbisara	Bimbisara	Sangha	Sangha
Bodhi	Bodhi	Sariputta	Shariputra
Channa	Chandaka	Savatthi	Shravasti
Chunda	Chunda	Siddhattha	Siddhartha
Devadatta	Devadatta	Sudatta	Sudatta
Dhamma	Dharma	Suddhodana	Shuddhodana
Dukkha	Duhkha	Sujata	Sujata
Gotama	Gautama	Theravada	Theravada
Jeta	Jeta	Uddaka	Udraka
Kanthaka	Kanthaka	Uruvela	Uruvilva
Kapilavatthu	Kapilavasthu	Vaidehi	Vaidehi
Kassapa	Kashyapa	Varanasi	Varanasi
Kathina	Kathina	Vesak (Wesak)	Vaishaka
Kisa Gotami	Kisa Gautami	Vesali	Vaisali
Ksema	Kshema	Visakha	Vishakha
Kusinara	Kusinagara	Visvamitta	Visvamitra
Lumbini	Lumbini	Wisakha Puja	Wisakha Puja
Magadha	Magadha	Yasa	Yasha
Mara	Mara	Yasodhara	Yasodhara
Maya	Maya		

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