CHAPTER-3
LIFE SKETCH OF BHAGAVAN BUDDHA

3.1 Birth and Childhood :

3.1.1. The Birth :

It is a peculiar thing, and very characteristic of the real meaning of the true Buddhism, that there is no life of the Buddha in the Buddhist Scriptures.\(^1\) Out of two places of the Scriptures the first of these passages in the Mahāpadāna sutta\(^2\) is really a legend, which gives not only the length of life, city, caste, parents, and chief disciples but also in exactly the same phraseology the same detail concerning the six previous Buddhas. The other is in the Buddhavaṃsa,\(^3\) a poem not reckoned as canonical by all schools, which uses much the same phraseology, and extends the information to twenty four preceding Buddhas.\(^4\) Such legends are indeed of the greatest possible historical value from the comparative point of view. Similar legends are related of all the founders of great religions, and even of the more famous kings and conquerors in the ancient world. In a certain stage of intellectual progress it is a necessity of the human mind that such legends should grow up.\(^5\) The generally accepted accounts says that he was a Sākiyan, son of Suddhodana, chief ruler of Kapilavatthu, and of Mahā Māyā, Suddhodana’s chief consort, and he belonged to the Gotama-gotta. His chief wife is known under various names: Bhaddakaccā or Kaccānā, Yasodharā, Bimbā, Bimbasundarī and Gopā. She, later, comes to be called Rāhulamātā because their son is called Rāhula.\(^6\)

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\(^2\) DB. II, pp.6-7.


The early history of Buddhism is bound up with the life of its founder, the Buddha whose actual historical figure is generally accepted. Most of what is known of the Buddha comes from later accounts rather than contemporary historical records made during his lifetime. In 1896 a team of Nepalese archaeologists discovered a marker honoring the Buddha’s birthplace. The birthplace of the Buddha is identified with Rummindei, by the discovery of an Asokan pillar bearing an inscription which states that —By His Sacred and Gracious Majesty the King, consecrated twenty years, coming in person, was worshipped this spot, in as much as here was born the Buddha Sakyamuni. A stone bearing a figure was caused to be constructed and a pillar of stone was also set up, to show that the Blessed One was born here. The village Lumbini was made free of religious cesses and also liable to pay only one-eighth share of the produce. In Suttanipāta it is said: The Bodhisatta, excellent jewel, incomparable, has been born in the world of men for their benefit and happiness in the village of Sakyans, in the Lumbini country. At the time of the Buddha’s birth, the area was at or beyond the boundary of Vedic civilization and it is even possible that his mother tongue was not an Indo-Aryan language. At the time, a multitude of small city-states existed in Ancient India, called Janapadas. Republics and chiefdoms with diffused political power and limited social stratification, were not uncommon amongst them, and were referred to as gaṇa-sanghas. The Buddha’s community does not seem to have had a caste system. It was not a monarchy, and seems to have been structured either as an oligarchy, or as a form of republic.

The country of the Sakya or Sākiya where the Buddha was raised is known only from Buddhist writings as Kapilavatthu. Modern investigation has placed it

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9 Nālaka Sutta (GD. P.78).
in the north-east portion of the United Provinces, and along the borders of Nepal between Bahraish and Gorakhpur.\textsuperscript{13} It was far to the east of the Holy Land of Brahmin tradition, and there can be but little doubt that, at the time, the inhabitants of that district were many respects more independent of the Brahmins than the countries farther west. There is no evidence that there was any large number of Brahmins settled in the country, which was inhabited by a high-caste tribe, forming the Sakya clan. Mr. Beal, the late translator of so many Chinese Buddhist books, was of opinion that this very word Sakya was sufficient evidence to show that the clan was of Skythian, and therefore of Mongolian, origin.\textsuperscript{14} Apart from the legendary and historical facts the day of the Buddha’s birth is widely celebrated in Buddhist countries as Vesak.

2.1.2. The Chronology :

Chronology is one of the most besetting problems in ancient Indian history. The available sources are insufficient for the reconstruction of exact chronological information. Though there is general agreement that the Buddha lived for eighty years, but precisely when, is hard to point out without drawing criticism. Innate inconsistencies in the traditional Buddhist chronology have been suggested form time to time.\textsuperscript{15} Some sources give the date of the Buddha’s birth as 563 B.C.E. and others as 624 B.C.E. but Theravada Buddhist countries tend to use the latter figure. This displaces all the dates in the following table about sixty one years further back. On the above basic, the timeline of the Buddha is figured thus:

\begin{center}
The Buddha’s birth – 563 B.C.E. \\
The Buddha’s enlightenment – 528 B.C.E. \\
The Buddha’s demise – 483 B.C.E.
\end{center}

There is controversy about the base date of the Buddhist Era with 544 B.C. and 483 B.C. being advanced as the date of the Parinibbāna of the Buddha. Hence the approximate date of the Parinibbāna is between 485 and 481 B.C. which

accords well with the Mahayana dating of 483 B.C. The latest calculation, however, shows the 397 B.C. may only be taken as a rough approximation to the year in which the Buddha expired.\textsuperscript{16}

2.1.3. The Lifeworks:

Buddhist mythology states that the Buddha went to meditate beneath a pipal tree, now known as the Bodhi tree. Later that night the Buddha was to realize the Four Noble Truths, achieving enlightenment during the night of the full-moon day of the month of May, Vesakha at a place now called Buddhagayā. After this enlightenment, the story continues that the Buddha sought out five companions and delivered to them his first sermon, the hammacakkappavattana Sutta\textsuperscript{17} at Sarnath. The Buddha taught that those in search of enlightenment should not follow the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification.

Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata discovers the middle path leading to vision, to knowledge, to calmness, to awakening, and to Nibbāna. This middle path is known as the Noble Eightfold Path, and consists of right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right living, right endeavour, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This is the fundamental framework of the Buddhist teaching which came out from the very first step of the Buddha’s lifework.

The traditional story of the Buddha, like those of most saints and heroes of ancient days, has suffered much at the hand of higher criticism. Some of the references to him in those parts of the canon which purport to give his teachings verbatim are by no means reliable. Even the Sermon of the Turning of the Wheel of the Law, which is said to be the first sermon preached after the Buddha’s enlightenment, and which is the basic teaching of all Buddhist sects, is dubious authenticity, and in the form in which it is not among the earliest parts of the canon.\textsuperscript{18} Despite such contentious facts, it is believed that the Buddha started his Dhamma missionary by delivering the first discourse.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p.48.
\textsuperscript{17} BD. IV, p.15
For forty five years of his life, the Buddha is said to have travelled in the Gangetic Plain,\(^{19}\) teaching his doctrine and discipline to an extremely diverse range of people\(^{20}\) from nobles to outcaste street sweepers, mass murderers such as Āṅgulimāla and cannibals such as Āḷāvaka. This extended too many adherents of rival philosophies and religions. Thus the Buddha who regarded no wealth, no rank, no caste, came to the poor and the despised, as well as to the rich and the noble, urging them to affect their own salvation by a pure and unblemished life. Virtue opened the path of honour to high and low alike; no distinction was known or recognized in the Buddhist community. Thousands of men and women responded to this appeal, and merged their caste inequalities in common love for their teacher and common emulation of his virtues. The Buddha founded the community of Buddhist monks and nuns along with laity\(^{21}\) to continue the dispensation after his Parinibbāna and made thousands of converts. His religion was open to all races and classes and had no caste structure. He was also subject to attack from opposition religious groups, including attempted murders and framings. The Buddha however, did not give up his mission till the last day of his life.

### 3.1.4 Queen Maha Maya’s Dream:

More than 2500 years ago, there was a king called Suddhodana. He married a beautiful Koliyan princess named Maha Maya. The couple ruled over the Sakyas, a warrior tribe living next to the Koliya tribe, in the north of India, in what is now known as Nepal. The capital of the Sakya country was laid out across the foothills of the Himalayas and called Kapilavatthu.

Queen Maha Maya was the daughter of King Anjana of the Koliyas. Such was her beauty that the name Maya, meaning “vision” was given to her. But it

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\(^{20}\) Based on the Buddhist Literature, the people who visited the Buddha for discussion or had interviews with him or received instruction and guidance direct from him are approximately counted as 308 (*Ibid.*, p.808-810).

\(^{21}\) 43 monks, 13 nuns, 11 laymen and 10 laywomen are listed as the Buddha’s most eminent disciples as having possessed pre-eminence in some particular respect. (GS. I, pp. 16-21).
was Maya’s virtues and talents that were her most wonderful qualities, for she was endowed with the highest gives of intelligence and piety. King Suddhodana was indeed worthy of his lovely wife. He himself was called “King of the Law” because he ruled according to the law. There was no other man among the Sakyas more honored and respected. The king was admired by his nobles and courtiers, as well as by the householders and merchants. Such was the noble family from which the Buddha was to arise.

One full moon night, sleeping in the palace, the queen had a vivid dream. She felt herself being carried away by four devas (spirits) to Lake Anotatta in the Himalayas. After bathing her in the lake, the devas clothed her in heavenly cloths, anointed her with perfumes, and bedecked her with divine flowers. Soon after a white elephant, holding a white lotus flower in its trunk, appeared and went round her three times, entering her womb through her right side. Finally the elephant disappeared and the queen awoke, knowing she had been delivered an important message, as the elephant is a symbol of greatness in Nepal. The next day, early in the morning, the queen told the king about the dream. The king was puzzled and sent for some wise men to discover the meaning of the dream.

The wise men said, “Your Majesty, you are very lucky. The devas have chosen our queen as the mother of the Purest-One and the child will become a very great being.” The king and queen were very happy when they heard this. They were so pleased that they invited many of the noblemen in the country to the palace to a feast to tell them the good news. Even the needy were not forgotten. Food and clothes were given to the poor people in celebration. The whole kingdom waited eagerly for the birth of the new prince, and queen Maya enjoyed a happy and healthy pregnancy, living a pure life for herself and her unborn child.

3.1.5 The Birth of the Prince:

About ten months after her dream of a white elephant and the sign that she would give birth to a great leader, queen Maya was expecting her child. One day she went to the king and said, “My dear, I have to go back to my parents. My baby is almost due.” Since it was the custom in India for a wife to have her baby
in her father’s house, the king agreed, saying, “Very well, I will make the necessary arrangements for you to go.” The king then sent soldiers ahead to clear the road and prepared others to guard the queen as she was carried in a decorated palanquin. The queen left Kapilavatthu in a long procession of soldiers and retainers, headed for the capital of her father’s kingdom.

On the way to the Koliya country, the great procession passed a garden called Lumbini Park. This garden was near the kingdom called Nepal, at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains. The beautiful park with its sala trees and scented flowers and busy birds and bees attracted the queen. Since the park was a good resting place, the queen ordered the bearers to stop for a while. As she rested underneath one of the sala trees, her birth began and a baby boy was born. It was an auspicious day. The birth took place on a full moon (which is now celebrated as Vesak, the festival of the triple event of Buddha’s birth, enlightenment and death), in the year 623 B.C.

According to the legends about this birth, the baby began to walk seven steps forward and at each step a lotus flower appeared on the ground. Then, at the seventh stride, he stopped and with a noble voice shouted:

“I am chief of the world, Eldest am I in the world, Foremost am I in the world. This is the last birth. There is now no more coming to be.”

After the birth of her baby son, Queen Maha Maya immediately returned to Kapilavatthu. When the king learnt of this he was very happy, and as news of the birth of the long-awaited heir spread around the kingdom there was rejoicing all over the country.

3.1.6 The Naming Ceremony:

King Suddhodana had an old teacher who was known to be very wise. He was called Asita the Sage. Asita lived in the jungle. While sitting one day he heard the devas singing and saw them dancing. “Why are you so happy?” he asked. “Because the most excellent of all beings has been born at Lumbini Park to Queen Maha Maya,” replied the devas. When he heard this, Asita went quickly to
see the king and queen and their newborn son. The king was very happy to see his wise old teacher again. In the palace, after the sage was seated; the king brought the prince before him and said, “Teacher, my son was born only yesterday. Here he is. Please see if his future will be good.”

As the king said this, he lowered the infant prince before the sage so that he might examine him properly. However, the baby turned his feet on to the sage’s head. Thus surprised, Asita took hold of the baby’s feet and examined them very carefully, finding some marks on them. He got up and said, “This prince will become a very great teacher in this world.” The sage was very pleased and, putting his palms together, paid due respect to the baby prince. The king, seeing this, did the same. This was the first salutation of the king.

On the fifth day of his son’s life, the king invited five wise men to witness the naming ceremony and to suggest a good name for the prince. The wise men examined the birthmarks of the prince and concluded, “The prince will be King of Kings if he wants to rule. If he chooses a religious life then he will become the Wisest—the Buddha.” The youngest of the five wise men, Kondanna, then said, “This prince will be the Buddha and nothing else.”

Then the wise men gave him the name Siddhartha meaning “wish fulfilled” or “one who has accomplished his goal”.

3.1.7 The Prince’s Education

On the seventh day after his birth, Prince Siddhartha’s mother died. The king had another queen, who was called Prajapati Gotami. She was the younger sister of Queen Maha Maya, and she had given birth to a son on the same day that Queen Maha Maya died. Prajapati Gotami gave her own son to a nurse and brought up Prince Siddhartha, whom she loved very much, as her own son. Prince Siddhartha could not remember his own mother.

When Prince Siddhartha was only a few years old, King Suddhodana sent him to school. There were many children in his class, all of them from noble families. His teacher was called Sarva Mitra. He studied languages, reading, writing, mathematics, history, geography, science, and games like boxing,
archery, wrestling and many others. He learnt all these subjects faster than any other pupil in his class. He was the cleverest in the class and the best at games. He gained distinction in every subject and became cleverer than his teachers. He was the wisest and the only one who asked many questions from his teachers and elders. He was the strongest, the tallest and the most handsome boy in the class. He was never lazy; he never misbehaved and was never disobedient to the teachers. He loved everybody and everybody loved him. He was a friend to all.

3.1.8 Prince’s Siddhartha’s Kindness:

Prince Siddhartha was very kind to people, animals and other living things. He was also a very brave horseman and won many prizes in the country. Although he did not have to suffer any hardships and difficulties, as he had everything, he always thought of the poor people and living things who were working hard to make him happy. He felt sorry for them and wanted to make them happy too.

One day he was walking in the woods with his cousin Devadatta, who had brought his bow and arrows with him. Suddenly, Devadatta saw a swan flying and shot at it. His arrow brought the swan down. Both the boys ran to get the bird. As Siddhartha could run faster than Devadatta, he reached the swan’s injured body first and found, to his surprise, that it was still alive. He gently pulled out the arrow from the wing. He then got a little juice from cool leaves, put it on the wound to stop the bleeding and with his soft hand stroked the swan, which was very frightened. When Devadatta came to claim the swan, Prince Siddhartha refused to give it to him. Devadatta was very angry to see his cousin keeping the swan away from him.

"Give me my bird! I shot it down," said Devadatta.

"No, I am not going to give it to you," said the Prince. "If you had killed it, it would have been yours. But now, since it is only wounded but still alive, it belongs to me." Devadatta still did not agree. Then Siddhartha suggested, "Let us go to the court of the Sage and ask him who really owns the swan." Devadatta agreed, so off they went to the court of the Sage to tell him about their quarrel. The Sage, hearing boys’ version of the story, said, "A life certainly must belong to the who tries to save it, a life cannot belong to one who is only trying to destroy it. The wounded swan by right belongs to Siddhartha."
3.1.9 Prince Siddhartha’s Wife:

The five wise men who were at Prince Siddhartha’s naming ceremony not only predicted the great future of the new prince, but had given the king a warning. “When your son sees a sick man, an old man, a dead body and a monk, he will want to leave the palace and become a monk himself,” they had said.

These words worried the king. He became afraid that this son would see these four sights and leave the palace. To shield Siddhartha from any such experiences he employed many young servants to distract and protect him, and did not allow any sick or old people or monks to go into the palace. He built Siddhartha three palaces: one for winter, one for summer and one for the rainy season, as well as enclosed parks and hunting grounds. Siddhartha played in a sunny world of gardens and groves, amended by dancing girls and musicians. He lived in a world of plenty and beauty. He could have whatever he wanted, yet he was not happy. One day the king asked some wise people, “What shall I do to make my son happy? He seems depressed and sad always.” They answered, “Now your son is sixteen years old, why not finding him a beautiful girl to marry?” The king agreed and sent for all the beautiful girls in the country to come to the palace. When they had all arrived, a grand parade was arranged and the king asked the prince to choose one to be his wife.

Among them there was a most charming and kind girl by the name of Yasodhara. When Prince Siddhartha gave her a present more valuable than any he had given to the other maidens, the king saw that the prince had chosen his love. The king happily accepted Yasodhara and allowed his son to marry her.

3.2 Indelible impacts on Buddha:
3.2.1 The Four Sights: Old Age

The king did everything he could think of to ensure his son Prince Siddhartha would grow up prepared for a life following in his own footsteps and become a king. He ordered a high wall to be built around the palace, including its parks and gardens, but the prince was not happy living like a prisoner. One day he told his father, “I must go out of the palace gate and see how other people live.”
“Very well, my son,” said the king, “you shall go outside the palace wall to see how people live in my city. But first I must prepare things, so that all would be good and proper for my noble son’s visit.”

The king ordered the people of the city to prepare for his son’s visit by making the streets and homes beautiful and welcoming him as he passed them by. When the people had decorated the city the king said, “Now you can go, my dear son, and see the city as you please.”

As the young prince was going through the streets all of a sudden, from a small old hut beside the road, out came an old man with long silver-grey hair, wearing very old, torn and dirty rags. The skin of his face was dried and wrinkled. His sunken eyes were dim and he was almost blind. There were no teeth in his mouth. He stood up, trembling all over, almost bent over double and clutching at a shaking stick with two bent and skinny hands to save himself from falling.

The old beggar dragged himself along the street, paying no attention to all the happy people around him. He was speaking very feebly, begging people around him to give him food, as he would die that very day if he could find nothing to eat. When the prince saw the old man, he didn’t know what he was looking at. It was the first time in his life that he had seen an old man of this type.

“What is that, Channa?” he asked his driver. “That really cannot be a man! Why is he all bent? What is he trembling for? Why is his hair silver-grey, not black like mine? What is wrong with his eyes? Where are his teeth? Is this how some people are born? Tell me, oh good Channa, what does this mean?”

Channa told the prince that it was an old man and he was not born like that. “When young he was like us and now, due to his old age he has become this way.” Channa told the prince to forget this man. But the prince was not satisfied. “Everyone in the world, if he lives long enough, becomes like this man. It cannot be stopped,” said Channa. The prince ordered Channa to drive back home at once, as he was very sad and wanted to think carefully about that terrible thing called old age. That night there was a grand royal feast for the prince, but he was not interested or happy at all during the dinner and dance. He was thinking all the
time, “Someday you will all grow old and frail and bent—every one of you, even the prettiest.” He could not sleep when night came. He was in bed thinking that one day, everyone would grow old, grey, wrinkled, toothless and ugly like the old beggar. He wanted to know if anyone had found a way to stop this horrible thing—old age.

The king, when he heard this story, was very sad and worried that his son would leave the palace. He told his attendants to put on more dances and dinners. But the prince begged his father to allow him to see Kapilavatthu on an ordinary day without the people being told of his visit.

### 3.2.2 The Four Sights: Sickness:

The king very unwillingly allowed the prince to visit the city a second time. He thought it would do no good to try to stop him, and would only add to his confusion and unhappiness. On his second visit to the city the king did not warn the people to be ready or to prepare the streets. The prince and Channa dressed up as young men from noble families so the people would not know them. When they arrived, the city was quite different to their last visit. No more joyous crowds of people hailed the prince. There were no flags, bunting, flowers or well-dressed people, but simple folk going about their daily work to earn a living. A blacksmith was sweating and pounding to make knives. The jewelers and goldsmiths were making necklaces, bangles, earrings and rings out of diamonds, gold and silver. The clothes-dyers were dyeing cloths of lovely colour and hanging them up to dry. The bakers were busily baking bread, cakes and sweets and selling them to the customers, who ate them, still hot. The prince looked at these simple common people. Everyone was very busy, happy and pleased in their work.

As the two walked along they came across a man on the ground, twisting his body, holding his stomach with both hands and crying out in pain at the top of his voice. All over his face and body were purple patches, his eyes were rolling, and he was gasping for breath. For the second time in his life something made the prince very sad. At once the prince, being a very kind person and not liking to see
people distressed, ran forward and rested the man’s head on his knee, saying, “What is wrong with you? What is wrong?” The sick man could not speak, but only cry. “Channa, tell me why this man is like this,” said the prince. “What is the matter with his breath? Why does he not talk?” “Oh, my prince,” said Channa, “does not hold this man like that. This man is sick. His blood is poisoned. He has plague fever and it is burning all over his body. That is why he is crying loudly without being able to speak.”

“But are there any other men like this?” asked the prince. “Yes, and you may be the next if you hold the man as close as that. Please put him down and do not touch him or the plague will come out of him and go to you. You will become the same as he is.” “Are there any other bad things, besides this plague, Channa?” “Yes, my prince, there are hundreds of other sicknesses as painful as this,” replied Channa.

“Can no one help it? Will everyone be sick? Can it happen at any time by surprise?” asked Siddhartha. “Yes, my dear prince,” said Channa, “everyone in this world. No one can stop it and it can happen any time. Anyone may fall ill and suffer.” The prince was even sadder as he returned to the palace the second time, dwelling on the man and his sickness.

### 3.2.3 The Four Sights: Death

On returning to the palace after seeing the sick man, Siddhartha was very dissatisfied and depressed and was often seen in deep thought. The king, seeing him so changed, became very sad. Soon enough, the prince asked again for the king’s permission to leave the palace to learn more of life in the city. The king agreed, as he knew there was nothing to gain by trying to stop his son.

This time, again wearing the clothes of noblemen, Siddhartha and Channa went out from the palace and walked in many parts of Kapilavatthu. After they had journeyed a good part of the day, the prince saw a crowd of people coming along the street crying, while four men at the back were carrying a plank on which a very thin man lay flat and still. The carried man was like a stone, never saying a
word. The crowd soon stopped and the plank bearers rested the person down on a pile of wood and set the wood on fire. The man did not move as the flames were burning the plank, and then his body, from all sides.

“What is this, Channa?” asked Siddhartha. “Why does that man lie there so still, allowing these people to burn him up? It’s as if he does not know anything.” “He is dead,” replied Channa. “Dead! Channa, does everyone die?” “Yes, my dear prince, all living things must die some day. No one can stop death from coming,” replied Channa. The prince was so shocked he did not say anything more. He thought that it was terrible that such a thing called death should come to everybody, even kings and queens. Was there no way to stop it? He went home in silence. He went straight to his own room in the palace and sat deep in thought for the rest of the day. Very sadly he pondered, “Everyone in the world must die some day; no one has found out how to stop it. There must be a way to stop it. I must find it out and help the whole world.”

3.2.4 The Four Sights: A Monk

After many days of contemplation and distress, Siddhartha visited the city for the fourth time. As he was driving to the park he saw a happy man wearing an orange coloured robe. He asked Channa, “Who is this man wearing an orange robe? His hair is shaved off. Why does he look so happy? How does he live and what does he do for a living?”. “That is a monk.” replied Channa, “He lives in a temple, goes from house to house for his food and goes from place to place telling people how to be peaceful and good.” The prince felt very happy now. He thought, “I must become one like that,” as he walked through the park.

He walked until he was tired, then sat under a tree to think some more. As he was sitting under the cool shady tree, news came that his wife had given birth to a fine baby boy. When he heard the news he said, “An impediment (“rahula”) has been born to me, an obstacle to my leaving has been born,” and thus his son’s name became Rahula. As he was returning to the palace he met the Princess called Kisagotami. She had been looking out of the palace window and, seeing the prince coming, was so taken by his handsome looks that she said loudly, “Oh! How happy must be the mother, and father, and the wife of such a handsome young prince!”
As he passed this woman, Siddhartha heard this and thought to himself, “In a handsome figure the mother, father and wife find happiness. But how does one escape obstacles and suffering to reach nirvana (escape from suffering, a lasting liberation which is happiness and genuine peace)?” With this question he realised what he must do. “I must quit this household life and retire from the world in quest of enlightenment. This lady has taught me a valuable lesson. I will send her a teacher’s fee.” Loosening a valuable pearl necklace from about his neck, Siddhartha honoured his word and sent it as payment to Kisagotami, with thanks.

3.2.5. The Prince Leaves Home:

The king, Siddhartha’s father, arranged a grand dinner and dance for the prince to celebrate the birth of Rahula. Invited were the best dancers, singers and musicians in the country. It was not just out of joy that the king arranged the celebration. He could see that the prince was depressed and that his new baby son was not giving him happiness. The king was afraid Siddhartha was planning to leave the palace for good and, for the last time, did his best to distract him away from his somber reflections and back to the abundance of palace life.

The prince attended the party just to please his father. During the dinner the most delicious food was served, the most enchanting and beautiful dancing girls in the country performed, the most sensitive musicians played and the finest puppets and magicians performed incredible feats. But Siddhartha was so tired from thinking that he soon fell asleep. When the singers and the dancers saw this they too stopped and fell asleep. Sometime later that night the prince awoke and was shocked to see these sleeping people. What a sight! All the prettiest, most charming dancing girls, the finest singers, best musicians and cleverest performers in the country, who, hours ago, were trying to make the prince so happy, were now all over the floor of the room in the most ugly, shameful and loathsome positions. Some people were snoring like pigs, with their mouths wide open, some grinding and chewing their teeth like hungry devils. This alteration in their appearance made the prince even more disgusted and unhappy. “How oppressive
and stifling this all is,” he thought, and his mind turned again towards leaving the palace. He got up quietly from the room and, waking Channa, asked for his horse, Kanthaka, to be saddled.

As Channa was preparing his horse, Siddhartha went quietly to see his newborn son for the first time. His wife was sleeping with the baby beside her, her hand resting on the baby’s head. The prince said to himself, “If I try to move her hand so I can take the child for one last cuddle I fear I will wake her and she will prevent me from going. No! I must go, but when I have found what I am looking for, I shall come back and see him and his mother again.”

Quietly then, Siddhartha left the palace. It was midnight, and the prince was on his white horse Kanthaka with Channa, his faithful servant, holding on to its tail. Nobody stopped him as he rode away from all who knew, respected and loved him. He took a last look at the city of Kapilavatthu—sleeping so quietly in the moonlight. He was going away to learn to understand old age, sickness and death. He rode to the bank of the river Anoma (“illustrious”) and dismounted from his horse. He removed his jewellery and princely clothes and gave them to Channa to return to the king. Then the prince took his sword and cut his long hair, donned simple clothes, took a begging bowl and asked Channa to go back with Kanthaka.

“It is no use living in the palace without you, my master,” said Channa very sadly, “I want to follow you.” But Siddhartha would not allow him to stay, although Channa asked three times. At last Channa started to go, but Kanthaka refused. The prince talked to the horse very kindly. “Please, Kanthaka, go with my friend. Don’t wait for me.” But Kanthaka thought, “I shall never see my master again.” Tears rolled down from the horse’s eyes as it kept them fixed on the prince, until he turned to go away and walked out of sight. As Siddhartha disappeared over the horizon, so Kanthaka’s heart burst, and he died of sorrow.

3.2.6. King Bimbisara’s Offer:

From the Anoma River, dressed as a beggar, the young prince wandered from place to place. Eventually he came to Rajagaha City, where King Bimbisara lived. With his begging bowl in his hands Siddhartha walked round the streets
begging for food from door to door like any other religious monk. People began to call him “Sakyamuni” or sage of the Sakyas, others called him “Ascetic” or “Ascetic Gotama”, but nobody called him Prince Siddhartha any more. He was most handsome, young, healthy, clean and neat. He spoke very kindly and gently. He did not ask people to give him anything but people were happy and pleased to put some food into his bowl. Some people went and told the king, “Your majesty, there is a young man. Some people call him ‘Ascetic Gotama’. He is very clean, neat, kind, polite and not like a beggar at all.” When King Bimbisara heard the name “Gotama” he knew at once that this prince was the son of King Suddhodana, his friend. He went up to him and asked him, “Why do you do this? Have you quarrelled with your father? Why do you go about like this? Stay here and I shall give you half of my kingdom.”“Thank you very much, Sir. I love my parents, my wife, my son, you and everybody. I want to find a way to stop old age, sickness, worries and death. Therefore I am going thus,” said the Ascetic Gotama and off he went.

3.2.7. The Buddha’s Teacher:

At this time in India there were many religious teachers. One of the best and most well known was Alara Kalama. Ascetic Gotama went to study under him. He stayed and was taught many things, including meditation. He worked hard and eventually equalled his teacher in learning. Finally Alara Kalama could not teach Gotama anymore and he said, “You are the same as I am now. There is no difference between us. Stay here and take my place and teach my students with me.” But Gotama was not interested in staying. Despite what he had learnt he could see that he was still subject to old age, sickness, and death and that his quest was not over. Thus, Gotama left Alara Kalama and went in search of a new teacher. At last he found another great teacher, Uddaka, who was famous for his cleverness. Again, Gotama learnt very quickly and soon knew as much as his teacher. He found that Uddaka could not teach him how to stop suffering, old age and death either, and he had never heard of anyone who could solve these problems. Once again the Ascetic Gotama was disappointed and left Uddaka, making up his mind to struggle by himself until he found the cause of all the suffering of life.
3.2.8. Six Years of Searching

After leaving his second teacher, Uddaka, Prince Siddhartha was known as Ascetic Gotama. He met five friends—Kondanna, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama and Assaji—who had also left the palace and a life of luxury to become ascetics, or students of life, living poorly. They went to Uruvela and for six years Gotama struggled and tortured his body while his five friends supported and looked after him. “I will carry austerity to the uttermost,” thought Gotama. “This is the way to acquire wisdom.” He practised fasting, which was thought to be one of the best ways to acquire wisdom. He lived on a grain of rice a day, and later, nothing at all. His body became so thin that his legs were like bamboo sticks, his backbone was like a rope, his chest was like an incomplete roof of a house, his eyes sank right inside, like stones in a deep well. His skin lost its golden colour and became black. In fact, he looked like a living skeleton—all bones without any flesh! He suffered terrible pain and hunger, yet continued to meditate.

Another way of torturing his body was to hold his breath for a long time until he felt violent pains in his ears, head and whole body. He would then fall senseless to the ground. During the full moon and new moon he went out into the forest or to a cemetery to meditate, wearing rags from graveyards and rubbish heaps. He became frightened at first, especially when wild animals came, but he never ran away. He stayed behind bravely in these dreadful places, meditating all the time.

For six long years he did these practices and in spite of the great pain and suffering he did not find wisdom or the answers to his questions. He finally decided, “These austerities are not the way to enlightenment.” He went begging through the village for food to build up his body. When his five friends saw these they felt disappointed. They took their bowls and robes and left, wanting nothing more to do with Gotama.
After hearing the Buddha, many decided to give up the wrong views they previously held regarding their religious way of life. Buddhism is a beautiful gem of many facets, attracting people of diverse personalities. Every facet in this gem has tested methods and approaches that can benefit the Truth seekers with their various levels of understanding and spiritual maturity.

The Buddha Dhamma is the fruit resulting from a most intensive search conducted over a long period of time by a compassionate noble prince whose mission was to help suffering humanity. Despite being surrounded by all the wealth and luxuries normally showered on a crown prince, He renounced His luxurious life and voluntarily embarked on a tough journey to seek the Truth and to find a panacea to cure the sickness of the worldly life with its attendant suffering and unsatisfactoriness. He was bent on finding a solution to alleviate all suffering. In His long search, the prince did not rely on or resort to divine guidance or traditional beliefs as was fashionable in the past. He did an intensive search with a free and open mind, guided solely by His sincerity of purpose, noble resolution, inexhaustible patience, and a truly compassionate heart with the ardent wish to relieve suffering. After six long years of intensive experiment, of trial and error, the noble prince achieved. He gained Enlightenment and gave the world His pristine teachings known as Dhamma or Buddhism.

The Buddha once said, ‘Monks, the lion, king of beasts, at eventide comes forth from his lair. He stretches himself. Having done so, he surveys the four quarters in all directions. Have done that, he utters thrice his lion’s roar. Having thrice uttered his lion’s roar, he sallies forth in search of prey.

‘Now, monks, whatever animals hear the sound of the roaring of the lion, king of beasts, for the most part, they are afraid; they fall to quaking and trembling. Those that dwell in holes seek them; water-dwellers make for the water; forest-dwellers enter the forest; birds mount into the air.

‘Then whatsoever ruler’s elephants in village, town or palace are tethered with stout leather bonds, they burst out and rend those bonds asunder; void their excrements and in panic run to and fro. Thus potent, is the lion, king of beasts, over animals. Of such mighty power and majesty is he.
‘Just so, monks, is it when a Buddha arises in the world, an Arahant, a Perfectly Enlightened One, perfect in wisdom and in conduct, wayfarer, Knower of the worlds, the unsurpassed trainer of those who can be trained, teacher of gods and men, a Buddha, an Exalted One. He teaches the Dhamma; “Such is the nature of concept of Self; this is the way leading to the ending of such a Self.’

‘Whatsoever gods there be, they too, on hearing the Dhamma of the Tathagata, for the most part are afraid: they fall to quaking and trembling, saying: ‘We who thought ourselves permanent are after all impermanent: that we who thought ourselves stable are after all unstable: not to last, though lasting we thought ourselves. So it seems that we are impermanent, unstable, not to last, compassed about with a Self.’ Thus potent is a Tathagata over the world of gods and men. (Anguttara Nikaya).

3.4 The Story of Buddha’s Enlightenment

Buddhism began almost 2,500 years ago. The foundation of Buddhism rests on the life of one teacher; an Indian prince named Siddhartha Gotama. Prince Siddhartha grew up in small kingdom in northeast India, an area which now rests in Nepal. His father, King Sudhodana, ruled over the Shakya people. Although the King hoped his son would carry on his legacy, the prince had a very different calling; one which made him one of history’s most famous and influential figures.

In order to understand the principals of Buddhism, one must begin with the life of its founder. The deeds and words of Lord Buddha are the source and inspiration behind this popular faith. As you read the story of Buddha’s enlightenment given below and on the following pages, be sure to locate all place names on the map titled Places in the Life of Buddha.

Prince Siddhartha was born around 563 BCE, son of King Sudhodana and Queen Maya. Even before the birth, the queen had premonitions of great happenings. Legend tells that in her dreams a radiant white elephant descended from the sky. As the elephant descended, its six large tusks pierced the queen’s womb, and she was filled with light.
That morning, the king and queen sought the counsel of the wise, for this was no ordinary dream. The fortune-tellers explained that the queen would give birth to a son, and he would be a great leader. The couple was overjoyed at hearing this. King Sudhodana was thrilled, for now he would have a successor.

About ten months later, on the full moon night, in the Indian month of Vaisakha (May/June), Queen Maya was on her way to her father’s house in the town of Lumbini. Suddenly, she halted her escorts, descended from her carriage, and entered a lush, beautiful garden. There she gave birth to a son. Legends tell of the sacred silence which anointed the garden that night and of a peace which flowed throughout the land.

The royal couple decided to name the baby Siddhartha, which means “the one who brings all good.” News of the prince’s birth spread, and there was much celebration. Many visitors came to pay tribute to Siddhartha. One of these visitors was the holy sage, Asita. Asita told the parents that the prince would be either a great king or a great saint. Then something strange happened. When Asita’s eyes met the infant’s, the sage began to weep. This worried the king and queen, but Asita explained that these were bittersweet tears he shed for himself, for he saw that this indeed was a special child, one who could lead others to peace. Now the holy man wept because, after a lifetime of searching, he would not live to hear Siddhartha’s teachings.

Both the king and queen were happy, but Sudhodana wanted to be certain that his son became a great emperor, not a saint. Therefore, he set out to give Siddhartha all he could desire.

But the couple’s joy was quickly ended when Queen Maya shortly became seriously ill. Within seven days of giving birth, she lay on her bed dying. She asked her sister, Prajapati, to mother her son. Prajapati consented. Soon afterwards, the queen passed away.

Prajapati raised Siddhartha as though he were her own son, and the prince lived a carefree childhood within the palace walls. King Sudhodana made certain that the boy received the finest education, for Asita’s prophecy remained with him. The prince learned quickly. In fact, legend has it that after only a few lessons he had no need of teachers he had learned all they could teach him.
As Siddhartha grew, his intelligence was matched with a compassionate gentleness. Unlike his peers, he spent a great deal of time alone, wandering the palace gardens. He did not participate in the common games of boys but sought the company of animals and nature.

It was on one of these garden days that the prince came upon a wounded white swan, an arrow still piercing its wing. He removed the arrow and comforted the bird, tending to its wounds. Shortly thereafter, Devadatta, Siddhartha’s cousin, came running. Adorned with bow and arrow, Devadatta demanded the swan he had hunted. But the Prince refused. The boys argued until they agreed to settle their dispute in the palace’s court.

When Devadatta came before the judges, he claimed that because he shot the bird, it should belong to him. When Siddhartha spoke, he said that he had saved the swan’s life, and therefore it belonged to him. The judges sided with the prince, agreeing that the bird’s savior has a greater right.

Years went by, and as the prince became a young man he continued in his gentle, quiet ways. This disturbed his father, who wanted his son more involved in worldly matters. But the King’s worries were allayed when Siddhartha met Princess Yasodhara, daughter of King Suprabuddha. The young couple wanted to be married, but the neighboring king needed proof of Siddhartha’s bravery and skills. Only then would he give his daughter in marriage. Although he had little experience in warrior games, the prince gladly agreed to take part in a contest against other suitors. Now even Siddhartha’s father was worried. How could the prince compete against the other young men who had spent years in training?

But the prince surprised everyone with his abilities. He began by winning the archery match, defeating his cousin, Devadatta. Next, he won the swordsmanship contest when, in one lightning quick stroke, he slashed through a tree with two trunks! However, though the prince was powerful, it was his gentleness which won him the final contest.

Each of the suitors was given an opportunity to mount a wild horse. One by one they were thrown by the wild, kicking beast. In fact, the horse was so
ferocious that the judges were about to stop. But when Siddhartha approached the horse, stroking it softly and speaking kind words, the horse mellowed. The prince mounted the horse, and the contest was over. Prince Siddhartha and Princess Yasodhara were wed.

Although King Sudhodana was happy, he remained worried that his son may yet become a saint. So, he built the newlyweds two enormous, heavenly palaces one for winter and one for summer. These dwellings were surrounded by walls. Only beautiful servants, accomplished musicians, and the finest foods were allowed in the lush, natural settings. In this way, the king hoped Siddhartha would never be disturbed or seeks to go outside the palace, and for years the prince and princess lived undisturbed within the palace walls. In time, they gave birth to a son, Rahula.

Now, although Siddhartha had all the luxuries in the world, he had yet to do one thing: venture outside the palace grounds. From servants he heard tales of other lands and wonders of different peoples, languages, and landscapes. A stirring began inside him. Shortly after, he asked his father’s permission to visit the capital city of his kingdom. The king consented, but he ordered his subjects to hide away anyone who was ill or old and to decorate their houses in festive colors, for Sudhodana did not want any sights to trouble his son.

So, aboard his chariot the Prince entered the city of Kapilavastu. The streets, lined with onlookers, were filled with gaiety and celebration. The cheerful citizens, all of them healthy and young, showered the prince with praise. For a moment, Siddhartha was pleased, thinking that this city was like his.

Amidst the crowd stood an elderly man, saddened and bent with age. In all his years, the Prince had never seen such a sight. In fact, he did not even know that people grew old. This knowledge stunned him, and when he returned to the palace, he sat alone in deep contemplation.

In time, the Prince journeyed again into the city, and again the streets were lined with happy faces. However, among the citizens was a sick man, coughing and pale. In all his palace years, sickness was unknown to Siddhartha. Now, he learned of disease. He learned that anyone can fall ill at anytime. This news saddened him.
But the prince’s third trip to the city affected him most deeply. Riding along in his chariot, he saw a group of mourners carrying a coffin. Inside the coffin, he saw a dead man wrapped in white. Now he learned of death and the rites of cremation. He was overwhelmed with the thought that even his beloved wife and son would someday die.

Siddhartha became very depressed and spent his time alone. His father tried to cheer him, but to no avail. The prince wondered how people could live happily knowing that old age, sickness, and death awaited them. His gloom deepened, until one day he rode out again on his chariot. This time, he traveled to the countryside. There he saw a saint meditating under a tree. He learned that this hermit had exchanged all worldly pleasures to seek for truth. This man had also seen the suffering in the world and sought to go beyond it to enlightenment. Prince Siddhartha was deeply moved by the sight. He returned to the palace, sure of his calling.

Siddhartha’s mind was made up: he would leave his life of luxury and search for truth. Knowing he would not receive consent, that very night as everyone lay sleeping, he bid a silent farewell to his wife and son. He mounted his horse and set out for the forest in the far reaches of the land where the holy men gather. When he arrived, he cut his long hair and donned the robe of an ascetic, a man of solitude searching for wisdom. Now, at the age of twenty-nine, his journey had begun.

Prince Siddhartha spent the next six years in the forest. He studied with the most famous sages, but still he did not find an end to suffering. He joined a group of men who believed enlightenment could be found by denying the body nourishment and sleep, thereby mastering pain. For years the prince ate and slept very little. He grew as thin as a skeleton, and though the rain and sun beat down on him, he did not waver from his practices.

Finally, he realized that he was getting nowhere. Though he had neglected his bodily needs, he had not found an end to suffering. Thus, when a young woman came to him offering food, he accepted. Now that he was nourished he sat
in meditation under a bodhi tree in the town of Bodhgaya. He sat down and vowed, come what may, he would not move until he found an end to sorrow. Although demons tempted him with images of his past and evil spirits brought nightmares upon him, the prince was centered on his goal.

Finally, under the Tree of Enlightenment, Siddhartha became Buddha, the Enlightened One. He went on to become a great world teacher, as Asita had prophesied, and from his teachings, Buddhism was born.

3.4.1. The Great Renunciation :

Leaving his kingdom and loved ones behind, Siddhartha became a wandering monk. He cut off his hair to show that he had renounced the worldly lifestyle and called himself Gautama. He wore ragged robes and wandered from place to place. In his search for truth, he studied with the wisest teachers of his day. None of them knew how to end suffering, so he continued the search on his own.

For six years he practiced severe asceticism thinking this would lead him to enlightenment. He sat in meditation and ate only roots, leaves and fruit. At times he ate nothing. He could endure more hardships than anyone else, but this did not take him anywhere. He thought, “Neither my life of luxury in the palace nor my life as an ascetic in the forest is the way to freedom. Overdoing things can not lead to happiness. “ He began to eat nourishing food again and regained his strength.

3.4.2. The First Five Monks :

Now the Buddha wanted to tell other people how to become wise, good and do service for others. He thought, “Now Asita, Alara and Uddaka are dead but my friends Kondanna, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama and Assaji are in Benares. I must go there and talk to them.” Then he set out for Benares, till at last he came to a grove where his five friends were. This grove at Sarnath was called the Deer Park. They saw him coming towards them and one said to another, “Look yonder! There is Gotama, the luxury-loving fellow who gave up fasting and fell back into
a life of ease and comfort. Don’t speak to him or show him any respect. Let nobody go and offer to take his bowl or his robe. We’ll just leave a mat there for him to sit on if he wants to and if he does not, he can stand. Who is going to attend on a good-for-nothing ascetic like him.” However, as the Buddha came nearer and nearer, they began to notice that he had changed. There was something about him, something noble and majestic such as they had never seen before. And in spite of themselves, before they knew what they were doing, they forgot all they had agreed on. One hastened forward to meet him, and respectfully took his bowl and robe; another busily prepared a seat for him, while a third hurried off and brought him water to wash his feet. After he had taken a seat the Buddha spoke to them and said, “Listen, ascetics, I have the way to deathlessness. Let me tell you, let me teach you. And if you listen and learn and practise as I tell you, very soon you will know for yourselves, not in some future life but here and now in this present lifetime, that what I say is true. You will realise for yourself the state that is beyond all life and death.”

Naturally the five ascetics were very astonished to hear their old companion talking like this. They had seen him give up the hard life of fasting and consequently believed that he had given up all efforts to find the truth. So initially they simply did not believe him, and they told him so. But the Buddha replied, “You are mistaken, Ascetics. I have not given up all effort. I am not living a life of self-indulgence, idle comfort and ease. Listen to me. I really have attained supreme knowledge and insight. And I can teach it to you so you may attain it for yourselves.”

Finally the five were willing to listen to him and he delivered his first teachings. He advised his followers to follow the Middle Way, avoiding the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-torture. For the first time he taught the Four Noble Truths and how to practise the Eightfold Path, the Noble Way that would lead to freedom from suffering and to the way of enlightenment. With the conversion of the five ascetics at the Deer Park at Sarnath, the order of monks was established.
3.4.3. The Buddha’s First Teaching:

The Buddha’s first teaching was called the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, which means the Turning of the Wheel of Truth. It was given on the full-moon day of July, called Asalha. This discourse was given to the five ascetics who were his former companions, at the Deer Park in Isipatana (now called Sarnath), near Benares, India. Many devas and Brahmas (angels and gods) were present to listen to the discourse. The Buddha started the discourse by advising the five ascetics to give up two extremes. These were indulgence in sensual pleasures and the tormenting of the body (self-indulgence and self-mortification). He advised against too much sensual pleasure because these pleasures were base, worldly, not noble and unhelpful in spiritual development. On the other hand, tormenting the body was painful, not noble and also unhelpful in spiritual development. He advised them to follow the Middle Way, which is helpful in seeing things clearly, as they are, and in attaining knowledge, higher wisdom, peace, and enlightenment or nirvana.

The Buddha then taught the five ascetics the Four Noble Truths. They are: the truth of suffering; its cause; its end; and the way to its end. Everything in this world is full of suffering, and the cause of suffering is craving. The end of suffering is nirvana. The way to the end of suffering is via the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha said that he was enlightened only after he understood these Four Noble Truths.

The Noble Eightfold Path has eight parts or factors:

1. **Right understanding** means to know and understand the Four Noble Truths.

2. **Right attitude** means to have three kinds of thoughts or attitudes:
   
   (i) Thoughts of renunciation or an attitude of “lifting go”.
   (ii) Thoughts of goodwill to others, which are opposed to ill will.
   (iii) Thoughts of harmlessness, as opposed to cruelty.

3. **Right speech** deals with refraining from falsehood, such as telling lies or not telling the truth; tale-bearing or saying bad things about other people; harsh words and frivolous talk such as gossiping.
4. **Right action** deals with refraining from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.

5. **Right livelihood** deals with the five kinds of trade which should be avoided in order to lead a noble life. They are: trading in arms (weapons), living beings (breeding animals for slaughter), intoxicating drinks and poison.

6. **Right effort** has four parts using meditation:
   (i) To try to stop unwholesome thoughts those have arisen
   (ii) To prevent unwholesome thoughts from arising.
   (iii) To try to develop good thoughts
   (iv) To try to maintain good thoughts those have arisen

7. **Right mindfulness** is also fourfold. It is mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings/sensations, mindfulness of thoughts passing through the mind and mindfulness of Dharma.

8. **Right concentration** is one-pointedness of mind as developed in meditation.

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

   **Sila (morality)** right speech, right action, right livelihood.

   **Samadhi (concentrated mind in meditation)** right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

   **Panna (wisdom)** right attitude, right understanding.

   These three—morality, concentration and wisdom—are the three stages on the path to mental purity whose object is nirvana. These stages are described in a beautiful verse:

   
   To cease from evil,  
   To do what is good.  
   To cleanse one’s mind:  
   This is the advice of all the Buddhas.

3.4.4. **The Serpent King** :

   As soon as he had 60 disciples the Buddha sent them away to teach people everywhere. He left the Deer Park and turned southwards towards the Magadha
country. Along the way, on the banks of a river, there lived three brothers whose names were Uruvela Kassapa, Nadi Kassapa and Gaya Kassapa. Each lived with 500, 300 and 200 followers respectively. One evening the Buddha visited Uruvela Kassapa’s hut and asked, “If it is not an inconvenience, may I spend a night in your kitchen?” “I don’t mind, Great Gotama, but there is a fierce serpent king in the kitchen. I am afraid it will harm you,” said Uruvela Kassapa. “Oh, I don’t mind,” answered the Buddha. “If you have no objection I will spent the night there.” The Buddha went into the kitchen, spread some grass on the floor for bedding, and sat down. The fierce serpent king, hearing the noise, came slithering out of a hole in the wall, opening his mouth to bite the Buddha. “I will not harm this serpent king. I will subdue him by my love and kindness,” thought the Buddha. The angrier the serpent king became, the more kindly and loving was the Buddha. The serpent king could do him no harm.

Early next morning Uruvela Kassapa went to the Buddha and found him sitting in deep meditation. The ascetic was surprised and asked the Buddha whether the serpent king had harmed him. “Here, see for yourself,” said the Buddha and uncovered his begging bowl. Out came the fierce serpent king and the ascetic started to run away in fright. But the Buddha stopped him, saying that he had a way to tame any fierce serpent. “Can I learn?” asked the ascetic. The Buddha then gave his teachings and Uruvela Kassapa, his brothers and all their followers became devotees of the Buddha’s Dharma.

3.4.5. Returning Home:

When King Suddhodana came to know that the Buddha was teaching in Rajagaha he sent nine messengers, one after the other, inviting him to come to Kapilavatthu. All the messengers became monks. They listened to the Buddha’s teachings and found them so appealing that they forgot to convey the king’s message. The king had made arrangements for the Buddha to stay in a park called Nigrodha. But when the Buddha did not arrive, the king sent Kaludayi, a childhood playmate of Buddha’s, to invite him back to Kapilavatthu. When the people of Kapilavatthu discovered that the Buddha had come to their city they
flocked to see him. Prince Siddhartha’s own relatives came as well and said, “He is our younger brother, our nephew, our grandson.” Then the Buddha realised that some people, even then, did not understand that he was already enlightened but felt they were his elders. He showed them a miracle called the “Twin miracle”. Even the king, seeing this miracle, worshipped him.

“I am not putting you to shame, O Great King. This is our custom,” replied the Buddha calmly. “How can this be? Nobody in our family has ever begged like this. How can you say ‘it is our custom’?” the confused king asked. “Oh Great King, this is not the custom of the Royal family, but of the Buddhas. All the former Buddhas have lived by receiving food this way.” However, when the king begged the Buddha to take food in the palace the Buddha kindly did so. The next day the Buddha took his begging bowl and went from door to door begging for food. The king, seeing this, was very annoyed. “Why do you disgrace me, my son? Why do you ruin me like this? Why don’t you take food in the palace? Is it proper for you to beg for food in this very city where you used to travel in golden sedan chairs? Why do you put me to shame, my dear son?”.

3.4.6. The Story of Prince’s Yashodhara:

When the Buddha had taken his evening meal that day, all who knew him as Prince Siddhartha, except Princess Yasodhara, came to talk to him. All of them were surprised but happy to see their prince dressed like a monk. Yasodhara stayed in her room thinking, “Prince Siddhartha is now the Enlightened One—the Buddha. He now belongs to the line of Buddhas. Is it right for me to go to him? He does not and cannot need me. I think it is better to wait and see.”

After a while the Buddha asked, “Where is Yashodhara?” “She is in her room,” said his father.”I shall go there,” said the Buddha and, giving his bowl to the king, he went to her room. As he entered he said to the king, “Let her pay me respect as she likes. Say nothing.” As soon as the Buddha entered the room, even before he took his seat, Yashodhara rushed to him. She fell to the floor, held his ankles, placed her head at his feet and cried and cried until his toes were wet with her tears. The Buddha kept quiet and nobody stopped her until she was tired of
crying. King Suddhodana then said, “Lord, when my daughter-in-law heard that you were wearing yellow robes she also robed herself in yellow. When she heard you were taking one meal a day she did the same. When she heard that you had given up low couches, she lay on a low couch and when she heard that you had given up garland and scents she too gave them up. So virtuous is my daughter-in-law.”

The Buddha nodded and said, “Not only in this last birth, O king, but in a previous birth too, Yasodhara was devoted and faithful to me.”

3.4.7. The Story of Prince Nanda:

On the third day after the Buddha’s return to Kapilavatthu he was invited to the wedding of Prince Nanda, his youngest stepbrother, and his new bride, Princess Janapada Kalyani. The Buddha attended the wedding and celebrations, blessed them all, left his begging bowl with Nanda and went away.

Nanda thought, “I will go to the temple and return the bowl.” While he was there, Nanda and the Buddha talked for a while before the Buddha said, “Nanda, would you like to be a monk?” “Yes, Sir,” said Nanda, and the Buddha ordained him. Afterwards Nanda, thinking of his beautiful bride, became very sad and unhappy. “Why are you so sad, Nanda?” asked the monks.

“Brothers, I am disappointed. I do not like this life. I want to leave it and go home.” The Buddha then came to talk to Nanda. First the Buddha showed him a she-monkey whose nose and tail were burnt and fur singed and bloodied. “Do you see this monkey, Nanda? Then take good note of her,” said the Buddha. Then the Buddha showed Nanda 500 celestial nymphs. “Nanda, do you see these nymphs?” “Yes,” answered Nanda. “Who is prettier? The nymphs or Janapada Kalyani?” “Sir, as my bride is prettier than the burnt monkey, so are the nymphs compared to Janapada Kalyani.” “Well, Nanda, what then?” “Reverend Sir, how does one obtain the celestial beings?” “By performing the duties of a monk.” “In that case I shall take the greatest pleasure in living the monk’s life,” said Nanda and he began to follow the Buddha’s teaching very carefully.
3.4.8. The Story of Prince Rahula:

On the seventh day after the Buddha’s homecoming Princess Yasodhara dressed up young Rahula. The Buddha’s son had been brought up by his mother and grandfather and was now seven years old. She pointed to the Buddha and said, “That is your father, Rahula. Go and ask him for your inheritance.” Innocent Rahula went to the Buddha and, looking up into his face, told him what his mother had asked him to say, adding, “Father, even your shadow is pleasing to me.” As the Buddha left the palace Rahula followed him saying, “Give me my inheritance.” Coming to the park the Buddha thought, “He desires his father’s wealth, but this goes with the worldly life and is full of trouble and suffering. I shall instead give him what I know and thus give him an excellent inheritance.” The Buddha then asked Sariputta, one of his disciples, to ordain Rahula. When King Suddhodana heard that his beloved grandson had become a monk he was deeply grieved. The king said, “When you left home it made me sad. When Nanda left home my heart ached. I concentrated my love on my grandson and again the one I love has left me. Please do not ordain anyone without their parent’s permission.” To this the Buddha agreed and never ordained anybody after that without their parents’ permission.

3.4.9. The Two Chief Disciples:

Near Rajagaha there were two villages called Upatissa and Kolita. The headmen of these two villages were also known as Upatissa and Kolita. Both families were very close friends. One day Upatissa’s wife, Sari, gave birth to a son called Sariputta. On the same day Kolita’s wife, Moggali, also gave birth to a son called Moggallana. The sons became best friends. When they grew up both of them liked to watch dramas. One day, while watching a drama called Giragga Samapujja (The Mountain Festival), the young boys decided to leave home in order to seek greater happiness and understanding of life than could be had by watching plays. Now at this time there was a famous religious teacher called Sanjaya staying near Rajagaha. The two friends went to learn from him, but after a while they found his teachings unsatisfactory and left. They promised each other they would both continue searching, studying and meditating in an effort to find the truth about life, and that whoever found it first would let the other know.
One morning, in the main street of Rajagaha, Sariputta saw the ascetic Assaji begging for alms. He radiated modesty and calmness as he went from house to house. As Sariputta came closer he saw on Assaji’s face a look of perfect peace, like a smooth undisturbed lake under a calm clear sky. Sariputta went up to him and humbly said, “Your face, friend, is serene. Your eyes so clear and bright. Who is your teacher and what does he teach, Sir?” “I can soon tell you that, brother,” replied Assaji. “There is a great ascetic of the Sakya race who has left his home and country behind in order to follow the homeless life. He is my teacher and it is his teaching that I follow and practise.”

“I am only a newcomer to the way of the Buddha,” replied the ascetic modestly. “I do not know very much yet. But I will give you a brief description.” “That is all I want, brother,” said Sariputta quickly. “Tell me the meaning of the teachings. Why make a lot of words about it?” “Very well then,” said the ascetic. “Listen! The Buddha teaches that there is a cause for everything, and also how things cease to be.” After the Venerable Assaji spoke these lines; Sariputta was so clever that he understood their meaning. He realised the truth that everything that ever has come into existence, or will come into existence, must pass away. He said, “If this is what the Buddha teaches you have found the state that is free from sorrow and suffering and full of peace and happiness.” After thanking Assaji, Sariputta went to find his friend Moggallana to bring him the great news. Before he spoke a word Moggallana cried, “Why brother, how clear and shining your face is. Can it be that at last you have found what we have been seeking?” “It is so, brother, it is so,” was Sariputta’s glad reply, and he explained the Buddha’s teachings to him.

Thus, Sariputta and Moggallana joined the Buddha and in a short time became two of his chief disciples. Sariputta became known for his wisdom and Moggallana for his miraculous power.

3.4.10. The Story of Poor Sopaka:

There once was a boy by the name of Sopaka, born to a very poor family. When this boy was only seven his father died and his mother married another man who was very wicked and unkind. His new stepfather always beat and scolded small Sopaka who was very kind, innocent and good. The stepfather thought,
“This boy is a nuisance, a good-for-nothing, but I cannot do anything to him because his mother loves him so much. What shall I do about him?” One evening he said, “Dear son, let us go for a walk.” The boy was surprised and thought, “My stepfather has never talked to me so kindly. Perhaps my mother has asked him to be kind to me.” So he happily went with his stepfather. They walked to a cemetery where there were many rotting bodies and the stepfather tied Sopaka to one of them, leaving him alone and crying.

As the night became darker and darker Sopaka’s fear increased. He was alone in the cemetery and so frightened that his hair stood on end and drops of sweat rolled down his body. The noises of the jackals, tigers, leopards and other wild animals made him even more frightened. Then, when he was almost paralysed with fear, he saw a shining noble-looking person with a bright light coming towards him saying, “Sopaka, don’t cry. I am here to help you, so don’t fear.” At that moment Sopaka broke his bonds and stood before the Buddha in the Jetavana monastery. The Buddha bathed him, gave him food to eat, cloths to wear and consoled and comforted him.

Meanwhile, on returning home, the wicked stepfather was questioned by Sopaka’s mother. “Where is my son?” she asked. “I don’t know,” he replied, “he came home before me.” But the mother could not sleep the whole night for worrying about her son. Early next day she went to see the Buddha for help. “Why are you crying, sister?” asked the Buddha. “O Lord,” replied the lady, “I have only one son and since last night he has been missing. My husband took Sopaka for a walk and the little boy never returned home.” “Don’t worry, sister. Your son is safe. Here he is.” And so saying the Buddha showed her Sopaka, who had become a monk. The mother was overjoyed to see her son again, and after listening to the Buddha’s teachings she too became a follower.

3.4.11. Angulimala the Bandit:

The King of Kosala had an adviser called Bhaggawa. Bhaggawa had a wife called Mantani and a son called Ahinsaka. When Ahinsaka was born, all the weapons in the country shone brightly. The king was disturbed by this, and the next morning he called his adviser to find out the reason why the weapons were shiny. The adviser said, “My wife has given birth to a son, Your Majesty.” “Then
why do the weapons shine in such a manner?” asked the king. “Your Majesty, my son will be a bandit.” “Will he rob alone or with a gang?” asked the king. “He will be single-handed, Your Majesty,” replied Bhaggawa. “We should kill him now,” said the king. “No!” exclaimed Bhaggawa, “As he will be alone we shall be able to catch him easily.”

When Ahinsaka was old enough his father sent him to a school in Takka Sila. Ahinsaka was the strongest, brightest and the most obedient child of all the children in the whole school. Other children became envious of him and behind his back made the teacher hate him. Thus, when he had finished his education, the teacher said, “Now you must pay me my tuition fee.” “How much should I pay, Sir?” asked Ahinsaka. “I don’t want cash but one thousand right-hand human fingers. And remember not to bring two right-hand human fingers from the same person.”

Although it was a most difficult thing for him to do, Ahinsaka promised to pay his teacher. Taking a sword, off he went until he reached Kosala. Hiding near a jungle highway, he waited for passersby. He would rush out and kill them, cutting off a right-hand finger and hanging their corpses on a tree for the vultures and crows. He made a garland out of the finger bones and soon became known as “Angulimala” (anguli=fingers, mala=garland). Angulimala went to another district and began to kill again. Because he was murdering so many people, the King of Kosala decided to go with his strong army and capture the bandit. When Mantani heard this she went to her husband to try to get him to save their son. “Darling, he is very fierce now,” said Bhaggawa. “He may have changed completely, and if I go there he may even kill me.” But the mother was very soft hearted and loved her son more than she loved herself. She thought, “I must go to the jungle myself and save him.”

Now Angulimala had killed 999 people. He had spent months and months in the jungle without proper food, sleep or comfort, so he was impatient to pay off his debt and live a decent life. He thought, “Today if even my own mother comes I will kill her and cut off a finger to make one thousand fingers.”

Now that day, while the Buddha looked round the world to see if anybody needed help, he saw Angulimala and his mother. “I must save them,” he thought
as he set out towards the jungle. The villagers, seeing the Buddha, cried out, “Teacher, don’t go that way, it is too dangerous. Return home quickly.” Three times they warned him but the Buddha continued, thanking them for their concern.

Now Angulimala’s mother entered the jungle. Angulimala saw her coming and thought, “Poor lady. She comes alone. I pity her but it cannot be helped. I must keep my word and kill her.” All of a sudden, the Buddha appeared between them. Angulimala thought, “It is very good that this ascetic comes before my mother. Why should I kill her? I will leave her alone and kill this stranger.” And with his sword he ran towards the Buddha. The Buddha walked slowly before him, thinking, “Let this young man see me running.” So Angulimala ran and ran towards the Buddha, but he could not catch up with him. He became so weak that he could not run any further. Then he shouted at the Buddha, “Stop! Stand still!” “I stand still, Angulimala! Do you also stand still?” said the Buddha. Angulimala could not understand the meaning of the Buddha’s words, so he asked him, “How can you say you stand still while running faster than me?”

“I stand still Angulimala evermore,
For I am merciful to all living beings;
But you are merciless to living beings.
Therefore I stand still and you stand not still.”

Angulimala was very pleased with what the Buddha said and throwing away his sword knelt before him. The Buddha blessed him and took him to the monastery, where he became a monk. Meanwhile, the king was waiting with his army at the palace to receive the Buddha’s blessing before setting out to the jungle. When the Buddha did not come, he went to the monastery with his five hundred horses and soldiers. The Buddha asked him, “What is it that troubles you, mighty King?” “There is a most fierce killer called Angulimala and I am going to catch him.” “But mighty King, suppose you see Angulimala head shaven, wearing yellow robes. What would you do to him?” “I would worship him,” answered the king. Then the Buddha called Angulimala and the frightened soldiers started to run away. But the Buddha stopped them, and taught the Dharma to them all.
3.4.12. Sunita, the Scavenger:

In Savatthi there was a scavenger named Sunita. He was a road-sweeper and barely earned enough to feed himself. Sunita slept on the roadside, for he did not have a house to go to. He saw other people enjoying themselves but he could not mix with them because these people called him an outcast. Whenever a higher caste person went on the road Sunita had to run and hide so his shadow did not fall on them. If he was not quick enough he would be scolded and beaten. Poor Sunita lived a miserable life. One day, as he was sweeping a dirty, dusty road, Sunita saw the Buddha with thousands of followers coming towards him. His heart was filled with joy and fear and finding no place to hide he just stood, joining his palms in respect. The Buddha stopped and spoke to poor Sunita in a sweet, gentle voice saying, “My dear friend, would you like to leave this work and follow me?”

Nobody had ever spoken to Sunita like this before. His heart was filled with joy and his eyes with tears. “O, most venerable Sir, I have always received orders but never a kind word. If you accept a dirty and miserable scavenger like me I will follow you.” So the Buddha ordained Sunita and took him along with the other monks. From that day forth no one knew what Sunita’s caste was, and nobody treated him with disgust and cruelty. Everybody, even kings, ministers and commanders, respected him.

3.4.13. The Buddha and the Sick Monk:

One day the Buddha visited a monastery. While he was there he came across a chamber where a monk lay in great pain caused by a loathsome disease. Although there were many other monks at the monastery, not one of them was concerned about their sick brother. The Buddha, beholding this woeful situation, began to look after the suffering man. He called Ananda and together they bathed the monk, changed his dirty bed and eased his pain.
Then the Buddha admonished the monks of the monastery for their neglect and encouraged them to nurse the sick and care for the suffering. He concluded by saying, “Whosoever serves the sick and suffering, serves me.”

3.5 Buddha’s Last Years:

Shakyamuni Buddha passed away around 486 BC at the age of eighty at kusinara, leaving behind thousands of followers, monks and nuns, and a vast treasure store of Dhamma Teaching. The impact of His great love and dedication is still felt today. Although he has left the world, the spirit of his kindness and compassion remains.

The Buddha realized that he was not the first to become a Buddha. “There have been many Buddhas before me and will be many Buddhas in the future,” The Buddha recalled to his disciples. “All living beings have the Buddha nature and can become Buddhas.” For this reason, he taught the way to Buddhahood.

The two main goals of Buddhism are getting to know ourselves and learning the Buddha’s teachings. To know who we are, we need to understand that we have two natures. One is called our ordinary nature, which is made up of unpleasant feelings such as fear, anger, and jealousy. The other is our true nature, the part of us that is pure, wise, and perfect. In Buddhism, it is called the Buddha nature. The only difference between us and the Buddha is that we have not awakened to our true nature.

In the Three Greatest Men in History, H.G. Wells states, ‘In the Buddha you see clearly a man, simple, devout, lonely, battling for light, a vivid universal in character. Many of our best modern ideas are in closest harmony with it. All the miseries and discontents of life are due, he taught, to selfishness. Before a man can become serene he must cease to live for his senses or himself. Then he merges into a greater being. Buddhism in a different language called men to self-forgetfulness 500 years before Christ. In some ways he was nearer to us and our needs. He was more lucid upon our individual importance in service than Christ and less ambiguous upon the question of personal immortality.”
3.5.1 The Buddha’s Last Words:

Before the last years of Buddha he had given some words to his followers. After the conversion of Subhadda, the Buddha spoke again to Venerable Ananda. “It may be, Ananda, that some of you will say, ‘without the Buddha, the Sublime Teacher, there is no teacher for us’. No, Ananda, you should not think in this way. Whatever doctrine and discipline taught and made known by me will be your teacher when I am gone.”

Then the Buddha, addressing the other monks said, “If any amongst you has any doubts as to the Buddha, the teaching, or the order of monks, ask me now so that afterwards you may have no cause to regret that you did not ask me while I was still with you.”

But at these words, none of the monks said anything. None had any questions, and all of them were silent. For the second and third time the Buddha addressed the monks in this way. And for the second and third time, all the monks were silent.

The Buddha said, “Perhaps it may be out of respect for the teacher, that you do not question me. Let a friend, O disciples, tell it to another friend.” Still the disciples remained silent.

Then Venerable Ananda spoke to the Buddha, “It is wonderful. It is marvellous, Lord! I do believe that in all this great company of monks there is not a single one who has doubts or questions about the Buddha, the teaching or the order of monks, or the path and the method of training and conduct.”

“With you, Ananda,” said the Buddha, “this may be a matter of faith and belief. But, Ananda, I know that not one single monk gathered here has any doubt or question about these things. Of all the 500 monks here, Ananda, he who is the most backward is a sotapanna, not subject to fall back to a lower state of existence, but is certain and destined for enlightenment.”

Then the Buddha addressed all the monks once more, and these were the very last words he spoke:
“Behold, O monks, this is my last advice to you. All component things in the world are changeable. They are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation.”

Then the Buddha lapsed into the jhana stages, or meditative absorptions. Going from level to level, one after the other, ever deeper and deeper. Then he came out of the meditative absorption for the last time and passed into nirvana, leaving nothing whatever behind that can cause rebirth again in this or any other world.

The passing away, or the final nirvana of the Buddha, occurred in 500 BC on a full-moon day in the month of May, known in the Indian calendar as Vesak.