

Buddha

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‘Buddha’ is generally a generic name. This name is given neither by a Buddha’s mother (*na mātārā kataṃ*), nor by his father (*na pitarā kataṃ*), nor by his brother (*na bhātarā kataṃ*), nor by his sister (*na bhaginiyā kataṃ*), etc. It is a name which he earns by his own efforts. When he attains enlightenment (*bodhi*), i.e., attains the knowledge of the truth, he become the Buddha. When he attains *nibbāna* by annihilating *rāga*, *dosa* and *moha*, he becomes the Buddha and he is no longer subject to birth. Because he has extirpated all the causes of suffering, he becomes the Buddha who not only knows the causes of suffering but roots them out and attains a state of perfect peace and bliss by walking on the Noble eightfold Path consisting of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* which he himself rediscovers.

A Buddha is self-dependent (*sayambhū*). He has no teacher to teach him (*anācariyako*). He himself realizes the truth (*sāmaṃ saccāni abhisambhujjhati*) never heard before. He himself attains omniscience (*sabbaññutaṃ*). He is endowed with ten supernormal powers such as knowing according to reality the possible as possible, and the impossible as impossible, etc.

The characteristics of the Buddha are summed up here.

‘The Blessed One is accomplished, fully enlightened, perfect in true knowledge and conduct, sublime, knower of worlds, incomparable leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of gods and humans, enlightened, blessed.’

Generally, the term Buddha refers to Gotama Buddha. Therefore, given below is an account of the Buddha who was the son of the Śākyan king Suddhōdana and his queen consort Mahāmāyā Devī.

The biography of the Buddha can be reconstructed from various sources like the Sela Sutta, the Ambaṭṭha Sutta, the Mahāpadāna Sutta, the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, the Bodhirājakumāra Sutta, the Mahāsaccaka Sutta, the Māgandiya Sutta, the Brahmāyu Sutta, the Acchariyaabbhutadhamma Sutta, the Lalitavistara, Aśvaghōsa’s Buddhacarita, Buddhaghosa’s Nidānakathā in the Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā and Pāli Aṭṭhakathās.

Buddhaghosa in his Nidānakathā divides the life of the Buddha into three parts, *dūre nidāna*, (life in the distant past) *avidūre nidāna* (life in the near past) and

santike nidāna (life in the present time). As far as the last two parts are concerned, they describe the life of Gotama Buddha. But why describe *dūre nidāna*? Why discuss a past life of Gotama Buddha? To my mind, this *nidāna* containing his life in the distant past has been narrated to prove two important laws propounded by the Buddha. One is the law of *kamma* and rebirth and the other is that one cannot become a Buddha without perfecting the ten *pāramitās*. Perfecting *pāramitās* takes a very long time, in fact several lives. But it is perfecting *pāramitās* that makes one a Buddha. The Jātaka stories make the two laws very clear to the masses.

In the *dūre nidāna*, Buddhaghosa traces the biography of the Buddha when he was born as brahman Sumedha during the time of Dīpaṅkara Buddha, four *asaṅkheyyas* and one hundred thousand *kappas* (aeons) ago in Amarāvātī. He learnt the branches of knowledge meant for the brahmans. While he was young, his parents died. He had inherited great wealth. But when he realized that his father and his father's father did not even take a *kahāpaṇa* (ancient square copper coin) with them from here, he thought it proper to do wholesome actions in his life so that their results could follow him when he died. He distributed all his wealth and left home to become an ascetic.

Once while he was sitting cross-legged on the roof of his palace, he reflected that to be born again and again is *dukkha* (misery) because wherever one is born one has to die. So, he concluded that as he was subject to birth, old age, disease and death, he must look for something which is unborn, immortal, not subject to disease and misery but free from them, just the complete opposite of them. He also reflected that just as there is water to quench fire, so there must be *nibbāna* to put out the three fires of craving, aversion and ignorance. So, after giving *dāna* (donation) of whatever he had, he left home, went to the Himalayas, made himself a cottage and started practicing meditation. He used to live on alms, but there came a time when he thought of living on fruits that fell from trees, which he could get without making any exertion. While practicing meditation he exerted and attained eight *samāpattis* (four *rūpāvacara* and four *arūpāvacara jhānas*) and five *abhiññās* (super knowledges).

Once, as the *Bodhisattva* named Sumedha, he was in the city called Ramma. The people of that city had invited Dīpaṅkara Buddha to their city, and as such, were making a road on which the Buddha was to come. Sumedha also made up his mind to take part in it and was asked to fix the part of the road that was muddy. He tried his best to fix the road by sprinkling dust and sand on it. But

when he saw that it would not be possible to do so and the Dipaṅkara Buddha would have to soil his feet, Sumedha laid himself over the mud, face down, to enable the Buddha and the *khīṇāsavas* accompanying him to walk on his body. The Dipaṅkara Buddha read Sumedha's mind and, knowing that his resolve to become a Buddha would be fulfilled, declared that Sumedha would become a Buddha with the name of Gotama after four *asāṅkheyyas* and one hundred thousand *kappas*. When Sumedha heard this declaration from Dīpaṅkara Buddha, he thought, 'Whatever is said by the Buddha comes to be true, it is not otherwise. Just as a clod of earth thrown upwards is sure to come down, just as birth is sure to be followed by death, so whatever the Buddha says comes to be true.' Sumedha was sure to become a Buddha in the future.

When he came to know the *dhammas* that make one a Buddha, he decided to perfect them. They are called *pāramitās* (perfections). They are ten in number: *dāna pāramitā* (perfection in liberality), *sīla pāramitā* (perfection in morality), *nekkhamma pāramitā* (perfection in renunciation), *paññā pāramitā* (perfection in wisdom), *viriya pāramitā* (perfection in energy), *khanti pāramitā* (perfection in patience), *sacca pāramitā* (perfection in truthfulness), *adhiṭṭhāna pāramitā* (perfection in resolution), *mettā pāramitā* (perfection in loving kindness) and *upekkhā pāramitā* (perfection in equanimity). He perfected different *pāramitās* in different subsequent births, which are described in the Jātaka stories.

Sumedha had such a strong aspiration to become the Buddha that all twenty-four past Buddhas, during whose time he was born under different names, declared that he would become the Buddha, Gotama by name.

Sumedha perfected *dāna pāramitā* when he was previously born as Akitti, Saṅkha, Mahāsudassana, Mahāgovinda, Sivi and Vessantara, *sīla pāramitā* when he was born as Sīlava, Bhūridatta, Chaddantanāgarāja and Alīnasattukumāra. In this way, he perfected various *pāramitās* over several lives as narrated in the Jātaka stories.

In the *avidūre nidāna* (life in the near past), the life story of the Buddha begins when he was living in Tusitapura as a *Bodhisatta* (Sk. *Bodhisattva*). There was an announcement there of the birth of a Buddha. All gods or deities of ten thousand *cakkavālas* assembled there and, knowing who was going to be born as the Buddha, approached him and requested him to be born as a Buddha because it was he who had perfected all the *pāramitās*.

In a dream, Mahāmāyā Devī saw the *Bodhisatta* descend from the Tusitaloka and go into her womb from the right side in the form of a white elephant. Mahāmāyā spoke about this dream to Suddhōdana. He invited brahmins to explain what that dream meant. They said that Mahāmāyā had conceived and she was going to deliver a male child. If he lived the life of a householder, he would become a wheel-turning (*cakkavatti*) king and if he did not, he would become the next Buddha.

After ten months when Mahāmāyā was about to be in labor, she expressed her wish to go to her parents' house. The king made arrangements. When she reached Lumbini park on her way to Devadaha, she delivered the child. It was the full-moon day of Vesākha and the year was 623 B.C. according to the Mahāvamsa and the Dīpavamsa. As soon as he was born, he stood on the earth and looked in the eastern direction. He then took seven strides in the north direction and said, 'I am the foremost in the world.'

When Kāla Devala, the royal priest of the Śākya, heard from the gods of Tāvatisa that a son had been born to King Suddhōdana, he came to see him. When he came to know that he was going to be the Buddha he was very happy. But at the same time tears came into his eyes. When Suddhōdana saw his tearful eyes, he became worried and wanted to know if any inauspicious thing was going to happen. Kāla Devala assured him that nothing inauspicious was going to happen but he was sad because when their son would become the Buddha—the Enlightened One—he himself would be no more.

His mother, Mahāmāyā, died a week after giving birth to him. Her sister Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, who was also married to Suddhōdana, brought him up.

The eight brahmin astrologers, who came to see the boy on the naming ceremony day and forecast his future, said that a boy with such marks on his body (he had thirty-two marks of a great man on his body) was sure to become the Buddha if he left home for a homeless life. However, if he stayed at home then he would become a wheel-turning king. But the youngest of the brahmin astrologers said that he was for sure going to be the Buddha. His name was Aññāsi Koṇḍañña.

The king took great care of his son, Siddhattha. He brought him up in great luxury. He had three palaces in the cities of Ramma, Suramma and Subha made for him, one for summer, one for winter and the third for the rainy season.

He began to live his life in great luxury and comfort. In fact, the king saw to it that nothing unpleasant and sorrowful came to his sight.

Once when Siddhattha was in his boyhood as a prince, he was taken by his nurses to a place where the ploughing ceremony was to take place. Leaving the prince on a screened and canopied couch under the cool shade of a jambu tree, the nurses stole away from there to have a glimpse of the colorful ploughing festival. The young child, finding the atmosphere quite congenial and peaceful for meditation, sat cross-legged and meditated. When the nurses came and found him sitting in that posture and practicing meditation, they reported it to the king. The king saw in him the qualities of a great man.

As far as his education is concerned, one can guess that he must have received the best kind of education with the famous teachers of his time. He must have studied not only all the scriptures and philosophical systems but also the art of warfare.

He was married to Yasodharā at the age of sixteen. She was also of the same age. As said above, he lived a very luxurious life. He enjoyed all kinds of sensuous pleasures. But very sensitive and contemplative as he was, he saw all pleasures fleeting. Gradually he became fed up with them. He was also fed up with living a walled life. He wanted to go out of the palace and see what the outside world was like. He went out and it is said that he saw four signs: an old man, a sick man, a dead man and a *bhikkhu* (renunciate or monk), whose face was serene. The first three signs served him to be disgusted with the world and the fourth served him to renounce it.

Siddhattha felt very disturbed when he came to know that he was also subject to old age, disease and death as others are. He wanted to make a quest of the deathless and the peaceful. He also found household life ‘crowded and dusty’. In these circumstances he decided to leave home to search for the deathless and the peaceful.

When a son was born to him, he was not overjoyed like ordinary persons. He must have thought that as he was subject to old age, disease, etc., so his son also was going to be. But lest he might become an obstacle in his renouncing home for making a Noble Quest, he left home without seeing Yasodharā and his newly born son. He asked the charioteer, Channa, to keep the horse named Kanthaka ready for enabling him to leave home for a homeless life. It is said that at midnight all watchmen fell to sleep and the gods opened the gates of the

palace without making any sound. As said in the Buddhavaṃsa, “Seeing the four signs, I set out on horseback.”

The next morning, he crossed the Anomā river and took rest on its bank. He shaved his head and beard, gave all his garments and ornaments to Channa and became an ascetic by putting on yellow robes.

He first went to the hermitage of Ālāra Kālāma, where he learnt the seventh *arūpāvacara jhāna*. Then he went to the hermitage of Rama, where his biological or spiritual son Uddaka, who was the head of the hermitage after his father’s death, was his *sabrahmacārī* (companion in the holy life) because he did not abide in the eighth *arūpāvacara jhāna*. (Uddaka Rāmaputta was not his teacher like Ālāra Kālāma as many scholars take him to be). There he learnt the eighth *arūpāvacara jhāna* with his own efforts.

As he was not satisfied with the Dhamma taught by Ālāra Kālāma, so he was not satisfied with the Dhamma that he learnt in the hermitage of Rāma run by Uddaka Ramaputta. In search of ‘the supreme state of sublime peace’ he arrived at Senānigama near Uruvelā (now Bodh Gaya) and seeing a very congenial place with a peaceful atmosphere, he sat there for practicing meditation along with five other *bhikkhus*.

The ascetic practices he practiced there are mentioned in the Mahāsaccaka Sutta and the Bodhirājakumāra Sutta. At that time, it was commonly believed that one could not remain withdrawn from sensual pleasures unless he practiced severe austerities. The spiritual climate of that time is reflected in what Bodhirājakumāra said to the Buddha when they met, ‘Pleasure is not to be gained through pleasure; pleasure is to be gained through pain.’ He, therefore, practiced several austere practices. He practiced them more and more and felt more violent pains. Although he felt physically exhausted and weak, his energy was still tireless and his mindfulness was established.

He then decided to take little food in the form of soup. As a result, his body became extremely emaciated. But as he always learned from his own experiments and experiences, he came to the conclusion that self-mortification was no path to enlightenment. He then recalled how in his boyhood he had entered upon and abided in the first *jhāna* when he was quite secluded from sensual pleasures and unwholesome states. He recalled he had felt rapture and pleasure then. He thought about it and concluded that could be the path to enlightenment.

The pleasure that he had experienced then had nothing to do with sensuous pleasures and unwholesome states. Realizing he could not have that sort of pleasure with an excessively emaciated body, he decided to eat solid food.

When he gave up fasting and other austere practices, the five *bhikkhus* waiting upon him felt disgusted with him and they left him. According to them, the only way to enlightenment was practicing austerities. But Siddhattha found the austerities useless.

In the morning of the day he was going to attain enlightenment, he sat under the Ajapāla Banyan tree. A generous lady named Sujātā, who had taken a vow to worship the tree deity if she was married into a rich family and if she was blessed with a son, had come to worship the tree deity. Considering Siddhattha to be the tree deity, she offered him some milk-rice. In fact, both her wishes had been fulfilled. After this good meal, Siddhattha gained energy and made up his mind to contemplate. When he decided to do this, the forces of Māra attacked him but they could neither produce any kind of fear in him nor make him give up his resolution. Not even Mara’s beautiful daughters Taṇhā, Arati and Ragā could exert their influence on him.

He then decided to sit under the Bodhi tree and took a resolve not to leave his posture and the place without attaining enlightenment. He then ‘quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states’ started practicing *jhāna*. He entered upon all the four *rūpāvacara jhānas*, abided in them although the pleasant feeling that he felt did not invade his mind. In other words, he had no craving for more pleasant feelings. He remained equanimous. He practiced vipassana.

As a result of practicing *jhāna*, his mind was fully concentrated. Not only concentrated but it was ‘purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady and imperturbable.’ He directed this powerful and pure mind to attain different kinds of super knowledge like recollection of past lives, divine eye, and finally to the destruction of the taints. He directly understood as it is, suffering, its cause, its cessation and the way leading to its cessation. When he knew and saw that his mind was liberated from the three taints (*āsavas*)—namely, the taint of sensual desire (*kāmāsava*), the taint of being (*bhavāsava*) and the taint of ignorance (*avijjāsava*)—he then directly came to know, ‘It is liberated, birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived,

what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.’

He had attained enlightenment. He had this knowledge and vision, ‘My deliverance is unshakeable; this is my last birth; now there is no renewal of being.’

The day he attained enlightenment was again the full moon day of Vesākha.

After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha spent seven weeks under different trees experiencing the bliss of liberation and sometimes reflecting upon the Law of Dependent Origination. He kept fasting for seven weeks. In the seventh week, while he was sitting under the Rājāyatana tree and experiencing the bliss of liberation, two merchants Tapassu and Bhallika from Ukkala happened to pass that way. They saw the Buddha and offered him *laddūs* (a kind of sweet made of rice flour and honey). They were the first two to take refuge in the Buddha and Dhamma.

After attaining this knowledge, he reflected; ‘This Dhamma that I have attained is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise.’ Therefore, he did not feel inclined to teach this Dhamma to the people who were engrossed in taking delight in sensual and other pleasures. It was not possible for them, who live so engrossed in lust and hate, to understand the Dhamma.

Sahampati Brahmā knew the mind of the Buddha with his mind and felt that the world would be lost without the Buddha’s teachings. So, he came to the Buddha, saluted him and requested him to teach the Dhamma to the people. He said that at least there were some people without dust in their eyes and they would be able to understand the Dhamma.

Compassionate as the Buddha was, he agreed to teach the Dhamma. He looked for suitable and competent persons to teach so that they could understand it quickly. He considered Ālāra Kālāma, a suitable, wise, intelligent and discerning person to learn the Dhamma but he came to know that he died seven days ago. He then thought of Uddaka Rāmaputta to be the second-best choice, however, he soon discovered that he also died the night before. He considered the five bhikkhus, who waited upon him while he was engaged in austere

practices, and knowing that they were living at Benaras in the Deer Park, he made up his mind to go to Isipatana to teach the Dhamma to them.

On the way he met an Ājīvaka, Upaka by name. Upaka saw his clear faculties and the pure and bright color of his skin and being impressed he asked, “Whose Dhamma do you profess?” When he heard the Buddha reply that ‘he has no teacher and one like him does not exist in the world’, Upaka could not believe his words and shaking his head, perhaps with disapproval of his claims, he took a bypath and left.

The Buddha then arrived where the group of five *bhikkhus* stayed. When they saw him coming, they decided not to welcome him. Though as the Buddha approached them, they were so impressed by his self-confidence and clear faculties that one of them took the Buddha’s bowl and robes, the other brought water for him to wash his feet and so on. The Buddha said that he was the *Tathāgata*—the Accomplished One. Ultimately, he turned the wheel of Dhamma, instructed them and they all became *arahants* within a short time. In the first discourse known as the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the Buddha preached the four Noble Truths to them. The first to become a *sotāpanna* and an *arahant* was Aññāsi Koṇḍañña who was the first to realize the great universal law: *yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ*—whatever arises is sure to pass away.

The Buddha compared his Dhamma with a wheel because the wheel is the greatest invention of mankind, which conquers time and space. Just as a wheel, free from faults and flaws, can efficiently take one to the goal in a short time, so also the perfect Dhamma, free from the crookedness of body, speech and thought, can efficiently take one to *nibbāna*.

The Buddha then ordained Yasa, the son of a very rich man, who was fed up with the worldly life. Then his fifty-four friends were also ordained. In this way, there were sixty *arahants* besides the Buddha. The Buddha then asked them to go in different directions to preach the Dhamma. One should go alone, not in company, so that a large number of people would have the opportunity to listen to the Dhamma. “*Caratha, bhikkhave, cārikaṃ bahujana hitāya bahujana sukhāya.*”

With these sixty *arahant* disciples the Buddha founded the *Bhikkhu Saṅgha* (the Order of the monks) which ‘was democratic in constitution and communistic in distribution.’ The Buddha kept the Order open for all worthy

persons irrespective of their castes. It is true that, in the beginning, only people from the highest status of society joined the Order but later people of all castes, who were worthy, joined it. Sweeper Sunīta and Caṇḍāla Sopāka also joined the Order. They also became *arahants*. The Buddha compared his Order of *Bhikkhus* with the ocean where all rivers join and lose their identity.

After turning the wheel of Dhamma at Isipatana and Sarnath, he spent the rainy retreat (*vassāvāsa*) there. Then he came to Uruvela where he converted the three Jaṭila brothers with their one thousand followers.

The Buddha then visited Rājagaha with these followers, where king Seniya Bimbisara came to see him at the Latthivanuyyāna. The king invited the whole of the *Bhikkhu Saṅgha*, headed by the Buddha, to have a meal at his palace. After the meal, he gave the gift of Veluvana (the king's pleasure garden) to the Buddha and his *Saṅgha*.

The two affluent brahmans who were friends, Sāriputta and Moggallāna, became the disciples of the Buddha through Assaji (one in the group of five *bhikkhus* whom the Buddha first taught Dhamma) from whom Sāriputta came to know about the Buddha and his teachings.

When Suddhōdana heard about his son attaining enlightenment, he became very eager to see him. He sent many people but ultimately sent Kāludāyi, who was Siddhattha's playmate, to fetch him. Kāludāyi went and found the Buddha, became ordained and when the time was opportune, he invited the Buddha to go back to Kapilavatthu.

The Buddha went to Kapilavatthu, showed the Buddha power to his proud kinsmen. As he was not invited to a meal by his kinsmen, he begged alms in the street. That grieved Suddhōdana very much. But the Buddha told him that that was the custom of all Buddhas. Listening to his preaching, Suddhōdana became a *sotāpanna*. When the Buddha was invited by the king to a meal the other day, all women except Rāhulamātā paid him great reverence. The Buddha visited Rāhulamātā in her own apartment. It was a very moving moment when the Buddha himself praised the qualities of Rāhulamātā by narrating the Candakinnara Jātaka.

Then he took Nanda, his half-brother, to the monastery and ordained him. He ordained Rāhula soon after that.

While he was returning to Rājagaha from Kapilavatthu, he stopped at Anupiyā, where he ordained Upāli first and then ordained Anuruddha, Bhaddiya, Ānanda, Bhagu, Kimbila and Devadatta. These Śākyaans had requested the Buddha to ordain Upāli first so that they could pay respect to him—a man of lower caste.

In Rājagaha, while he was living at Sītavana, Sudatta—popularly known as Anāthapiṇḍika visited him. Anāthapiṇḍika was so impressed by the Buddha that he invited him to Sāvatti to spend his rainy retreat. The Buddha accepted his invitation and went to Sāvatti, where Anāthapiṇḍika gifted the Jetavana (lit. Jeta's grove) to the Buddha and his *Bhikkhu Saṅgha*. It had all the amenities and it is said that Anāthapiṇḍika had spent fifty-four crore over the monastery at Jetavana. Anāthapiṇḍika was declared the foremost of all the lay donors by the Buddha. Similarly, Visākhā Migāramātā, who constructed Pubbārāma and gifted it to the Buddha and his order of monks, was declared the foremost amongst the women donors.

On hearing that his father, Suddhōdana, was on his death-bed, the Buddha went to Kapilavatthu to preach to him. He died as an *arahant*.

When the Buddha was there the Śākyaans and the Koliyaans started quarrelling. The issue was who would irrigate the field first from the water of Rohini, the Śākyaans or the Koliyaans as both had rights over the water of the river. The problem became acute when the water was less in the river, particularly in the summer season. The Buddha persuaded them to make peace and not to shed blood, which, he said, is more precious than water.

When the Buddha was staying at Nigrodhārāma, Mahāpajāpati Gotamī with a number of Śākyaan women visited him and asked him to allow women to join the Order. The Buddha was reluctant to allow them to do so and refused three times but when Ānanda (who served the Buddha as an attendant very sincerely for twenty years) interceded on behalf of the women, the Buddha agreed with a heavy heart to allow them to be nuns. This happened when the Buddha was staying in Vesali where Mahāpajāpati Gotamī had gone to again request him to allow women to join the Order. This was the beginning of the *Bhikkhuni Saṅgha*.

It is also said that the Buddha ascended to Tāvatisa to teach the *Abhidhamma* to his mother. She had been born there as a god after her death. For his bodily needs, the Buddha used to return to earth at intervals to beg alms in Uttarakuru

and eat his food on the banks of Anotatta. Then he would go to Chandanavana for rest where Sariputta waited on him and learnt *Abhidhamma* from him.

How members of the hostile sects envied the reputation of the Buddha is clear from the two incidents, one connected with Ciñcā Māṇavikā and the other with Sundarī Paribbājikā. Ciñcāmāṇavikā accused the Buddha of making her pregnant and not taking care of her when she was about to be in labor. But the truth that she had pretended to be pregnant came out in the assembly itself and the people came to know the reality. Sundarī, when asked where she was going in the evening after adorning and decorating herself, would say she was going to the Buddha to spend the night with him. After a few days, she was killed by the men hired by the members of a hostile sect and the blame was put on the Buddha. But when the incident was thoroughly investigated by the king, it became clear who killed her.

In his ministry of forty-five years, the Buddha sojourned in village, district, town and city, practically the whole of Majjhima desa and came across different kinds of people, rich and poor, Brahmans and non-Brahmans, kings, merchants, courtesans, the downtrodden and the extremely marginalized. He preached his Dhamma to all who came in contact with him without making any distinction. He humbled the proud Brahmans, who thought high of themselves as they were born of Brahman parents, by making it explicitly clear that it is not birth that makes one great or small. It is actually one's actions and conduct that determine one's greatness or otherwise. By giving numerous examples he made this point clear.

The contributions made by the Buddha to our society are great. He showed that caste system based on birth is man-made. Instead, he gave importance to actions. Man is great or small by virtue of his actions and his conduct. The arguments he gave against the prevailing form of the caste system in society are unassailable and based on common-sense logic. He also spoke against animal sacrifice and proved that there are other sacrifices more beneficial than animal sacrifice. To observe *sīla*, to practice concentration of mind and to develop wisdom are better forms of sacrifice. It was he who raised his voice against cow slaughter and showed why meek cows should not be killed. Had people listened to the sane advice of the Buddha, we would not have as many social problems as we are having today.

The Buddha had a magnetic personality. Those who came in contact with him were greatly influenced by him as he was very compassionate, kind and wise.

Brahmans like Pokkharsāti, Soṇadaṇḍa, Brahmāyu and the Bhāradvājas were greatly influenced by him. He brought out a transformation in the life of a ferocious dacoit named Aṅgulimāla who became a saintly person and eventually an *arahant* after listening to his Dhamma.

Although primarily concerned with elevating spiritual life by purifying one's mind of defilements and putting an end to suffering in life, the Buddha did not lose sight of what should be done to make social and worldly life better. How social problems can be solved and what are the duties of a king to solve them, have been described in the Kūṭadanta Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya. The king must help the poor farmers with seed, agricultural implements and money. The businessmen must be given capital to set up their business and, last but not least, young men and women willing to serve the king must be given jobs with handsome pay. As trust begets trust, so the Buddha says that the king must trust his subjects and give them money without ever asking them to sign a hand note/bond.

Isn't this a very perceptive and revolutionary observation made by the Buddha 2600 years ago, much before Karl Marx whom we consider a great social philosopher?

One of the greatest teachings of the Buddha is what he said to the Kālāmas. He said that no view should be imposed upon anybody nor should one accept anybody's view without verifying whether it is good for him and others or not. What he said to the Kālāmās is actually the magna carta of freedom of thought.

The two kings who had great respect for the Buddha were king Bimbisāra of Magadha and king Pasenadi of Kosala.

What the Buddha thinks of a republic and how it can be ever prosperous has been described in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta.

The last days of the Buddha are graphically described in this sutta. From Rājagaha, the Buddha went to Pāṭaliputta where Ajātsattu was making his new capital to attack Vesālī. He then crossed the Ganges and went to Kotigāma and from there to Nāṭikā. From there he went to Vesālī. There he stayed in the park of courtesan Ambapālī and accepted a meal from her. The Licchavīs came to invite him but they were disappointed as the Buddha had already accepted Ambapālī's invitation. Ambapālī made a gift of her park to the Buddha and the *Bhikkhu Saṅgha*. He then went to Veluva where he spent his rainy season. He

fell ill there but with strong determination he survived. He told Ānanda that his mission was complete as there were many *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* with high attainments in the *Saṅgha* and after his death the Order must maintain itself by going to the refuge of the Dhamma.

It was at Vesāli that the Buddha taught the *bhikkhus* for the last time. ‘All conditioned things are of a nature to decay; strive on untiringly.’

When Ānanda came to know that the end of the Buddha was imminent, he was very sad. When the Buddha came to know it, he then asked him to be his own island. ‘Therefore, Ānanda, you should live as islands unto yourselves, being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge.’

He went to Cāpāl Cetiya with Ānanda, where he announced that he would pass away in three months.

The Buddha loved nature very much. He loved nature so much that all the great events of his life took place in the lap of nature. He was born in Lumbini park, attained enlightenment in Uruvelā, set the wheel of Dhamma in motion in the Deer Park at Isipatana, Sārnātha and died in the Mallas’ Sāla grove in the vicinity of Kusinara.

From Vesālī, he went to Bhoganagar en route Bhandagāma, Hatthigāma, Ambagāma and Jambugāma. Finally, he went to Pāvā and stayed in the mango grove of Cunda, the smith, who served him with a meal, which included *sūkaramaddava* (pork). This was his last meal. On eating it, the Buddha suffered from dysentery. Despite that, he went on to Kusinārā where he passed into Mahāparinibbāna on the full moon day of Vesākha (543 B.C.) which is a thrice-blessed day: the day on which the Buddha was born, the day on which he attained enlightenment and the day on which he passed away. Before he passed away, he preached Dhamma to the ascetic Subhadda who had come to learn Dhamma from him.

When Ānanda informed the Mallas of Kusinārā of the Buddha’s death, they came and held a great celebration for seven days. Then at the instruction of Ānanda, the body was prepared for cremation. The Buddha’s pyre did not light up till Mahākassapa, one of the great disciples of the Buddha, came and worshipped the feet of the Buddha. Then the pyre lighted up and burned completely.

There were several claimants for the Buddha's relics, as many as eight. They included Ajātasattu, Vedehaputta of Magadha, the Licchavīs of Vesālī, the Śākya of Kapilavatthu, the Bulis of Allakappa, the Koliyas of Rāmagāma, the Brahman of Vethadīpa, the Mallas of Pāvā, and, of course, the Mallas of Kusinārā who did not want to share the relics with others. However, the Brahman Dona who wanted concord and no discord, divided the relics into eight equal parts and gave one to each claimant. Dona himself was satisfied with the measuring vessel. The Moriyas of Pippalivana came last and carried off the ashes only. Thūpas (Sk. stūpas) were built over these relics and remains and great feasts were held in honor of the Buddha.

Siddhattha Gotama perfected all the ten *pāramitās* in several lives, walked on the Noble Eightfold Path, attained enlightenment by his own efforts, broke the cycle of birth and death and became the Buddha. He taught the universal Dhamma to mankind out of compassion. If this Dhamma is practiced sincerely, one can be free from suffering and can experience peace within oneself.

Questions:

- 1 Who is called a Buddha?
- 2 'Buddha' is a generic name. Explain.
- 3 What are the characteristics of the Buddha? Explain.
- 4 Explain *Bhagavā*.
- 5 What are the ten *pāramitās*? Enumerate and describe them in brief.
- 6 'Therefore, Ānanda, you should live as islands unto yourselves, being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge.' Bring out its import.
- 7 Explain *dūre*, *avidūre* and *santike nidāna*.
- 8 What important teachings of the Buddha do you get from the Mahāparinibbāna sutta? Write in brief.
- 9 Describe the last journey of the Buddha from Rajgir to Kusinārā according to the Mahāparinibbāna sutta.
- 10 Explain the Noble Eightfold Path.
- 11 'All conditioned things are of a nature to decay; strive on untiringly.' Explain its meaning.
- 12 What measures, according to the Buddha, should be taken to ameliorate the poor conditions of the people? Write in brief.

- 13 What did the Buddha say about the caste system? Who, according to him, is great? Can one be great just by his birth or by his actions?
- 14 Why is the Dhamma taught by the Buddha compared with a wheel?
- 15 How is the Dhamma taught by the Buddha universal? Expound in detail.