



The Buddha

The following passage was written by a Buddhist Monk, the Venerable Piyadassi Thera of Sri Lanka, ref. THE DHAMMAPADA 2517 - 1974. (Free distribution - Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy)

Over 2,500 years ago, there lived in Northern India a religious teacher who had attained supreme enlightenment and security from bondage through moral, intellectual and spiritual perfection, a teacher with an indefatigable zeal and steel determination for propagating the truth he had realised. That dynamic personality is none other than Siddhattha Gotama (Siddhartha Gautama in Sanskrit), popularly known as the BUDDHA.

His father, Suddhodana, ruled over the land of the Sakyas at Kapilvastu on the Nepalese frontier. Mahamaya, princess of the Koliyas, was Suddhodana's queen.

At the early age of sixteen the prince was married to a beautiful princess named Siddhatthara. Lacking nothing of the earthly joys of life, he lived amidst song and dance, in luxury and pleasure. However, with the advance of maturity, the prince began to glimpse the woes and miseries of life, despite the father's endeavours to keep them out of the sight of the son's enquiring eyes. Such attempts only heightened the son's eagerness to understand the meaning of sorrow and to find a way out of it for the benefit of suffering mankind.

The more he came in contact with the world outside his palace walls, the more convinced he became that the world was lacking in true happiness, and what appeared to be happiness was distinctly temporary and unstable, and its disappearance became a cause for further unhappiness.

Now at the age of twenty-nine, when Yasodhara gave birth to his only son, Rahula, the prince left the palace renouncing wife, child, father (his mother had already passed away) and a crown that held the promise of power and glory, and in the guise of an indigent ascetic retreated into the solitude of the forest, there to seek an answer to the riddle of life and to obtain enlightenment.

Dedicating himself to the noble task of discovering a remedy for life's universal ill, he began a determined struggle to subdue his body in the hope that his mind, set free from the shackles of the body, might be able to soar to the heights of liberation. At the end of six years' self-mortification, he realised the futility of such an endeavour. He also realised that the path to the fruition of his ardent longing lay in the direction of a search inward into his own mind.

This led to a critical analysis of the function of the human mind, which ultimately brought him a realisation of the four fundamental principles appertaining to life which he called the Four Noble Truths: 1. The fact of DUKKHA, that is, suffering or disharmony or conflict or unsatisfactoriness; 2. its CAUSE; 3. its CESSATION; and 4. the way leading to its cessation.

Thus Siddhartha Gautama, by comprehending in all their fullness and profundity the import of the Four Noble Truths, became the Buddha or the Awakened One. Even after he became a Buddha, he did not claim to be any divine being, a God or Brahma, who creates, and sits in judgement over the destinies of mankind. He is a man among men. Asked as to who he was, the answer came: "I am the one awake", and summed up his attainments in these words:

"I know what should be known, what should
Be cultivated I have cultivated.
What should be abandoned that I have let go
Hence, I am BUDDHA, the Awakened One" (Sutta Nipata, 558)

His followers, therefore, do not pray to him, do not expect rewards and punishments from him, knowing as they do that rewards and punishments are consequences of one's own deeds and misdeeds. They take refuge in him in the understanding that his life and teaching is a model to be followed, and which, if faithfully followed, would lead them from lower to higher levels of mental life, and finally to that bliss that results from the highest culmination of spiritual progress which is NIBBANA (NIRVANA in Sanskrit).

Without resting on his laurels, the Buddha came out of his solitude, and beginning with his first sermon to the five ascetics, his former friends, still steeped in the fruitless rigours of extreme asceticism, embarked on a long and tireless mission of a period of forty-five years disseminating the message of the Dhamma (his teaching) far and wide.

He made no distinction of caste, colour, class or clan when he disseminated the Dhamma. Men and women, the rich and the poor - from different walks of life; the lowliest and the highest; the literate and the illiterate; brahmins and outcasts; princes and paupers; saints and criminals; listened to him as he showed the path to peace and enlightenment. What the Buddha taught was not only for India. not only for his time. It is for all men, for all time. The path he had pointed out is open to all.

The Buddha passed away at the age of eighty at Kusinara (in modern Uttara Pradesh in India) with a final admonition to his followers:

"Subject to change and transiency are all component things. Work out your deliverance with diligence."

This, in short, is an account of who the Buddha is and what he had done for the world at large. The Four Noble Truths is the priceless message that he gave unto suffering mankind for their guidance and to help them to be rid of the bondage of Dukkha, and to attain that

absolute Happiness, that absolute Reality- Nibbana.

These truths are not his creation. He only discovered their existence. We thus have in the Buddha one who deserves our respect and reverence, not only as a teacher, but also as a pattern of noble, self-sacrificing and meditative life we would do well to follow if we wish to improve ourselves.

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"The gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts".