

## GAUTAMA BUDDHA - THE ENLIGHTENED WORLD-TEACHER

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The subject of this essay is "Gautama Buddha - The Enlightened World-Teacher". He who is not only "the Light of Asia" but one of the foremost leaders of humanity, has left, unfortunately for us, no direct evidence of his personal life, nor any verbatim report of his own utterances. This, however, is in perfect tune with the unique attitude of Indian saints and sages towards the story of their individual life. In order to let the truth they sought shine in its pristine purity they maintained a studied silence on the events of their temporal existence and environment. For our knowledge of the life and thought of the Buddha we have, therefore, to depend on what his immediate and later followers have recorded here and there in the Buddhist scriptures. Among these the Pali canon of the Sthaviravadins is most useful for our purpose. The *Tripitakas*, or the "Three Baskets of the Law" of this canon, were probably compiled and completed by 241 B.C. They contain, therefore, the earliest and most reliable record of the doings and sayings of the Buddha, known to us at the moment. The traditional story thus built up from the disjointed details gleaned from the Pali canon may not appear entirely unvarnished to modern higher criticism. Admittedly it is difficult to steer clear of the imaginary accretions and mythical legends that have grown round the life of the Buddha during the many decades subsequent to his death. The story is, nevertheless, highly important and effective in its having exercised a vast and vibrant influence upon the ideals and actions of countless millions all over Asia for the last twenty-five centuries indeed. It has a deep spiritual meaning also to a growing number of men and women in the Western world even in this science-swayed twentieth century.

Let me then give below a pen-picture of the early princely life, the spiritual search and self-enlightenment, and the religio-philos-

ophical teachings of Gautama Buddha, mainly based on the Sthavira-vadin (Pali *Theravada*) scriptures.

## II.

About 2500 years ago in c. 563 B.C. a son was born to Mahamaya, chief queen of king Suddhodana who ruled over the Sakya clan residing in the Kosala state at the Himalayan foothills in North India. Before the birth the queen-mother had a dream in which she was taken away to the sacred lake Anavatapta in the Himalayas, and bathed therein by the divine guardian angels of the four directions of the universe. Then a handsome white elephant with a lotus flower in his trunk approached her and appeared to enter her side. The next morning the royal astrologers interpreted the dream for her to mean that she would give birth to a wonderful son who would grow to become a World Emperor or a World Teacher. While on her way to her parents' place for her confinement Mahamaya gave birth to a bonny boy in the Lumbini grove on the outskirts of Kapilavastu (modern Padaria, in southern Nepal), the capital of the Sakyas. This tradition that he was born in the Lumbini grove has now been corroborated by the discovery of the memorial stone-pillar erected by king Asoka in 250 B.C. with the inscription, "Here was born Buddha, Sakyamuni."

On the fifth day from his birth after the customary ceremonies in all royal pomp and splendour, the boy was named Siddhartha, literally meaning "one whose every aim was achieved" or "fortunate". The Buddhist scriptures, however, refers to him very commonly as Gautama (Pali *Gotama*), for that was his family name. Sometimes in that literature he is also called Sakyamuni, "sage of the Sakya clan". King Suddhodana wanted to know from his soothsayers as to what future lay in store for his child, and was assured by most of them that his son would become a supreme world-ruler. But a saint named Asita who lived a hermit's life outside the capital, approached the king who held out his son as though to pay his reverence to the hermit. However, on recognizing the extra-ordinary characteristics of the child, Asita said: "O great king, it is I who should pay reverence to thy son. He is one of those rare men who are born only at long intervals. A great choice lies before him. He may become a supreme world-ruler, or a Buddha perfect in wisdom and saintly life. Truly, O king, I think thy son will become a

Buddha". As Asita was uttering these prophetic words, tears filled his eyes. The king in his amazement asked him: "Why do you shed tears?" Asita replied: "Alas, being old I shall not live to see the glory of thy son's Buddhahood, nor listen to his saving sermons."

These words made the king think deeply but not quite happy. To him there was great glory and grandeur in his son's future as a ruling emperor but no charm or delight if his lot would be that of a holy hermit. So he made up his mind to give Siddhartha such upbringing and education as would make the prince deliberately choose the path of regal glory of a sovereign and shun any other path whatever when he grew up. Siddhartha was, therefore, brought up in royal luxury, best of education and princely sport - particularly archery -, and to the delight of his father he excelled in all these far above his cousins and companions.

Of the many incidents of his early life recorded in the Buddhist texts, I shall relate here one or two which show the trend of his character and provide pointers to his later destiny.

One day, Devadatta, one of Siddhartha's cousins, struck with his arrow a swan flying high in the sky so that the poor bird came fluttering down and fell, by chance, in the garden where Siddhartha was taking a walk. Overwhelmed with compassionate feelings for the bleeding bird the prince at once rushed to it, pulled the arrow out with a gentle touch and himself applied some healing herbs to the wounded wing. On coming to know what had happened to his prey Devadatta demanded an immediate return of the swan to him. But Siddhartha firmly replied: "You could not take the life of the bird: you killed only its flight! I will not return the bird to you". Devadatta, however, repeated his claim in a more threatening tone so that the king, as he heard of this quarrel among the cousins, himself intervened and ordered that the dispute be referred to his council of wise men for arbitration. The verdict of the wise men was: "Devadatta tried to take the life of the bird: Siddhartha gave it back to the bird. He who gives life has a better right to own the bird than he who robs its life away. Even the gods cannot return life when it is taken away." The logic of the verdict was thus clear and convincing, and the swan remained under the tender care of Siddhartha till it became again strong enough to wing its way in high sky. Devadatta of course was dissatisfied with the verdict and nursed anger and envy in his heart for a very long time.

Mindful of what Asita had prophesied, king Suddhodana never relaxed in his planning for his son to pass his days in such a manner as would make him come in touch only with the sunny side of life. Says Gautama himself in one of the Buddhist texts: "I had three palaces at my disposal : one for winter, one for summer, and the third for the monsoon season. Through the four monsoon months, being entertained by female minstrels, I did not leave the monsoon palace at all." The king had passed secret orders that no one with any illness or sadness should go within the sight of the prince, and that none should utter before him even one word of sorrow or suffering, disease or death. And the climax of this princely pomp amidst which Siddhartha grew to be a youth of eighteen was his marriage with princess Yasodhara whom he won in open contest by feats of arms, overcoming all other renowned rivals such as his envious cousin Devadatta (reputed as the best archer), Nanda (the fine swordsman), and Arjuna (the expert horseman). Naturally king Suddhodana was highly pleased at this development in the life of his son, and as a mark of his happiness he presented the newly-wed couple yet another newly-built palace.

Siddhartha's mind, however, was no quite at peace: neither the luxury of a royal life nor the affection of a happy home was enough for him. All the precautions of his father for preventing him from perceiving the woes of the world could not avail; for Siddhartha *did* see the four signs - as prophesied - which changed the smooth course of his worldly life of a prince radically and urged him on in search of the life of spiritual enlightenment and inward peace. We are told that the gods themselves so arranged that the prince could see the signs, for man's destiny is always known to them. One day, when the prince was out on a drive in the country, he saw an old and wrinkled beggar, and in profound amazement asked his faithful charioteer Channa why the wretched fellow was so disgusting. Channa replied that the beggar was so repulsive because of his old age, and that all living men must grow old and aged in due course of time. The knowledge of this new but painful fact distressed Siddhartha who for a long time remained deeply pondering. This was the first sign. After a while he met the second sign in the same manner. He saw a very sick and suffering man attacked with plague-fever, and as he learned from Channa that sickness and suffering were the usual lot of a human being in this world, Siddhartha became terribly troubled in his mind. Then the third sign in the form of a corpse, which its mourners were carrying to the cremation ground, shook the prince's inner world with grim questions such as: Does death come to

one and all - even to proud princes and mighty men? Is death inevitable? These individual cases of inescapable decay, disease, and death appeared to him as symptoms of a universal malady. The fourth sign, however, had a silver lining of hope and solace. Siddhartha now met a wandering holy hermit with a calm and serene face beaming with inward joy and peace. His sight impressed the prince so much that his heart yearned to leave the worldly life and to seek his destiny by becoming himself a wandering monk.

About that time the prince received the news that his wife Yasodhara had given birth to a baby son. Without feeling any particular pleasure Siddhartha exclaimed: "This is another fetter!" He used the Sanskrit word *rahula* for "fetter"; so his son became known by the name Rahula.

From the worldly point of view Siddhartha thus had everything - high position and possessions, radiant health and a happy home, lovely wife and a charming child - and yet his whole inner being was haunted by an increasing dissatisfaction. There was an intense longing in him to seek for freedom from those fetters of glittering luxuries. An irresistible urge to look beyond the surface of his surroundings and sensual pleasures overwhelmed his heart and mind. So at one midnight, when the moon was shining in its full splendour and all others in the palace were sunk in sound sleep, Siddhartha roused his charioteer Channa, asked him to saddle his favourite horse Kantaka, and rode off with him into the night, without even taking the last look at his loving wife and tender son who were deep asleep. Verily, how true are the words of the *Bhagavad-gita*:

*ya nisa sarvabhutanam tasyam jagarti samyam,  
yasyam jagrati bhutani sa nisa pasyato muneh. (II, 69).*

"What is night for all beings is the time of waking for the disciplined soul. That which is the time of waking for all beings is the night for the sage of vision."

At dawn, far away from the capital, Siddhartha took off his princely ornaments and dress and put on a hermit's robe. With his own sword he cut off the flowing locks of his hair which were the sign of nobility. He handed all these to Channa and asked him to return to his father to report that the prince had now turned a recluse and adopted a homeless life. Thus Siddhartha performed what is known as *mahabhinishkrana* or "the great renunciation" and started on his unique spiritual quest.

In later years, after his enlightenment, Gautama Buddha spoke on his spiritual quest to this effect. There are two quests: the noble (arya) and the ignoble (anarya). If a man merely values and chooses and tries to possess those things which must decay and perish he will ultimately make himself unhappy. That is ignoble quest. As to the noble quest, he said that it is the wisdom and goodness of spiritual life which alone gives happiness. He continued: "Yes, in the days before my full enlightenment, when I was but a Bodhisattva and not yet fully enlightened, I too valued only those things which change and die in time. But the thought came to me: Why should I not pursue instead the happiness of the holy life which leads to a blissful life beyond this life of sorrow? So there came a time when I, being still quite young, with a wealth of coal-black hair untouched by grey and in all the beauty of my early manhood, cut off my hair and beard, put on a yellow robe and went out on a spiritual pilgrimage."

### III.

In the early days of his spiritual quest Siddhartha started on constant wandering from house to house and village to village, begging his food and searching for a *guru* (teacher). But soon he abandoned wandering and became a forest hermit. Says he: "A pilgrim now in search of the truth, and in search of the excellent road to peace beyond comparison, I came to Alara Kalama and asked if I might stay with his disciples and study under him". Alara Kalama was famous for his philosophical knowledge and attainments and from him Siddhartha learnt the technique of contemplation and the science of *Brahman* as taught in the Upanisads. But even this diligent discipleship under Alara Kalama did not convince him that mere knowledge and meditative discipline could lead one to the final liberation from sorrow and suffering of mortal life. He, therefore, left Kalama, and tried another reputed teacher named Ramaputra, but him also Siddhartha left because of the same lack of inner assurance and continued his quest once again all alone.

In those days in ancient India there was a widespread belief among some ascetics that life's *summum bonum* could be achieved only through intense suffering by the most rigorous self-torture. Siddhartha now tried this method of self-mortification and practised all kinds of painful penances: he lived dangerously and moved recklessly by passing his days and nights in desolate places, wild forests or haunted crematoria. He

disregarded the natural needs of his body and crushed even the elementary cravings of his flesh. He starved himself of food to the point of becoming a mere moving skeleton. We are told that at one time he lived on one millet seed a day! He carried on this severest self-suppression for about six years, and yet the truth that Siddhartha was seeking refused to dawn on his mental horizon. When he settled for a while at Uruvela in Magadha a batch of five ascetics following similar austere practices joined him as his disciples.

But a moment came when even his sturdy body reached almost the breaking point because of the tremendous strain Siddhartha had been inflicting on it for so long a period as six years. Once during meditation he fell down and fainted due to utter exhaustion but, fortunately, a goat-boy saw him by chance, who instinctively brought up one of his she-goats and milked some drops from her udder into Siddhartha's mouth. The fresh milk revived Siddhartha's consciousness and he at once realized that extreme austerities like long fasts and torturous penances did one little or no good: they hindered rather than helped man's spiritual progress. For a magnificent mind and a clear vision one must maintain a healthy and strong body. Life is like a lute, the strings of which must not be overstretched, nor be allowed to go loose, so that music is not marred, nor melody spoilt. Thinking thus he asked the goat-boy for more milk but the good boy now hesitated lest the touch of his low-caste body might defile the holy man: for that would be a sin according to the then prevailing caste-system beliefs. But Siddhartha said: "There is no caste except the good or bad characters, and these are the result of men's actions. Your action is good in bringing me the milk, so I consider you to be of a good caste. Evil actions make evil men and good actions make good men..." Delighted by these words the goat-boy rushed to fetch the finest milk-food he could get for Siddhartha. But the five disciples of his became disgusted at what they thought was Siddhartha's ignoble backsliding to a life of ease and luxury, and left him unceremoniously.

Outside the town of Gaya, Siddhartha was offered a bowl of a special meal of cooked rice and milk by a young mother, Sujata, with her heartfelt benediction: "May you be successful in fulfilling your wishes even as I have been!" After partaking of the meal, and after taking a bath in the nearby Niranjana (modern Phalgu) river, Siddhartha sat under a large *Pipal* or Bo tree and made a serene but solemn resolve:

*ihasane susyatu me sariram  
tvagasthimamsam pralayam ca yatu,  
aprapya bodhim bahukalpadurlabham  
naivasanat kayametaccalisyati.*

*Lalitavistara.*

"In this seat let my body wither, let my skin and bones and flesh meet utter destruction! My body shall not stir from this seat without attaining Enlightenment which is extremely difficult to obtain even in many ages!" With such an unshakable determination Siddhartha, now thirty-five years old, seated himself in a lotus-posture beneath the tree in deep meditation all through the night of full moon, and continued to do the same for full forty-nine days. H.G. Wells, in *The Outline of History* (p. 207), says: "When the mind grapples with a great and intricate problem, it makes its advances, it secures its positions step by step, with but little realization of the gains it has made, untill suddenly, with the an effect of abrupt illumination, it realizes its victory. So it would seem it happened to Gautama."

The Buddhist scriptures describe in vivid terms how Mara, the evil spirit of worldliness and sensuality, endeavoured in vain to shake Siddhartha's resolve, first by temptations of all kinds and then by terrors of whirlwind and tempest, earthquake and flood; how the earth itself stood witness of Siddhartha's goodness and benevolence when the latter was challenged by Mara to produce such evidence; and how Siddhartha could not be seduced even by Mara's charming daughters, *viz.* Desire, Pleasure and Passion. At long last, Gautama attained Enlightenment, the goal of his spiritual quest, the realization of the truth he was seeking. He solved the riddle of suffering and the secret of sorrow, and found out not only the cause of so much misery and unhappiness in this world but also the cure of overcoming all evil and winning supreme bliss. He became *Buddha* or "the Enlightened One", *Samyak Sambuddha* or "the Supremely Enlightened One", *Arhat* or "the Worthy One". Because of his conquest over Mara and his evil forces he is also called *Vira* or "Hero", and *Jina* or "Victor".

As to the processes of reaching the goal of such inner realization I give here Buddha's own words from the *Anupada Sutta* (III) of the *Majjhima Nikaya*: "By rising at every point above the realm of 'neither-perception-nor-non-perception' I developed and dwelt in the extinction of feeling and perception. When I had seen this by understanding, my defilements were shed. Mindful I moved in this attainment; and, moving



with mindfulness in this new attainment, my vision of the old qualities now extinguished and changed, told me that all of these *were* not, but came to be, and made themselves known by coming to be. So, without any leaning to those qualities or aversion from them, without dependence on them and without being enamoured of them, I lived detached and separate with my heart untrammelled. I knew now that there was no further refuge beyond, nor was it to be found in growth."

Thus Gautama, the Buddha, gained complete mastery over all evil thoughts and dispositions - over desire (*trsnā*), attachment (*raga*), and aversion (*arati*) - and attained deeper and deeper insight into the secrets of existence, not only of self, but also of human destiny and of the universe as a whole. No wonder he was henceforward also known as *Tathagata* or "One who has attained the Truth". Or, as one scripture says: "To describe him aright is to describe aright one who has risen to mastery and perfection in Noble Virtue, in Noble Concentration, in Noble Perception, in Noble Deliverance."

Still, for the moment, a doubt arose in the Buddha's mind as to whether this visionless world, full of ignorant and self-enslaved human beings as it is, would be able to grasp the meaning of the truth which he had realized after the severest test and triumph. However, the god Brahma, we are told, himself inspired the Buddha to preach to mankind the rare virtues of his doctrine and to open the doors of deliverance wide to all with eyes to see and ears to hear (*Majjhima Nikaya* I. 171).

#### IV.

Leaving the Bo tree, since known as the Tree of Wisdom, the Buddha travelled to Banaras, the holiest of Indian cities, and there in the Deer Park at Īsīpatana (modern Sarnath) he met his former five ascetic pupils who, though scornful at first, soon came under the spell of the serene and radiant presence of Gautama, the Enlightened One. To them the Buddha preached his first sermon, known in the Buddhist scriptures as *Dharma-cakra-pravartana* or "Setting in motion of the Wheel of the Law". Thus these five ascetics became once again his disciples. The circle of the Buddha's disciples and adherents rapidly widened. Within a few days sixty other young men accepted the discipleship under the Buddha. After giving them proper training he sent them out in all directions to preach the Buddhist teachings. "Go forth," he said to them, "and announce the Teaching, which is excellent in its beginn-

ing, excellent in its progress, and excellent in its goal. Proclaim the perfect life, pure and holy. There are in this world beings not altogether blinded with the dust of desire and passion; and if they do not learn the *Dharma* they will perish. They will learn and understand it from you." These sixty disciples were the first missionaries of Buddhism. In order to indicate the spirit of selflessness and devotion with which the Buddhist missionaries went to strange and unknown places and peoples, let me quote the following dialogue between the Buddha and his disciple Punna who had accepted to go to the Sunaparanta country which was inhabited by wild and violent people.

Buddha: "Punna, the people of Sunaparanta are fierce and ferocious. If they abuse and revile you there, what would you think of them?"

Punna: "Lord, I should think that the good folk of Sunaparanta were really nice people indeed, inasmuch as they refrained from striking me."

Buddha: "But if they did strike you?"

Punna: "I should think, Lord, that the good folk of Sunaparanta were very nice people indeed, inasmuch as they abstained from pelting me with clods."

Buddha: "But if they did pelt you with clods?"

Punna: "I should think, Lord, that the good folk of Sunaparanta were very nice people indeed, inasmuch as they forebore to cudgel me."

Buddha: "But if they did cudgel you?"

Punna: "I should think, Lord, that the good folk of Sunaparanta were very nice people indeed, inasmuch as they refrained from knifing me."

Buddha: "But if they did knife you?"

Punna: "I should think, Lord, that the good folk of Sunaparanta were very nice people indeed, inasmuch as they abstained from killing me."

Buddha: "But if they did kill you?"

Punna: "If they did, Lord, I should think at that moment that there are disciples of the Master who have proved their discipleship by facing death calmly while doing their duty. That would be my last thought, Blessed Master."

Buddha: "Good indeed, Punna. With such a mastery of yourself, you will be able to teach the people of Sunaparanta."

In no time did Buddha's fame as the Enlightened Teacher spread far and wide in India. Rulers of many territories vied with one another to welcome him and his followers and to receive religious instruction from them. As the number of his disciples increased by leaps and bounds, he organized the Buddhist congregation, commonly called *Sangha* or "Order of Mendicants", knit together by a common garb — the yellow robe — and a common discipline prescribed by the Buddha himself. The Sangha was charged with the mission of preaching unto the distracted world the *Dharma* — the Buddhist Doctrine — and point unto the doomed masses the ethical way to the everlasting peace.

I may refer here to a few of the most outstanding disciples of the Buddha. Sariputta and Mogallana, at first ascetics of Rajagrha with their respective names of Upatissa and Kolita, heard of the Buddha's teachings from Asvajit (one of the first five followers), and were so impressed by their imperishable character that they both requested the Buddha personally to admit them into the Sangha. Upali is known as the reciter of the *Vinayapitaka* (containing rules and regulations of discipline) at the first Council after the death of the Buddha. Kasyapa, reciter of the *Abhidharmapitaka* (dealing with the metaphysical views) was the president of the Council; it is said that the cremation of the Buddha's body was delayed to await his personal attendance. Ananda, reciter of the *Suttapitaka* (recounting the stories and parables told by the Master during his preaching rounds), was one of the Buddha's cousins and pet pupils of his last days, who looked after the Teacher with all tenderness and devotion. One of the last disciples ordained by the Buddha himself was Subhadra, a wandering monk in his earlier years.

In the Buddhist scriptures there are innumerable anecdotes of the Buddha's many years of preaching. He returned to Kapilavastu, twelve years after he had left it, and converted Suddhodana, Yasodhara and Rahula, as also many other members of the royalty, including his cousin Devadatta who had not yet purged his heart of anger and envy. Gautama's foster-mother, Krsa Gotami, requested the Buddha also to establish an Order of Nuns; after some hesitation he allowed its establishment. Devadatta's jealousy got the better of him and once he went to the extent of letting a mad elephant go loose in the Buddha's path so as to get the latter crushed under its heels. The mad beast, however, at

once came under the spell of the Buddha's overwhelming compassion and fearlessness, *karuna* and *abhaya*, and bowed at his feet like a tame and calm creature. A war was about to break between the Sakyas on the one hand and the neighbouring tribe of the Koliyas on the other, but the Buddha averted it by fearlessly stepping between the two camps and preaching to them the futility and evil of a bloody enmity. He once heard of a notorious robber Angulimala, who was a terror to the country. The Buddha went all alone to the den of the bandit and converted him and his gang from their terroristic activities to benevolent and peaceful living. Thus did *ahimsa* and *maitri*, non-violence and love, which the Buddha preached and practised, work their wonders in the spiritual uplift of individuals as also of masses.

Here is a typically touching story of how the Buddha brought the noble truths of his teachings home even to the most illiterate and ordinary masses. A woman, Krsa Gotami by name, was stricken with grief at the untimely death of her only child. Learning, from a monk that only Sakyamuni Buddha could provide the cure for death, she approached him and begged of him to restore her child to life. Buddha asked her first to fetch him a handful of mustard seed which should come from a house, in which no death had ever taken place, and from a family who had never suffered from bereavment due to the death of a dear one. The poor woman went from house to house in search of such a seed but could find no house and no family wherein no one had ever died. So at last she understood that death is common to one and all, and sorrow is inherent in worldly life. She then joined the Order of the Buddhist nuns and found her peace in the Buddhist Dharma.

The Buddha and his Sangha preached the Dharma to all and sundry, relentlessly moving on foot from village to village for about eight months in a year. During the four monsoon months they would stop in some convenient place or park and stay there until the rains were over. By the time he was eight years old the Buddha had travelled over much of India, established many branches and monasteries of his Sangha, and spread the sublime glory of his gospel with marvellous success. The "three-jewelled" voice of the Buddhism:

*Buddham saranam gacchami/  
Sangham saranam gacchami/  
Dharmam saranam gacchami//*

"I take refuge in the Buddha.

"I take refuge in the Sangha.

"I take refuge in the Dharma."

resounded in the ears of the millions of Indians all over the land and enkindled a flame of love and righteousness in their hearts.

The Buddha gave a new orientation to the popular religion in India. Many of the fundamental concepts of the *Upanisads* received a fresh restatement, a new emphasis from him. For example, he accepted the doctrine of *karma* (the cosmic law of cause and effect), the doctrine of *samsara* (rounds of birth, death, and rebirth), and the doctrine of self-restraint and renunciation of worldly pleasures. But he discouraged blind faith in the Vedic scriptures, and would not indulge in endless speculative theories of absolute reality. He would not let people depend for their destiny on mere performance of sacrifices unto gods; he inspired them to practise loving kindness towards one and all, to lead a life full of dynamic compassion. The Buddha humanized the popular religion, purified it into austere ethical sublimation of the *Dharma*. He roused man to his own moral remaking, by tirelessly appealing to him directly in his own simple local language.

It was when the Buddha was eighty that the end of his earthly existence came. He had already felt that the end was near at hand, for he had often told his disciples during those days that his body now resembled an over-used cart creaking at every joint. So he constantly harped on the advice to them that, after his passing, their leader would be none else but the *Dharma* (the Doctrine, the Truth) itself. Everyone must be his own friend, philosopher and guide, his own lamp, light and refuge. Although his physical body was attacked with sickness at the Pava town he insisted on moving and preaching as long as he could. At last on the outskirts of Kusinagara (Pali Kusinara) town he lay down under a *Sal* tree and that full-moon night he breathed his last breath in the midst of his surrounding disciples, Ananda and others, to whom — as well as to all succeeding generations — his last words were: "All composite things decay. Strive diligently for your own salvation!" Indeed, truly has it been sung:

"Transient are all things composite; theirs to originate and age,

And having originated, to be again destroyed; to have stilled them  
is beatitude."

Thus Gautama Buddha's body dissolved and he attained *mahaparinirvana* or "the Final Blowing Out". As a Buddhist would say: "The lamp of wisdom had been blown out by the wind of impermanence". And yet we are reminded by the Buddhist Texts that he had long since

been immortal (*Majjhima Nikaya* i, 172; *Vinayapitaka* i, 6; *Itivuttaka* 46, 62), unborn, unageing, undying (*Khuddakapatha* commentary 180; *Dhammapada* commentary 1, 228). *Samyutta Nikaya* (i, 71) says: "the body ages, but the Dharma does not age". The Buddha had indeed identified himself with the Dharma. In his case the lamp and the light, the fire and the flame, were one and the same. The *Samyutta Nikaya* (i, 43) also says: "The body dies, the Name survives". Which reminds us of the Rgvedic stanza (vi, 18, 7), *amartyena namnati pra sarsre*: "He far extends himself by an immortal name". In the *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* (iii, 2, 12) Yajnavalkya teaches Jaratkarava Artabhaga that when a person dies, the name does not leave him; the name is indeed infinite (*anantam vai nama*). Which, again, reminds us of what Rumi writes in *Shams-i-Tabriz* (xii): "Every shape you see has its archetype in the placeless world and if the shape perished, no matter, since its original is everlasting." (Nicholson's English Translation quoted by Radhakrishnan in *The Principal Upanisads*, p. 217).

## V.

The Enlightend Teacher had thus<sup>1</sup> passed away; his teachings, the immortal *Dharma*, remained. The Buddha himself once said: "He who knows the Dharma, knows me; he who knows me knows the Dharma" (*Samyutta Nikaya* iii, 120; *Milindapanha* 73). Let me now make a brief reference to his religious and philosophical teachings. For these the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, the "Sermon of the Turning of the Wheel of Law", which the Buddha had preached to his first five disciples at the Deer Park near Banaras, claims our first attention, containing as it does the basic teachings of Buddhism, viz. the "Four Noble Truths", and the "Noble Eightfold Path". Here are some essential extracts of the same:

"There are two extremes not to be pursued by a monk (lit. one who has gone forth from the world). What are these two? The pursuit of passions, (which is) low, coarse, common, ignoble and unprofitable; and the pursuit of self-mortification, (which is) grievous, ignoble and unprofitable. The Middle Way of the Tathagata avoids both these extremes:

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha took place on the same full-moon day of the month Vaisakha (May). Again, under a tree in the Lumbini grove was he born, under the tree at Gaya did he attain enlightenment, and under the tree at Kusinara did he enter *parinirvana*.

it gives vision and wisdom and leads to peace, insight, enlightenment, and *Nirvana*. What is this Middle way...? It is the Noble Eightfold Path, viz., Right View, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Recollection, and Right Meditation. This, O monks, is the Middle Way...

“And this, O monks, is the Noble Truth of Sorrow. Birth is sorrow, old age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow, contact with unpleasant things is sorrow, separation from pleasant things is sorrow, every wish unfulfilled is sorrow. In short, all the five aggregates of existence are sorrow.

“And this, O monks, is the Noble Truth of the Origin of sorrow. Sorrow arises from craving which leads to rebirth, which brings delight and passion, and seeks pleasure now here, now there, - the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving for existence, the craving for non-existence.

“And this, O monks, is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Sorrow. It is the complete cessation of that craving, so that no passion remains, leaving it, being emancipated from it, being released from it, yielding no attachment to it.

“And this, O monks, is the Noble Truth of the Way which leads to the Cessation of Sorrow. It is the Noble Eightfold Path, viz., Right View, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Recollection, and Right Meditation...” (*Samyutta Nikaya* v, 420 ff.)

The message of this short but significant sermon is quite clear: *Dukkha* or sorrow is inherent in ordinary worldly life; it is the direct result of constant craving for selfish satisfaction; it can only be stopped by a total cessation of that craving; and one can and must achieve this only by pursuing a middle course between self-indulgence and extreme asceticism and by leading a righteous, virtuous and well-ordered life. According to the Buddha, *dukkha* (sorrow), *samudaya* (cause), *nirodha* (suppression), and *marga* (way) are the four noble verities (*catvari arya-satyani*), the understanding of which is the *sine qua non* of a spiritual quest. This emphasis on the grim fact of sorrow and suffering has led some Western scholars to castigate the Buddhist doctrine as pessimistic<sup>1</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> The Buddha was criticized, also in India and in his own time, as preaching pessimism, inaction, and annihilation. For example, Siha, before his conversion to Buddhism, had asked the Buddha to clarify such current criticism. The Buddha calmly replied that the inaction and annihilation he taught concerned only misconduct of body, speech and mind which was unwholesome, immoral and harmful; on the other hand, he believed in action and did teach and train his disciples in the performance of such right conduct in body, speech and mind, as was wholesome, moral, and profitable (*Mahavagga, Vinaya Pitaka*).

but let it be remembered that the Buddha's life and thought are full of optimistic inspiration and assurance that the ills of this life and world are escapable, and that the Nirvana, the goal of man's spiritual aim and endeavour, is well within the reach of one and all.

From this apparently simple doctrine there arose, as time went on, several subtle and recondite tenets. The most important of these is known as *pratitya-samutpada*, "the law of dependent origination" or "the principle of causal production". Sometimes claimed to form the central part of the Buddha's teachings, or the final phase of the Buddha's enlightenment, the *pratitya-samutpada* constitutes a series of twelve terms, each preceding one giving rise to the next one in order. This twelve-linked chain of causation is explained to formulate itself as follows. From Ignorance (*avidya*) arise Volitional Activities (*samskaras*), thence Self-consciousness (*vijnana*), thence Name and Form (*nama-rupa*), thence the Six Senses (*sadayatana*: the sixth being mind), thence Contact (*sparsa*), thence Feeling (*vedana*), thence Craving (*trnsa*), thence Attachment (*upadana*), thence Becoming (*bhava*), thence Rebirth (*jati*), and thence Old Age and Death (*jara-marana*) and the entire mass of ills such as suffering, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.

Governed by the law of dependent origination the Wheel of Life turns on and on in a never-ending cycle, from ignorance onward unto birth and thence to all the ills that flesh is heir to. Craving — the cause of human suffering — has its roots in ignorance (a kind of cosmic ignorance) of the fundamental nature of existence, which has three conspicuous characteristics: it is impermanent (*anicca*); it is substanceless (*anatta*); it is suffering (*dukkha*).

The first characteristic underlines the fact that there is no eternal or unchanging entity anywhere in this universe. Every object or being is never the same even for two seconds; it is in reality transient and composite. Analysing the physical and psychical phenomena the Buddha says that existing beings are nothing else but a composition of five elements or aggregates (*skandhas*), viz., Corporeality, Feelings, Perceptions, Mental Formations, and Awareness (*Digha Nikaya 22*). According to the Buddha there is no being, but only becoming. Existence is in a continuous flux; any idea of permanence is, therefore, a part of the basic ignorance from which delusion and suffering spring.

The second characteristic is a logical development of the first: if life is but a compound of the above-mentioned five aggregates, what



else remains to be termed "substance" or "soul"? Hence the total absence of an eternal and unchanging self or soul in the Buddhist view of life. This is one of the fundamental doctrinal differences between Buddhism and other religio-philosophical tenets in India.

The last characteristic is also a natural inference from the first two: if existence is impermanent and substanceless, there can be no real delight or happiness, no restful peace or solace at all in life. Suffering is inescapably inherent in every aspect of life.

Is there, then, no everlasting, real and blissful entity at all, according to the Buddhist Dharma, which could be the ultimate aim of life? There is, and that is *Nirvana*, the complete extinction of all craving, the final "blowing out" of all selfish desires, and the realization of eternal bliss reached by the perfected beings like the Buddha and the Arhats (the worthy saints). Nirvana is the emancipation from, and the end of, the fetters that keep man chained to the woeful unending cycle of the birth, decay and death. This emancipation is the very essence and aroma of Buddhism. In the *Vinayapitaka* (i, 239) the Buddha is recorded to have said: "As the ocean has only one flavour, the flavour of salt, so has my doctrine only one flavour - the flavour of emancipation". Being a condition of inner experience and spiritual insight, Nirvana cannot be adequately expressed in our finite and limited terms. The impersonal, ineffable, ultimate Reality of Nirvana is a realm of mystic realization, far beyond human categories, concepts or comprehension. The Buddha did not care to define, or describe in detail, the nature of Nirvana: he urged, instead, man must work out his own salvation with diligence, and attain his own enlightenment, even as he himself had done. That Nirvana is far from a state of mere annihilation is clear from a statement in *Milindapanho* (v, 6) about it as "a glorious city, stainless and undefiled, pure and white, unageing, deathless, secure and calm and happy". Here it comes very near to the concept of the World-Soul, *Brahman*, of the *Upanisads*.

Nirvana is to be attained through the sincere and ceaseless pursuit of the Noble Eightfold Path (*Majjhima Nikaya* iii, 252), which has been already referred to above. For this purpose the Buddhism inculcates a high system of ethics. Rather than on knowledge of, and faith in, the supernatural there is in it a positive and persistent insistence on human conduct and character and on constant and conscientious practice of the cardinal virtues, *viz.*, love, joy, pity, and serenity. The Noble Eightfold Path is, in the Buddha's words, the Middle Path, since it steers

clear of the two extremes - the pursuit of sensual pleasures, and the indulgence in self-mortification.

The first step on the Eightfold Path is Right View of (i) the three salient characteristics of existence, (ii) the "four noble truths", and (iii) the law of "dependent origination". The second step is Right Resolve about renouncing all worldly attachments. These two steps are collectively called "Higher Wisdom".

The next three steps on the Eightfold Path form the Ethical Disciplines. They are: (i) Right Speech, i. e., refraining from lying and harsh language, from backbiting and loose gossip, of any kind; (ii) Right Action, i. e., avoiding killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct; and (iii) Right Livelihood, i. e., eschewing any kind of unworthy occupation, such as commerce in arms, in living beings, in flesh, in intoxicants, and in poisons.

The last three steps, jointly termed Mental Disciplines, are: (i) Right Effort which must prevent even unborn evil thoughts, eliminate the born evil thoughts, develop good thoughts yet arisen, and maintain the already arisen good thoughts; (ii) Right Recollection, i. e., constant and correct reflection on the states of body, feeling, mind and mind objects; and (iii) Right Concentration, i. e., *Samadhi* or mystic meditation during which the inner self is attuned to the immediate intuition of Truth. About the mental serenity of a disciple in *samadhi* the *Avatamsaka Sutra* says: "The Universe and all things in it are serenely reflected in his mind as the starry heavens are mirrored in the calm sea".

This, then, is the Noble Eightfold Path which leads to the cessation of suffering and to the attainment of *Nirvana*. The entire ethics of the Buddhism can be summed up in one stanza of the *Dhammapada* (xiv, 5):

"The eschewing of all evil,  
The perfecting of good actions,  
The purifying of one's mind,  
— This is the teaching of the Buddhas."

Treading this Noble Path faithfully into *Nirvana*, a true Buddhist passes his time all the way continually in the 'sublime mood' as beautifully described in the *Suttanipata* (143ff.):

"May every living being, weak or strong, large or small, seen or unseen, near or far, born or unborn - may every living being be full of delight!

“May none deceive another, or think ill of him in any way whatever, or desire evil for another in anger or ill-will!

“Just as a mother, as long as she lives, cares for her only child, so should a man feel all-embracing love for all living beings.

“He should feel limitless love for the entire world, above, below and across, unrestrained, without enmity. Standing, walking, sitting or lying down, he should be firm in the mindfulness of love. For this is what men call the Sublime Mood”.

Verily, the more one studies the Buddha’s teachings, the more does one feel that his religio-philosophic thought is one of the noblest ever conceived by the human spirit.

## VI.

In this way Gautama Buddha, the Enlightened Teacher, lived and taught that it is the ethical path that leads to spiritual emancipation. In modern India Mahatma Gandhi practised and preached the same truth. Although the Buddha demanded a total renunciation of all passions and pleasures that men’s minds ordinarily care for and crave after, his message and mission had tremendous success in India during his lifetime, and abroad, particularly in the countries of Asia, after his *parinirvana*. Sir Edwin Arnold wrote of him as “The Light of Asia”. Barth called him “the Light of the world”. The Indian emperor Asoka (269 to 237 B. C.) was so influenced by the Buddhist *Dharma* that after making many a bloody conquest he forswore war and violence altogether and made the peaceful tenets of Buddhism his state religion. During the subsequent centuries the Buddhist monks, like their Master, forsook everything to preach the doctrine of salvation to the world at large and carry its message of universal love and benevolence to distant parts of the East and the West. With gradual but grand steps Buddhism spread its radiance in the East into Tibet, Burma, Nepal, Ceylon, Cambodia, Annam, China, Japan, Korea, Manchuria, and Mongolia, and in the West into Afghanistan, Pamir, Turkestan, Syria and Palestine, and brought everywhere inner peace and solace to the common man. History bears witness to the fact that India’s contact with Asian nations through the Buddhism not only released spiritual power but aroused creative ardour in all of them. It was, so to say, a meeting of minds and union of hearts. Most of the best art Asia has known, in India, China, Tibet and Japan, has its roots in

this inspiring communion. I shall not relate here the story of this magnificent meeting of India and Asia, full of significant interest as it is. Let me only state the fact that the sublime grandeur of the Buddha's teachings has made an indelible impress on the conscience of mankind. He became the Enlightened World-Teacher, humanity's Friend and Saviour.

Indeed that sublime grandeur of his ethical idealism has the same freshness and fascination for the modern world as it had for the ancient. If the modern man wants to become free from the cankers of sensuality, of false views and values, of ignorance and illusion, let him work out his own salvation with single-minded diligence even as the Buddha did and urged others to do.

Two thousand five hundred years have elapsed since the Buddha's time, and three years ago in 1956 India, Burma, Ceylon, Nepal and other countries celebrated the 2500th anniversary on a grand scale. The Indian national emblem is adopted from the *Dharma-cakra*, "the Wheel of Law". In the past, the Buddhism was India's gift of love and friendship to the world — a gift that represented all that is true, beneficial, beautiful (*satyam, sivam, sundaram*) in her inner life and thought. Today, India should justify her celebrations only by remaining true to her sacred heritage of high ethical concepts: tolerance and non-violence, dignity of man and spiritual equality of all human beings, friendship towards whole humanity and also respect for life in nature.

I close by repeating the tribute to Gautama Buddha, the Enlightened World-Teacher, paid by the greatest living philosopher of India, Vice-President Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan: "The great Buddha typifies for all time the soul of the East with its intense repose, dreamy gentleness, tender calm, and deep love".