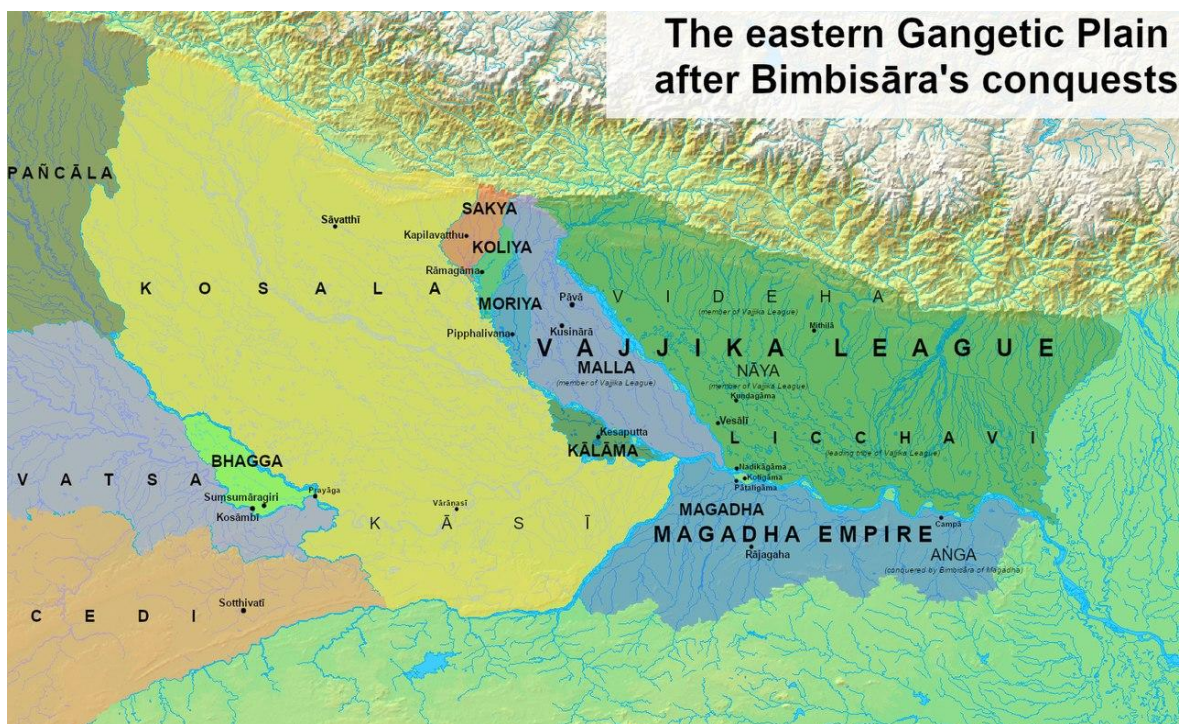


# The Journey of the Buddha

## Part 1: Birth to Renunciation

### The Sakya and Koliya kingdoms

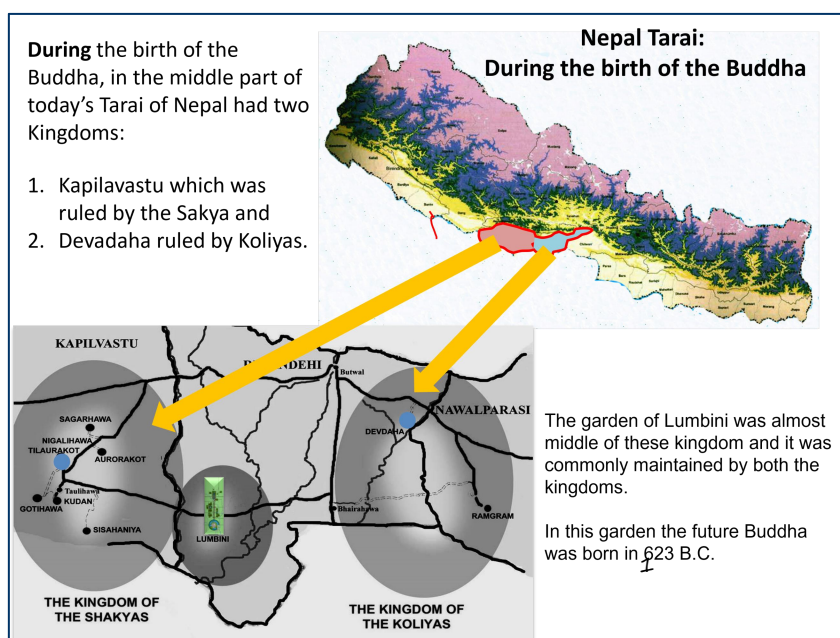


Location of Sakya and Koliya kingdoms

In the 7th and 6th centuries BC, the Tarai region of the southern part of Nepal had the two kingdoms, Kapilavastu and Devadaha. Kapilavastu was governed by the Sakyas, and their capital city also called the Kapilavastu, (presently called Tilaurakot). The Koliya kingdom had their capital at Devadaha.

### Kapilavastu: The Capital of the Sakya Kingdom

Kapilavastu is west of Lumbini and Devadaha is in the east.



The historical capital city of Kapilavatthu kingdom is located three kilometers north of Taulihawa, the district headquarters in the central part of the Nepalese Tarai of Kapilavatthu district in province no 5 of Nepal. The name Kapilavatthu refers to the kingdom as well as for the capital. The present archaeological mound of Tilaurakot (kot = mound or fortified area) is about 28 kilometres west of Lumbini.

### *The Environment*

Tilaurakot lies to the east of the river Banaganga (Buddhist literatures mentions this river as Bhagirathi). It is on the southern lap of Siwalik range often called it Chure mountain. It is surrounded on the north, east and south by agricultural fields and the mound with its dense jungle, it is almost like a forest.

### *The Name Kapilavatthu*

The earliest Buddhist literary sources mention that the name of Kapilavatthu was named after the sage Kapila. According to this literature, the children banished from the Kosala kingdom established the city, which later developed into a kingdom of its own. By the 8th-7th centuries B.C., it was one of the prosperous kingdoms north of the Ganges. Popularly it was called the Sakya kingdom, ruled as it was by the Sakya dynasty.

### *Boundaries of the Kapilavatthu Kingdom*

The Sakya territory was bordered on the north by the Himalayas, on the east by the river Rohini, on the west by the river Rapti and on the south by Pava and Kushinagar. Here the Himalayas means probably not up to the mount Everest but somewhere to the middle hilly regions or Churia ('Siwalik') Range. If we consider the Churia Range to the north and the river Rohini to the east (if it is indeed the same river Rohini which is flowing eight kilometres to the east of modern Butwal, 44 kilometres north of Lumbini), then the Kapilavatthu kingdom extended about 250 to 300 kilometres in radius.

### *Establishment of Koliya Kingdom*

The story of the origin of the Koliya race and their relations with the Sakyas.

Priya, the eldest sister of the exiled princesses from Kosala kingdom (the one who became the queen mother of Kapilavatthu kingdom), in course of time contracted leprosy, and was compelled to leave the town and live in a cave in the forest. Coincidentally the king of Varanasi, Rama by name, also suffered from the same disease and came to live in the same forest, where he had been fortunately cured by sitting under a Kolan tree (*Nauclea cordifolia*). As if by accident both met, and the princess complied with King Rama's suggestion to sit under the Kolan tree and was cured of her disease. They married and had thirty-two sons.

Together they established a city in the forest that came to be known as Kolanagara or Koliyapura, and Devadaha where royal families used to take bath. Nowadays it is known as Devadaha or Devahrada, meaning the "water tank of the gods."

### *Matrimonial Relation*

As Kapilavatthu and Devadaha bordered on each other, there developed matrimonial relations between the royal families of the two kingdoms. This relationship which was to lead to the birth of the Buddha.

## *King Suddhodana of Kapilavatthu*

Shortly after his marriage, his father, Singhahanu, died, and Suddhodana became king of Kapilavatthu. He married two Koliya princess from Devadaha, Maya Devi and Prajapati. They were sisters. The king and his amiable wife, Mayadevi observed the five precepts and ten royal duties. His palace had a pavilion, doors, gates, windows, rooms, towers, and temples, as also extensive inner apartments, and furnished with musical instruments. The king also improved the town with many tanks, roads, squares, crossings, markets, highways, and temples.

## *Maya's Dream*

It was the month of Ashara, when the Sakyas were celebrating a Asadh Utsav (festival of rain in the month of June/July). Mayadevi was about to conceive, and she had a dream:

A magnificent white elephant with six tusks descended from the heavens surrounded by a chorus of beatific praises. The elephant approached her, its skin white as mountain snow. It held a brilliant pink lotus flower in its trunk, and placed the flower within the queen's body. Then the elephant, too, entered her effortlessly, and all at once she was filled with deep ease and joy. She had the feeling she would never again know any suffering, worry, or pain, and she awoke uplifted by a sensation of pure bliss.

And the dream-readers said,

“The dream is good!

The Crab in conjunction with the sun

The queen shall bear a boy, a holy child

Of wondrous wisdom, profiting all flesh,

Who shall deliver the world from ignorance

Or rule the world, if will deign to rule.”

— The Light of Asia, Sir Edwin Arnold

And the king, having heard about this dream, summoned the Brahmins to interpret it. The Brahmins held that the queen had conceived a boy child in her womb and that this boy would become a universal monarch (chakravarti) if he led a domestic life, or else would become a sage who would show the path of salvation to the universe.

## *Maya's Travel to Devadaha*

Maya Devi, on nearing her full ten months of pregnancy and desiring to visit her parental house in Devadaha, expressed her desire to King Suddhodana, who in turn made all preparations for the journey. The road between the two towns was made level, strewed with clean sand; plantain trees were planted on each side; and water vessels were placed at regular intervals. The garden grove was beautified, roads were aggraded, flowering plants planted on both sides of the road and a horse-drawn carriage prepared for the queen to make the journey.

## *The Royal Procession*

On a spring day, on completion of all preparations for the queen's journey, a royal procession with Queen Maya Devi carrying the child in her womb, attended by her servants, and surrounded by groups of elephants, horses, youths, and chariots, slowly moved eastward across the tropical plains beneath the foothills of the western Himalayas towards the city of Devadaha, Maya Devi's parental and childhood home.

## *Lumbini*

### *The Birth of the Buddha*

On the full moon day of the month of Vaisakha (May/June), 623 BC, Maya Devi arrived in Lumbini on her way to her maternal home in Devadaha. She enjoyed the beauty of the Lumbini garden, attended by her servants as she walked slowly and heavy with child, but suddenly she felt the pangs of labour. Realizing that the time of delivery had come, she bathed in the Sakya Puskarini located almost at the center of the garden and proceeded twenty-five steps to the north, seeking some support. There was a beautiful ashoka tree (*Saraca indica*) in full bloom. While Maya Devi was holding the branch of the Asoka tree there shone forth from the right side of her womb an inconceivable and infinite light impossible to stop gazing at. Just as when the sun shines from the womb of the sky, the light of lightning strikes through the dense darkness from the womb of gathered clouds, or a great lamp appears in the womb of absolute darkness, kingdoms without distinction in ten directions were filled with light and light rays, and when all beings that had gathered there, including gods, nagas and humans, were insatiably experiencing the wondrous spectacle, the great sage was born without any harm to his mother. When the Bodhisattva was born, he looked in all four directions and took seven steps in each, and then spoke these words:

"This is the East from where the one who will attain nirvana (salvation) first appears. This is the South, and I shall become an object of devotion for all living beings. This is the West, and this shall be my final birth. This is the North; I shall cross over the sea of existence."

The proclamation was: "I am the foremost of all creatures who have crossed the riddle of the ocean of existence. I have come to this world to show the path of emancipation. This is my last birth, and hereafter I will not be born again."

The queen and the newborn prince were carried home in their four horse carriage to Kapilavatthu, the capital of the Sakyas.

### *Naming Ceremony of the Child*

A few days after the birth of the child a great festival was held in Kapilavatthu to name the young prince. The Brahmins selected the name Siddhartha, which means 'he whose aim is accomplished'. He was also called Sarvarthasiddha meaning 'one whose purpose has been fulfilled'.

### *Master Asita's Prophecy*

One week after Siddhartha's birth, a holy man named Asita Kaladevela paid a visit to the palace. The holy man gazed at the prince for a long time without uttering a word, and slowly started to weep. King Suddhodana, worried, asked if he saw misfortune for Siddhartha. Master Asita wiped the tears with his hands and shook his head. "Your majesty, your son will not be a politician. He will be a great Master of the Way. Heaven and Earth will be his home and all beings his relations. I weep because I will pass away before I have a chance to hear his voice proclaim the truths he will realize."

Soon after, Mayadevi passed away, and her sister, Gotami, or Mahapajapati became Siddhartha's mother.

### *Erection of Three Palaces for the Prince*

As the sage Asita, had foreseen that Siddhartha would attain Buddhahood, King Suddhodana made all possible arrangements for his son to lead a luxurious life and be kept away from all affliction and sorrow. He ordered the construction of three palaces suited to the seasons of the year. The first palace, called Ramma, had nine stories, the

second, called Suramma, had seven stories, and the third, called Subha, had five stories. Guards were posted up to seven kilometres from each palace on all sides to ensure that the prince would see no sad or disturbing sight.

### *Love versus Cruelty: Devadatta and the swan*

One day, in his ninth year, Prince Siddhartha sat in the palace garden, when suddenly, a wounded swan dropped on the ground. As he approached it, Siddhartha saw that the swan's wing had been pierced by an arrow. He tightly clasped the shaft of the arrow and pulled it out. Then, he picked up the creature and took it inside. Princess Sundari, his lady in waiting prepared medicine to apply to the wound while Siddhartha wrapped the bird in his own jacket and placed it close to the fireplace.

Soon, his cousin Devadatta came in and asked Siddhartha if he had seen a wounded swan. Siddhartha understood that the arrow had come from Devadatta's bow. He knew that if he handed over the swan to Devadatta, it would be killed. And so he stood between the swan and Devadatta, but Prince Devadatta was adamant. He claimed that since he had shot the swan out of the sky, it belonged to him.

Siddhartha persisted, saying, "Those who love each other live together, and those who are enemies live apart. You tried to kill the swan, so you and she are enemies. I saved her. The bird and I love each other, and we can live together. The bird needs me, not you."

Unable to resolve the argument on their own, the boys went to the court of King Suddhodana. Each of them presented their arguments, and the courtiers, aware of how dear Siddhartha was to the king, sided with him. Siddhartha was relieved that he had been able to save the swan but he was troubled because he knew that he had been supported not because of the truth of his argument but because he was the king's son.

For the next few days, he cared for the bird, and when it had healed, he released it into the sky, advising it to fly far away from Kapilavatthu.

### *Under the Rose-Apple Tree*

When Siddhartha was still a young boy, he attended his first ritual, in which his father, King Suddhodana, blessed by Brahmin priests, would plow a field, and indicate to the farmers of his land to prepare their fields. After prolonged chanting by the priests, the ceremony began. His father, and then the farmers, pushed ploughs, dividing the earth into furrows. He watched a water buffalo straining to pull a heavy plow, followed by a robust farmer whose skin was bronzed from long work in the sun. Sun blazed and the man's sweat poured in streams from his body. As the plow turned the earth, Siddhartha noticed that the bodies of worms and other small creatures were being cut as well. As the worms writhed upon the ground, they were spotted by birds who flew down and grabbed them in their beaks. Then Siddhartha saw a large bird swoop down and grasp a small bird in its talons.

He wandered off, and finding a rose-apple tree, sat beneath it and meditated on what he had seen. His mother, Queen Mahapajapati found him there, and when he opened his eyes, he said to her, "Mother, reciting the scriptures does nothing to help the worms and the birds."

### *Education*

In his childhood Siddhartha was sent to school. He learnt 64 types of alphabets, among which Brahmi, Kharosthi and the scripts of Banga, Anga and Magadha are mentioned. He studied all the Brahmanical literatures, including the Vedas ('scriptures') the Nigamas ('codes') the Puranas ('mythology') and Itihas ('history') along with the 18 silpas ('crafts').

## *Youth and tournaments*

Siddhartha preferred solitude and thoughtfulness to the frolics and pranks natural to his age. His father observed his spiritual inclinations and tried his best to protect the young prince from worldly sufferings.

The prince was provided all sorts of material comfort and pleasure. There are some places where the prince performed athletics and the martial arts. It is said that once an arrow shot more than ten krosch by Siddhartha pierced the ground and created a well that later became known as Sarakupa ('arrow well'). In a tournament of the Sakya youths, he is also said to have thrown a dead elephant three and half kilometers beyond the seven walls of the city moat into a deep hollow. This hollow is known, even to this day, as Hastigarta.

## *Witnessing Poverty and Oppression*

One day, Siddhartha and his cousin Devdatta were walking through Kapilavattu and heard wailing from a hut. Entering, they saw that the family was mourning the death of the husband/father. They were wretchedly poor and underfed, and the house was on the verge of collapse. The husband had desired the services of a Brahmin to purify the earth before rebuilding their kitchen, but before providing these services, the Brahmin demanded the man work for him and ordered him to haul large rocks and chop wood for several days. During this time the man became ill and asked to return home, but halfway home, he collapsed on the road and died.

As a result of such encounters, Siddhartha grew to question the teachings of the Vedas, and the power of the Brahmins over everyone else. He grew sympathetic towards those laypersons and members of the Brahmin caste who openly challenged the absolute authority of the brahmans.

## *Meeting Yasodhara*

As Siddhartha grew into his youth, Queen Mahapajapati was tasked with finding him a bride. At her request, the king and queen of the neighbouring Koliya kingdom arranged a martial arts event at which they invited all the young people of the nearby kingdoms. The princess of the Koliyas, Yasodhara was responsible for welcoming all the guests. Siddhartha placed number one in all the events.

As Yasodhara presented Siddhartha with his prize, a white elephant, Prince Devadatta stood behind him and fumed with envy. In his rage, he grabbed the elephant's trunk and viciously struck it in a sensitive spot. Overcome with pain, the elephant dropped to its knees. Siddhartha chastised Devadatta. Then he turned to the elephant, rubbed it gently where it had been hurt and spoke to it lovingly.

Gradually the elephant stood up again and bowed its head in respect to the prince. Siddhartha climbed upon the elephant's back and the victory procession began. Under the guidance of its trainer, the white elephant carried Siddhartha around the capital of Kapilavattu, and the people cheered. Yasodhara walked beside them.

## *Yasodhara and Siddhartha, a Second Meeting*

A few days later, when Siddhartha was walking in a village near the capital, he saw Princess Yasodhara again. She was tending to the village children who were suffering from various ailments and infections. He was surprised to see a royal princess in this manner and setting. Speaking to her, he learned that she had been doing such work since nearly two years. It gave her a sense of purpose and satisfaction that the life of the palace did not. And instead of trying to effect change as a member of the royal family, where women never held any real power, she preferred to work with people, helping them directly, tending to their most basic needs.

Siddhartha was happily surprised to see how closely her concerns resembled his own. He found that he could speak to her with ease, and that she understood him as almost no one else seemed to.

### *The Third Meeting*

Eager to finalise a bride for Siddhartha, King Suddhodana and Queen Gotami organised a reception for all the ladies of the nearby kingdoms. The Queen requested Siddhartha to stand beside a table laden with jewels to be gifted to each of the young women present. As each royal lady was requested to approach the table, Siddhartha picked up a ornament and presented it to her. Finally, it seemed that each of the young women had been gifted an ornament, and Siddhartha had completed his duty. But then, Yasodhara who had waited till the end, made her way towards the table. As she approached him, Siddhartha looked at the jewels kept on the table and back at her. He could not find anything that would suit her quiet grace. As she stood before him, he suddenly knew what to do. He removed the necklace from around his neck, and offered it to her, saying, “My mother, Queen Gotami, often says that I look better without jewelry. Please, princess, accept this gift.” As he placed the string of jewels around her neck, the audience applauded.

In the autumn of that year, they were married.

### *Witnessing Death, and Birth*

Siddhartha, after his marriage, was appointed Yuvaraja (crown prince) of Kapilavatthu and assigned as the governor (or chief magistrate) to Kalishaka, a neighboring town. King Suddhodana was very worried about the astrologers' prediction and afraid that the prince would renounce the world and lose the opportunity of attaining universal sovereignty.

After their marriage, Siddhartha and Yasodhara continued to travel from one edge of the kingdom to another, learning about the lives of the common people and the problems that they faced. Yasodhara continued her work of helping the poor. One day, a child she had been tending to, died. All her care had not been able to save a life. She returned to the palace and sat in meditation to ease her pain, but as she sat in meditation, tears streamed down her face. Siddhartha was equally moved by what she had experienced. He said to Yasodhara, “Birth, old age, sickness, and death are heavy burdens each of us carries in this life. What has happened to the child could happen to any of us at any moment.” It was then that Yasodhara informed him that she was with child.

Time flew and in some months, the young princess went into labour. It was only the noon hour, but suddenly the sky grew dark with clouds. Siddhartha could hear across the walls of the palace the cries of his wife. He waited with increasing anxiety. Reminded that his own mother had died a few days after birthing him, Siddhartha realised that childbirth was a passage fraught with danger, including the possibility of death.

As Yasodhara's cries stopped, he heard those of an infant. He had become the father of a young boy.

As Siddhartha held his son Rahula, he thought of the young child who had died a few months ago. He had accompanied Yasodhara to the funeral, watching as the small lifeless, pale body was placed on a pyre and eventually consumed by flames. Holding his son's tiny body in his hands now, Siddhartha thought to himself about the cycle of birth and death.

### *Witnessing Old Age, Decrepitude and Death*

Some time after the birth of Rahula, Siddhartha wished to go to the forest to see the glory of spring after winter. So on a day early in spring, Siddhartha was driven into the countryside by the charioteer Channa.

Some time into the ride, they saw on the road an old man. Siddhartha turned to Channa and asked, “Who is this man that has come here, with white hair and his hand resting on a staff, his eyes hidden beneath his brows, his limbs

bent down and hanging loose?” Channa replied that the man was this way because of his old age, that he had once been young and strong, standing erect just like Siddhartha. The Prince thought to himself, “Old age thus strikes down all alike, our memory, comeliness, and valour; and yet the world is not disturbed, even when it sees such a fate visibly impending.”

Troubled by these thoughts, he requested the chariot to be turned back towards the palace.

Some days later, the desire to see the spring in the forest arose again in Siddhartha’s heart. And again, Channa drove him and the royal family out of the palace.

Approaching the Banganga river, they saw on the road, a man who seemed to have collapsed due to an illness. He was less than thirty years old, but his body was disfigured. His arms and legs were pulled tightly towards his chest, and he was moaning in pain. Siddhartha held the man and directed Channa to take them to a doctor. Channa replied, “Your highness, these are the symptoms of an incurable, infectious disease. There is no hope for this man, and if we take him in the carriage, yourself, the princess and the young prince too may get infected.”

Siddhartha looked at the dying man no older than himself, and all the assurance of good health he had taken for granted, suddenly vanished. From the riverbank came cries of mourning. He looked up to see a funeral taking place. As the man passed away, Siddhartha released his hand and quietly closed the eyes.

### *A View of the Path*

For several days after these incidents, Siddhartha was racked with anxiety about the transitory nature of youth, health and life itself. Then, seeking respite, he mounted his horse *Kanthaka*, and left for the forest.

As he sat in the forest, pondering these questions, he was approached by a man a man in a beggar’s dress. On being asked who he was, the man replied, “I, being terrified at birth and death, have become an ascetic for the sake of liberation. Dwelling anywhere, at the root of a tree, or in an uninhabited house, a mountain or a forest, I wander without a family and without hope, a beggar ready for any fare, seeking only the highest good.”

Siddhartha understood that the man was a monk, seeking answers to the same questions that had been troubling him. Seeing the man walk away, he felt like he had found a path to pursue. Calm now, he sat in meditation on the fears and sorrows of birth, death, sickness and old age. He thought, “It is a miserable thing that mankind, though themselves powerless and subject to sickness, old age, and death, yet, blinded by passion and ignorant, look with disgust on another who is afflicted by old age or diseased or dead.”

As he left the forest, his mind was fixed on the attainment of *Nirvāna*.

### *Yasodhara’s Dreams*

That night, Yasodhara’s sleep was disturbed by three strange dreams.

In the first, she saw a white cow on whose head was a sparkling jewel. The cow strolled through *Kapilavastu* headed for the city gates. From the altar of *Indra* resounded a divine voice, “If you can’t keep this cow, there will be no light left in all the capital.” Everyone in the city began chasing after the cow yet no one was able to detain it. It walked out the city gates and disappeared.

In her second dream, Yasodhara watched four god kings of the skies, atop *Mount Sumeru*, projecting a light onto the city of *Kapilavastu*. Suddenly the flag mounted on *Indra*’s altar flapped violently and fell to the ground. Flowers of every color dropped like rain from the skies and the sound of celestial singing echoed everywhere throughout the capital.



In her third dream, Yasodhara heard a loud voice that shook the heavens. "The time has come! The time has come!" it cried. Frightened, she looked over at Siddhartha's chair to discover he was gone. The jasmine flowers tucked in her hair fell to the floor and turned to dust. The garments and ornaments which Siddhartha had left on his chair transformed into a snake which slithered out the door. She heard the bellowing of the white cow from beyond the city gates, the flapping of the flag upon Indra's altar, and the voices of heaven shouting, "The time has come! The time has come!"

Yasodhara awoke panic-stricken and turned to Siddhartha. She asked him, "Are these dreams an omen that you will soon leave me in order to go and seek the Way?" Siddhartha fell silent, then consoled her.

### *Preparing for Siddhartha's Departure*

A few nights later, while Siddhartha spent time with his cousins, Yasodhara went to Channa and requested him to keep Siddhartha's horse, Kanthaka, ready for the Prince's use later that night. She returned to their room, prepared Siddhartha's travelling clothes and placed them on the chair by his bed. Then she took the young Rahula in her arms and lay down on their bed.

### *The Renunciation: leaving with Channa and Kanthaka*

As the night of revelry stretched on, Siddhartha's cousins as well as the courtesans and musicians, tired and drunk, slowly drifted off to sleep. Siddhartha, awake and sober, extracted himself from the company and went to his quarters where he saw Yasodhara and Rahula asleep. Then he went to Channa, and waking him, asked that Kanthaka, the horse, be prepared, so that Siddhartha may leave the royal palace.

They departed through the east gate of the city (called Mangala-dwara, Lucky Gate) and paused a short time beyond the gate to look back at the city, where later a stupa was erected and called Kanthaka's Return. Later, this eastern gate also came to be known as Mahabhiniskramana dwara, or the 'gate through which Lord Buddha left his worldly life'.

The two men rode until they had crossed the border of the Sakya kingdom and entered the forest by the banks of the river, Anoma. There Siddhartha dismounted. Taking a sword, he cut off his hair, and then removed his ornaments. He handed the lock of hair, the sword and the ornaments to Channa and requested him to take them back to his family with the news of his departure.

He assured him that when he had found the path he was seeking, he would return to Kapilavatthu.

## Part 2: Seeking Enlightenment

Alone in the forest after the departure of Channa and Kanthaka, Siddhartha wandered about.

### *The Appearance of Maara*

The demon Maara appeared before him, and offered to make him the universal monarch if he returned to Kapilavatthu. But Siddhartha, who had already tasted the imprisoned life of the palace and was feeling delightfully free in the forest, recognised the temptation and walked on.

He came upon a man dressed as a monk but carrying a bow and arrow. The man was a hunter, dressed like a monk so that the forest creatures would not fear him and he could easily hunt them. Siddhartha approached the man and offered to trade him his royal robes and ornaments for his robes. Siddhartha, now in the garb of a monk, walked on. He felt a great sense of freedom and peace.

### *The Centre of Master Kalama, near Anupiya*

A monk was walking by. This was Bhargava, a student of the spiritual master Alara Kalama. Siddhartha spoke to Bhargava about his quest and his purpose for coming to the forest. He asked Bhargava to lead him to the centre of Master Kalama. The centre was located north of the city of Vesali (present day location: village Besarh, Tirhut division, Bihar), near a smaller city called Anupiya, in the country of the Mallas.

### *Following Master Alara Kalama*

Introduced by Bhargava, Siddhartha spoke to Master Kalama about himself and his quest for enlightenment. The master accepted him into his school. His disciples taught Siddhartha how to hold a bowl and beg for food in the city, and how to forage in the forest for edible roots and greens. Holding a bowl to beg for the first time, Siddhartha was struck by how closely the life of a monk was linked to the world around them- they depended directly on the city people and the forest.

Under guidance of Master Alara Kalama, after some weeks of practice, Siddhartha entered a state of concentration in which thought and attachment dissolved, and rapture and non-rapture ceased to exist. It felt to him as though the five doors of sense perception had completely closed, and his heart was as still as a lake on a windless day.

The master was impressed by his progress and asked him to meditate so as to attain the Realm of Limitless Space. This, he explained, was where the mind becomes one with infinity, all material and visual phenomena cease to arise, and space is seen as the limitless source of all things.

As Siddhartha practiced, he realised the state of Limitless Space, but he also realised that this did not liberate him from his deepest anxieties of death, old age and sickness. Addressing his concern, Master Alara explained that the limitless space that he experienced was only his consciousness and that he must go beyond it in order to seek liberation. In doing so, he would experience the Realm of Limitless Consciousness. He explained to Siddhartha, "the realm of limitless space is of the same essence as your own mind. It is not an object of your consciousness, but your very consciousness itself." And so, Siddhartha continued his practice.

In two days, Siddhartha entered the state of Limitless Consciousness. And yet, his fears and sorrows remained. Returning to the Master, Siddhartha was told, "You are very close to the final goal. Return to your hut and meditate

on the illusory nature of all phenomena. Everything in the universe is created by our own mind. Our mind is the source of all phenomena.” This, he told Siddhartha, is the Realm of No Materiality.

While the realm of no materiality was a precious fruit of meditation, it did not help resolve the fundamental problem of birth and death, it did not liberate Siddhartha from suffering and anxiety.

The Master looked at Siddhartha quietly and said, “You have achieved all that i can teach you. If you choose, you can continue to stay on with my disciples and together, you and i can guide them.” However, Siddhartha knew that he had to keep searching for his own path before he could guide others. Respectfully, he took leave of the master.

### *The Kingdom of Magadha*

From Vesali, Siddhartha crossed the Ganga and entered into the kingdom of Magadha (present day location: west-central Bihar). He had heard of many monks and ascetics that practiced in the villages and forests of Magadha. Some of them practiced severe austerities; they refused clothes, refused food, surviving on animal carcass and fruits, leaves and roots they found in the forest. They believed that by subjecting their bodies to the elements, they could attain heaven. Siddhartha disagreed with this method.

### *The Pandava Cave, near Rajagaha*

He found a cave on the Pandava hillside, not far from the capital city of Magadha, Rajagaha (present day Rajgir). He lived and meditated there.

### *Meeting King Bimbisara of Rajagaha*

One day, when he was begging for food in Rajagaha (present day location: Rajgir, Nalanda distt.), he crossed the path of the King of Magadha, Bimbisara. The king was impressed by the demeanour of the monk and inquired about him. The next day, the king went to the Pandava hillside to meet Siddhartha. The King was looking for a spiritual guide and friend who could be a sound companion to him and help him administer his kingdom justly. He offered Siddhartha half of the kingdom of Magadha, and a palace of his own. Siddhartha smiled, and told the king of his former life of royalty, and of his desire to find a path of liberation.

The king was embarrassed to have offered half of his kingdom to the prince-heir of the Sakyas. He said to Siddhartha, “Let me ask only this—from time to time, come to my palace and allow me to offer you food, and when you have found the Great Way, return in compassion to teach me as your disciple.” Siddhartha agreed.

### *South of Rajagaha | 3 years since Renunciation*

#### *Following Master Uddaka Ramaputta*

3 years after having left Kapilavasthu, Siddhartha entered the school of Master Uddaka Ramaputta, a renowned spiritual teacher.

Master Ramaputta explained to him, “Monk Siddhartha, in the state of no materiality, emptiness is no longer the same as empty space, nor is it what is usually called consciousness. All that remains are perception and the object of perception. Thus, the path to liberation is to transcend all perception.”

Siddhartha asked, “But, Master, if one eliminates perception, what is left? If there is no perception, how do we differ from a piece of wood or a rock?”

“A piece of wood or a rock is not without perception. Inanimate objects are themselves perception. You must arrive at a state of consciousness in which both perception and non-perception are eliminated. This is the state of neither perception nor non-perception. Young man, you must now attain that state.”

Siddhartha saw that this state allowed one to transcend all ordinary states of consciousness. But whenever he came out of this meditative state, it did not provide a solution to the problem of life and death. It was a most peaceful state to dwell in, but it was not the key to unlock reality.

The master explained that that was all he could teach him. He too, like Master Alara Kalama, offered to make Siddhartha his spiritual heir. Siddhartha politely declined, and decided to seek the path on his own.

While at Master Uddaka’s centre, Siddhartha had befriended five of the master’s disciples– Kondanna, Assaji, Mahanama, Bhaddiya and Vappa. They were sad to see him go. Siddhartha resolved that when we found the path, he would return to share it with his teachers and companions.

### *Dansgiri Mountain, on the banks of the Neranjara River | 5 years since Renunciation*

From the centre of Master Uddaka Ramaputta, Siddhartha walked west, towards the Neranjara river (the Phalgu or Lilajan river). He crossed the river and reached the Dansgiri mountain.

He wondered if he had misjudged the logic of the ascetics. Perhaps it was by conquering the body and its needs that one could free oneself of fear and anxiety around death, sickness and old age. And so, he climbed up the Dansgiri, a rugged mountain with sharp peaks and several caves. Siddhartha took shelter in a cave and decided to start practicing self-mortification.

### *In the Forest by the Neranjara*

#### *Becoming an Ascetic*

Some days later, his friends from Master Uddaka’s centre joined him. They wanted to accompany him in his quest. The six seekers moved down the mountain and into the forest by the banks of the Neranjara. Siddhartha’s austerities grew in severity and with that his body suffered. His skin hung loose off his bones, and his hair fell out in clumps. He stopped bathing in the river and barely ate at all, sometimes eating dried buffalo manure or a shrivelled fruit found on the forest floor. He became extremely weak. Now, Maara appeared before him a second time, and urged him to give up his search for the Path. But though weak in body, Siddhartha was resolute of mind. He ignored Maara and continued his practice.

One evening, after a long day of austerities in a cremation ground, he sat in quiet meditation. The gentle evening breeze caressed his skin, and he felt a bliss that he had not all through his day or bodily hardships. He was reminded of the peace he had experienced meditating as a young boy under the rose-apple tree, or walking the forest after leaving Kapilavasthu. He realised then the unity of the body and mind, that to nurture the mind, one could not torture the body.

In all his previous attempts, in all the teachings of the scriptures and the spiritual masters, the goal had been to go beyond perception and consciousness, to escape feelings and sensations. But perhaps that was not the way... It was true that one should not respond blindly to sensations and feelings, but one came no closer to true knowledge by annihilating them. Sensation, like that of the cool breeze, could bring peace to both body and mind.

## *Returning to the Body*

The next morning Siddhartha decided to nourish his body and his mind. He first walked to the body of a corpse, that of a young woman, that had been brought for cremation the day before. His own robe was in tatters. He respectfully removed the brick coloured shroud covering the dead woman, and draped it around himself. He washed his new robe and his body in the Neranjara. Then, he started walking to the Uruvela village (presently: Bodhi Gaya) to beg for food. But after just a short walk, he collapsed of weakness.

A young girl from Uruvela was walking towards the forest carrying a plate of offerings for the forest deities. Her name was Sujata. Seeing the monk lying there, she bent down and placed a bowl of milk to his lips. After a few sips, Siddhartha felt revived.

From that day on, Siddhartha espoused the doctrine of the "Middle Way" a path between luxuriant indulgence and extreme renunciation. He started living in the cool forest by the banks of the Neranjara. He would go into the village to beg for food, and return to the forest to meditate. During that time, Sujata became one of his regular visitors. So did Svasti, a young buffalo herder who brought fresh kusa grass for Siddhartha to sit on while he meditated.

Kondanna, Assaji and the other ascetics lost faith in him. They believed he had given up his quest in exchange for bodily comforts. Disappointed, they left the forest and decided to pursue their practice elsewhere.

## *Being Present in the World*

Siddhartha continued on the path he had decided for himself. He abandoned all reliance on tradition and scripture. He did not hesitate to let meditation nourish his mind and body, and a sense of peace and ease grew within him. He did not distance himself or try to escape his feelings and perceptions, but maintained mindfulness in order to observe them as they arose. He abandoned the desire to escape the world of phenomena, and as he returned to himself, he found he was completely present to the world of phenomena.

He often sat under a large peepal tree which spread its canopy far over the forest. One day, looking at a peepal leaf, he saw in it the presence of the soil, the sun, the rain and the wind. He saw that the leaf had always been around, in the presence of the light, the warmth, the rain, the sun and the soil. And when it would fall off the tree, it would remain, in the soil, the water and the warmth that would nourish other trees and leaves. The leaf, like himself, had never been born, it had simply manifested. With this insight, ideas of birth and death, appearance and disappearance dissolved. He could see that the presence of any one phenomenon made possible all others. All beings, animate and inanimate, were interdependent, and so, there was no separate self.

## *Siddhartha's Dreams: The Prelude to Awakening*

That night Siddhartha had several vivid dreams. In the first one, he was lying on his side, his knees brushing against the Himalayas, his left hand touching the shores of the Eastern Sea, his right hand touching the shores of the Western Sea, and his two feet resting against the shores of the Southern Sea. In another dream, a great lotus as large as a carriage wheel grew from his navel and floated up to touch the highest clouds. In a third dream, birds of all colors, too many to be counted, flew towards him from all directions.

## *The Defeat of Maara*

As Siddhartha sat in meditation evening, the demon Maara sat despondent in his realm. His three sons, Confusion, Gaiety, and Pride, and his three daughters, Lust, Delight, and Thirst, asked him the reason of his despondency. He

answered, “This sage, wearing the armour of resolution, and having drawn the arrow of wisdom with the barb of truth, sits yonder intending to conquer my realms, — hence is this despondency of my mind. If he succeeds in overcoming me and proclaims to the world the path of final bliss, all this my realm will to-day become empty.”

Maara mounted his elephant Girimekhalaa, and sent his army to disrupt Siddhartha’s meditation.

Siddhartha recognised Maara’s army,  
“Your first squadron is Sense-Desires,  
Your second is called Boredom, then  
Hunger and Thirst compose the third,  
And Craving is the fourth in rank,  
The fifth is Sloth and Torpor  
While Cowardice lines up as sixth,  
Uncertainty is seventh, the eighth  
Is Malice paired with Obstinacy;  
Gain, Honor and Renown, besides,  
And ill-won Notoriety,  
Self-praise and Denigrating Others:  
These are your squadrons.”

Maara, identified, was livid. He threw a disc at the monk, but he remained unmoved.

Finally, he challenged Siddhartha’s right to his seat under the peepal tree. “Up, up, O thou Ksatriya, afraid of death! follow thine own duty and abandon this law of liberation! ...this mendicant life is ill-suited for one born in the noble family of a royal sage to follow.” He called out to the earth to bear witness.

Suddenly the earth trembled, and a quake jolted Maara and his host of demons. The earth answered Maara’s accusation on Siddhartha’s behalf. They fled in disarray, as Siddhartha continued his practice under the tree.

### *The Great Awakening*

During the first watch of the night, Siddhartha began to discern the presence of countless other beings within himself. Animate and inanimate beings— mosses, minerals, soils, rocks, insects, grasses, people and animals, were all a part of him in the present moment. He saw his own countless births and deaths. He felt the joys and sorrows of all other beings. He saw that every cell of his body contained all of heaven and earth, and spanned the past, present, and future.

In the second watch, he saw how countless worlds had been created and destroyed, and countless beings passed through innumerable births and deaths. He saw that all these creations and destructions were like the rising and falling of waves in the sea. The sea remained— beyond birth and death, even as waves rose and ebbed.

As the third watch arrived, lightning and thunder cracked across the sky. Rain poured and soaked his body. Siddhartha saw that living beings suffer because they fail to see their connectedness with other beings. Feelings of greed, anger, annoyance, doubt and jealousy all have their roots in this ignorance. Through mindfulness, one can attain understanding, and through understanding, love. Life is illuminated by right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This is the Noble Path: aryamarga.

Looking deeply into the heart of all beings, Siddhartha attained insight into all minds, and was able to hear everyone’s cries of both suffering and joy.

The thunder and rain relented, and as Siddhartha opened his eyes, he saw that the morning star had risen.

## *Sharing the Wisdom*

A bigger group of children visited Siddhartha in the forest. Each of them brought some food, and all sat together and shared. Sujata peeled a tangerine and offered it to Siddhartha. He passed each piece of the tangerine to one child, and they all sat silently, eating in mindfulness, as Siddhartha explained to them how the tangerine was formed of the sky, the earth, the wind, the water and the soil- that it was a part of the universe, and the whole universe was in it.

He was delighted how simply and easily the children understood him. He said to them, "In previous lives, we have all been earth, stones, dew, wind, water, and fire. We have been mosses, grasses, trees, insects, fish, turtles, birds, and mammals. I can still remember a life in which I was a jagged rock upon a mountain peak and another life in which I was a plumeria tree. It is the same for all of you." Then he told them a story about one of his previous lives in which he had been a deer.

The Buddha was a deer who lived in a forest which had a clear lake where the deer liked to drink. A turtle lived in the lake's waters and a magpie lived in the branches of a willow tree beside the lake. Deer, Turtle, and Magpie were very close friends. One day, a hunter followed day old tracks left by Deer that led to the edge of the lake. There he left a trap made of strong ropes before returning to his hut on the outskirts of the forest. Later that day when Deer came for a drink of water, he was caught by the trap. He cried out and was heard by Turtle and Magpie. Turtle crawled out of the water and Magpie flew down from her nest. They discussed how best to help their friend get out of his predicament. Magpie said, "Sister Turtle, your jaws are sturdy and strong. You can use them to chew and cut through these ropes. As for me, I'll find a way to prevent the hunter from coming back here."

Magpie flew off in haste. Turtle began to gnaw at the ropes. Magpie flew to the hunter's hut and perched on a mango branch outside his front door all night to wait for him. When day broke, the hunter took a sharp knife and walked out his door. As soon as she saw him, Magpie flew into his face with all her might. Struck in the face by the bird, the hunter was momentarily dazed and went back inside his hut. He lay down on the bed to rest a moment. When he got up he paused for a moment and then, still clutching his sharp knife, went out the back door of his hut. But clever Magpie had outguessed him. She was waiting at the back perched on a jackfruit branch. Again she flew into his face, smacking him hard. Struck in the face twice by a bird, the hunter went back into his house to think things over. He decided it was an unlucky day and that perhaps it would be best to remain home until the morrow. The next morning he rose early. He picked up his sharp knife and, as a precaution, covered his face with a hat before he walked out the door. Seeing she could no longer attack the hunter's face, Magpie sped back to the forest to warn her friends.

"The hunter is on his way!"

Turtle had almost chewed through the last of the ropes. But the last rope seemed as hard as steel. Her jaws were raw and bloody from chewing nonstop throughout two nights and a day. Still she did not stop. Just then the hunter appeared. Frightened, Deer gave a mighty kick which broke through the last rope and set him free. Deer ran into the forest. Magpie flew high into the willow tree. But Turtle was so exhausted from her efforts that she could not move. The hunter was angry to see the deer escape. He picked up the turtle and tossed her in his leather sack which he left hanging on a branch of the willow tree. Then he went off to find Deer. Deer stood concealed behind some bushes and so saw Turtle's predicament.

"My friends risked their lives for me," he thought, "now it is time for me to do the same for them."

Deer stepped out in full view of the hunter. He pretended to stumble as though very tired and then he turned away and hobbled weakly down the path. The hunter thought, "The deer is almost out of strength. I will stalk it and soon kill it with my knife."

The hunter pursued Deer deeper and deeper into the forest. Deer managed to stay just out of the hunter's reach. When they were far from the lake, Deer suddenly broke into a run until he was out of the hunter's sight. He covered his hoof-prints and then returned to the lake. He used his antlers to lift the leather bag off the branch and to shake Turtle out. Magpie joined her two friends.

"You both saved me from sure death today at the hunter's hand!" said Deer. "I fear he will return here before long. Magpie, fly to a safer spot in the forest. Sister Turtle, crawl back into the water and hide. I will run back into the forest." When the hunter arrived back at the lake, he found his leather sack on the ground, empty. Frustrated, he picked it up and still clutching his knife, trudged home.

The Buddha said to the children, "Love is possible only when there is understanding. And only with love can there be acceptance. Practice living in awareness, children, and you will deepen your understanding. You will be able to understand yourselves, other people, and all things. And you will have hearts of love. That is the wonderful path I have discovered."

They listened to him carefully and then one of them suggested that they call this, the Path of Awareness. Another spoke, "Teacher, in Magadhi, Bodh or Budh means 'awaken', can we call you 'Buddha', the awakened one, and this tree that has sheltered you the Bodhi tree?" And thus, Siddhartha became Gautama Buddha.



## Part 3: The Dhamma and the Sangha

### *The First Disciples*

Two merchants, Tapussa and Bhallika, travelling past, saw the Enlightened One, and respectfully approached him, offering rice-cakes and honey. This was the first food the Buddha accepted after attaining Buddhahood. The Buddha pointed out the way of salvation, to them and they in turn took refuge and were taught about the Dharma making them the first followers as lay disciples.

### *Maara's War*

During the fourth week after the Enlightenment, Maara appeared again and discouraged the Buddha from going forth to preach. He said: "If you have realized the safe path to immortality, go your way alone by yourself. Why do you want to admonish others?" But Gautama, aware of what he was trying to do, ignored him. Then, his three daughters, Ta.nhaa, Arati, and Ragaa stepped in but they too were unable to dissuade Gautama from following his purpose.

### *Seven weeks after Enlightenment*

The Buddha spent seven weeks in meditation after enlightenment at seven different spots at Bodh Gaya: First week under the Bodhi tree, Second week - Animesha Lochana, Third week - Cankramana, Fourth week - Ratna Ghara, Fifth week - Ajapala Nigrodha tree, Sixth week - Muchalinda lake, and Seventh week - Rajayatna tree.

### *Leaving Uruvela*

It had been 49 days since the day of enlightenment. Gautama was mindful of promises he had made to share the Way with the people he had met along his journey. And so, that morning, he walked into Uruvela village to bid farewell to the children and the villagers who had supported him. He promised Svasti that he would return for him when the boy became a young man.

His first duty was to his teachers, Masters Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta. However, he learned that both of them had recently expired. Next, he thought of his fellow monks- Assaji, Mahanama, Vappa, Kondanna and Bhaddiya- who had accompanied him in practicing austerities.

He learned that after losing faith in him, the five monks had left the forest by the Neranjara and were now practicing in Isipatana. He decided to go to Isipatana to preach the Dhamma to them.

### *Isipatana (or Sarnath), near Varanasi*

Kondanna, Assaji and the others had been practicing austerities in the Deer Park in the Isipatana (current location: Varanasi). As they saw Gautama approaching them, they couldn't hold any anger against him and ran to greet him. Kondanna ran up to him and took his begging bowl. Mahanama fetched water so that Siddhartha could wash his hands and feet. Bhaddiya pulled up a stool for him to sit on. Vappa found a fan of palm leaves and began to fan him. Assaji stood to one side, not knowing what to do. After Siddhartha washed his hands and feet, Assaji realized he could fill a bowl with cool water and offer it to him.

### *Turning the Wheel of Dhamma*

Gautama shared with the monks what he had realised, that the extremes of pleasure as well as extreme austerities such as self-mortification were futile. The Middle Path that he had decided to follow was not based on thinking, but on direct experience of the world and its phenomena. He shared the Noble Eightfold Path with them, and spoke about the Four Noble Truths.

Gautama said to his fellow monks, “There are four undeniable truths to living: the existence of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path to the cessation of suffering.

Birth, death, old age, sickness are suffering; sadness, worry, anxiety, despair, anger, jealousy and fear are all suffering. The cause of suffering is ignorance; our inability to understand how we are all interdependent on each other. The cessation of suffering is also a truth; it is possible through practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the final truth. The Noble Eightfold Path is nourished by living mindfully. Mindfulness leads to concentration and understanding which liberates one from every pain and sorrow and leads to peace and joy.

The five monks agreed with Gautama, and decided to start practicing with him. They abandoned their path of austerities. Every day three of the monks would go to Isipatana and beg for food. Whatever they got was shared with all the others.

The Buddha taught them about the impermanent and non-self nature of all things. He taught them to look at the five aggregates- the body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness- as five constantly flowing rivers which contained nothing that could be called separate or permanent. By meditating on the five aggregates within themselves, they came to see the intimate and wondrous connection between themselves and all in the universe.

And thus, one by one, each of them gained enlightenment or Arhatship.

### *The Beginnings of the Sangha*

Together, the Buddha and the five monks became the Sangha- the community of those following the Dhamma and the Path. Accepting the Buddha as the teacher of the Sangha, they decided it was their duty to share their knowledge with as many others as they could.

Soon after, a young man from a rich family of Isipatana joined the Sangha. He too, like Siddhartha of Kapilavatthu, had grown disillusioned with a life of hollow luxury and sought something of greater, deeper value. Yasa’s parents, on hearing that their son had shaved his head, donned a monk’s robe and was living in an open park, became troubled, and came to the Deer Park to find him. Yasa met them and so did the Buddha, who explained that Yasa had chosen to follow the path to liberation and that it would bring him peace and joy. Yasa’s father was struck by the truth of his words and asked to be accepted as a lay disciple of the Buddha.

### *The Five Precepts*

The Buddha explained that in order to become a disciple, he would be required to follow the five precepts: to not kill, not steal, to not engage in sexual misconduct that violates the rights and commitments of others, to not be untruthful, and to not use alcohol and other stimulants.

Yasa’s father, and later his mother, accepted to live by these rules, and became lay members of the Sangha.

Many more young men from Isipatana heard of the Buddha and his teachings and flocked to the Deer Park to become disciples. The Sangha grew to sixty members, and many more became lay disciples.

### *The First Vassa or Rainy Season Retreat*

The rainy season would soon be upon them, and it would be difficult for the bhikkhus to travel during this time. Gautama was also concerned about the walking of bhikkhus trampling the small creatures that emerged from the earth during the rains. And so, he decided that the months of the monsoon would be for bhikkhus to practice more intensively without wandering through villages. Lay disciples of Isipatana were requested to bring food for the bhikkhus to their place of practice. During these days, Gautama gave regular sermons for bhikkhus as well as laypersons to better understand the Path and progress in their practice.

## *The Dhamma must be taken to the People*

At the end of the Vassa, Gautama wished for himself and the bhikkhus to be free to stay at the Deer Park or to go where they pleased. He knew that the Dhamma would grow only if the Sangha spread out. He gathered together the bhikkhus and spoke to them about leaving the Deer Park, spreading word of the Path, and ordaining people who wished to join the Sangha. Kondanna suggested a simple ritual for ordination of new members.

“First, the aspiring bhikkhu should have his head shaved.. Next, he must put on the robe, leaving his right shoulder exposed. He must kneel before the ordaining monk and accept him as his teacher, as a representative of the Buddha. And then, he must join his palms and repeat three times ‘I take refuge in the Buddha, the one who shows me the way in this life. I take refuge in the Dhamma, the way of understanding and love. I take refuge in the Sangha, the community that lives in harmony and awareness.’ After repeating these refuges, he will be considered a bhikkhu in the community of the Buddha.”

## *Leaving Isipatana*

Gautama recognised that he need no longer stay at Isipatana. Mindful of his promise to King Bimbisara of Magadha, he decided to make his way there. However, he would make several stops on his journey there, and on the way, convert the hearts of lay persons, aristocrats and monks.

## *Maara Appears Again*

A few days after the first sixty bhikkhus left the Deer Park, Maara, the demon decided to again try his luck at dissuading the Gautama. He appeared before Gautama and tried to convince him that he had really not attained liberation; that he thought he was pure and on the right path but he was, in fact, far from it. Gautama once again recognised Maara and his intent and Maara was vanquished.

## *The Journey from Isipatana to Magadha*

Shortly after leaving Isipatana, Gautama stopped at a forest to meditate, when four young men came up to him. They were looking for a young woman, a courtesan they had engaged to entertain them. She had run off with their ornaments and they were trying to find her.

Gautama listened to them, and then said, “Tell me, friends, is it better in this moment to find the young woman or to find your own selves?” He asked the young men to look at the wonder of the green in the young leaves of the forest trees. Then he asked one of them to play the flute he was carrying. After he had stopped playing, he offered it to the Buddha and requested him to play something. Gautama accepted.

The young men sitting around the Buddha felt completely refreshed, and they now dwelled completely in the present moment, in touch with all the wonders of the trees, Gautama, the flute, and each other’s friendship.

As he explained the eight fold path and the four noble truths, the young men listened intently, and when the he finished speaking, every one of them knelt down and asked to be accepted as a disciple. The Buddha ordained them all.

## *At Uruvela*

### *Meeting Uruvela Kassapa and the Fire Devotees*

Passing through Uruvela, Gautama learned of a community of Fire Worshipers led by the Brahmin Uruvela Kassapa. They believed that fire was the source of all life and by worshipping fire, following the precepts and rituals of the community which included performing sacrifices and austerities, one would attain liberation. This understanding they had derived from the Atharv-veda which said that fire, or Agni, the god of fire, was a manifestation of Brahma.

Speaking to the Brahmin Kassapa, Gautama asked him, “Master Kassapa, what do you think of those who regard water as the fundamental essence of life, who say that water is the element which purifies and returns people to union with Brahma?”

“Gautama, water cannot really help one attain liberation. Water naturally flows down. Only fire rises. When we die, our body rises in smoke thanks to fire.”

Gautama went on to explain that all elements, including one’s own awareness, are part of every being. Without either one or the other, anything that exists could not be. Rituals, he explained, were a false means of attaining liberation. As though a man wishing to cross a river were standing on one shore and praying to the opposite shore to come to him. He could only cross by actually entering the water, either with or without a boat.

As dusk arrived, Gautama asked if he may spend the night in the Fire Sanctuary where Kassapa’s disciples kept the holy fire burning. Kassapa was hesitant on account of a large snake that had been living in the Fire Sanctuary for the last few days, but gave in to Gautama’s wish.

Gautama sat up for long in the Fire Sanctuary practicing meditation. As he opened his eyes, he saw the great snake, and spoke to him, asking him to leave the Fire Sanctuary for his own safety. The snake uncoiled itself and crept out the door. The Buddha stretched out and fell asleep.

Later that night, Gautama awoke from his sleep and saw that the moonlight was bright. He decided to practice walking meditation. Early next morning, the Fire Sanctuary caught fire. The Fire devotees ran to put it out but to no avail. Uruvela Kassapa was greatly grieved believing that the young monk had perished. But then the Buddha, who had been walking in the nearby hills came to the site of the fire. Kassapa ran to the Buddha and grasped his hand with joy and relief.

A few days later, Gautama and Kassapa sat down to speak again.

Kassapa asked, “You said that humans, too, exist only because of the coming together of many other conditions. But when all these conditions cease to be, where does the self go?” The Buddha answered, “For a long time humans have been trapped by the concept of atman– a separate and eternal self. We have believed that when our body dies, this self continues to exist and seeks union with its source, which is Brahma. But, friend Kassapa, that is a fundamental misunderstanding. In truth, there is nothing which is separate and eternal. There is no self, whether a higher or a lower self.”

“But if there is no self, then why do we seek liberation? Who will be liberated?”

Gautama asked Kassapa if he believed that there is suffering, a cause of suffering and if one were to remove the cause of suffering, then suffering itself would subside. Kassapa admitted that he did.

“The cause of suffering is ignorance: thinking the impermanent is permanent, that there is a self when there is not. From ignorance is born greed, anger, fear, jealousy, and countless other sufferings. The path of liberation is the path of looking deeply at things in order to realise the true nature of being. This path is the path which overcomes ignorance. Once ignorance is overcome, suffering is transcended. That is liberation. There is no need for a self for there to be liberation.”

The next day, Uruvela Kassapa and all his followers shaved their long braids and beards, and threw the locks of hair into the Neranjara River along with all the liturgical objects they had used for fire worship. They bowed before the Buddha and took refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

A day later, Uruvela Kassapa’s brother, who led his own school of fire devotees, came in a rush to the forest near Uruvela. They had seen hundreds of locks of braided hair flowing down the Neranjara and were worried that some calamity had befallen Uruvela Kasappa. Reaching there, he learnt of what had happened, and was convinced by his brother to take refuge in the Buddha’s teachings. Soon after, their brother Gaya Kassapa and his disciples too joined the Sangha.

## *Gayasisa Hill, near Gaya*

### *The Fire Sermon*

Gautama sat on the Gayasisa hill near Uruvela. Surrounding him were 900 bhikkhus, all former fire devotees, followers of the three Kassapa brothers.

He gave the Fire Sermon: “bhikkhus, all dharmas are on fire. What is on fire? The six sense organs— eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind— are all on fire. The six objects of the senses—form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and objects of mind— are all on fire. The six consciousnesses— sight, hearing, smell, taste, feeling, and thought— are all on fire. They are burning from the flames of desire, hatred, and illusion. They are burning from the flames of birth, old age, sickness, and death, and from the flames of pain, anxiety, frustration, worry, fear, and despair. Do not allow yourselves to be consumed by the flames of desire, hatred, and illusion. See the impermanent and interdependent nature of all dharmas in order not to be enslaved by the cycle of birth and death created by the sense organs, objects of the senses, and the sense-consciousnesses.”

Gautama stayed on in the forests near Uruvela and the Gayasisa hill for another three months before resuming his journey to Magadha.

### *The Palm Forest, near Rajagaha*

900 bhikkhus, Gautama and Uruvela Kassapa walked for ten days on the path from Uruvela to Rajagaha. Kassapa led the group to the Palm Forest (present day location: Rajgir), two miles south of Rajgir. They settled near the Supatthita temple in the forest, and as their practice, would go into the city everyday to beg for food and speak to people about the Dhamma.

### *An Audience with King Bimbisara and 1,20,000 Brahmins*

King Bimbisara heard of the bhikkhus and was sure their teacher was the same young monk he had met some years ago. He, along with his wife and son, Prince Ajatasattu, and a retinue of 1,20,000 brahmins arrived at the Palm Forest for an audience with Gautama.

The brahmins who had gathered there knew of Uruvela Kassapa, and seeing him and the Buddha together, they wondered about who was teacher and who the disciple. Aware of this, the Buddha publicly questioned Uruvela about his reasons for abandoning fire worship and sacrifice. Uruvela explained that he had derived sense-pleasures from the fire worship and sacrifice, and had now come to see that those pleasures would not lead one to liberation. That is why he had come to accept the path of learning through experience.

“Glorious Buddha, because I have distinctly perceived Nibbāna which has the characteristic of peace, free from the four attachments (upadhis), which cannot be made known by others, which can be achieved only through the Path developed by oneself, which is not subject to change, being free from birth, old age, and death, and which is forever free from lust of life and attachment to existence. I no longer enjoy offering sacrifices, I no longer take delight in daily practice of fire-worship.”

In order to make it known that he was a disciple of the Buddha, Uruvela Kassapa rose from his seat, arranged his robe on the shoulder, prostrated himself with his head at the feet of the Buddha, saying: “Glorious Buddha, You, the Exalted Buddha, are my Teacher. I am but a disciple of Yours.” Then he rose to the sky, first up to the height of a palm tree. Descending from it, he made obeisance to the Buddha. Then he rose up to a height of two palm trees in his second display. In this way, he rose up, in his seventh display, to a height of seven palm trees, then descended from there, made obeisance to the Buddha.

There were no more whispers among the brahmins. King Bimbisara was delighted having heard Gautama’s sermon and Kassapa’s display of respect. He requested to be accepted as a lay disciple.

## *The Second Monsoon Retreat*

The second monsoon since the day of Gautama's enlightenment arrived and it was decided that the 900 bhikkhus would spend it at the Palm Forest. During this time, two monks, Sariputta and Mogallana, joined the Sangha. Over time, they were to become among the most venerated of Gautama's disciples.

## *Rajagaha, Capital City of Magadha*

As requested by King Bimbisara, the Buddha and his followers arrived at Rajagaha for the royal feast on a full moon day. People from all over the kingdom, and special guests of the King had all arrived to pay their respects to the Buddha and his Sangha. But the crowd was so dense that Uruvela Kassapa worried that the bhikkhus would not be able to move forward. All of a sudden, a young bhikkhu who had joined the Sangha only a few days ago stepped forward with a six stringed sitar. As he played, he sang:

“On this fresh spring morning,  
the Enlightened One passes through our city  
with the noble community of 1,250 disciples.  
All are walking with slow, calm, and radiant steps.”

“Grateful for this chance to be his student,  
let me praise his endless love and wisdom,  
the path that leads to self-contentment,  
and the Sangha which follows the True Way  
to Awakening.”

As he sang and walked ahead of the procession of monks, the crowd parted and opened a path towards the royal palace. The young bhikkhu was in fact Sakka (in some interpretations, Indra, or the chief of the devas), who on noticing the difficult situation, had taken human form.

## *The Heron, the Crab and the Fish: A Jataka Tale*

After they had been served a meal by the royal family, Gautama sat down to speak to the many people gathered around. He spoke to them about the five precepts as the way to create peace and happiness for one's family and all the kingdom.

Among those gathered was a group of children- Prince Ajatasattu and his companions. They now came forward and sat by Gautama. The young prince held his hand.

Turning to the children, he began a story:

“Children, before I was a human being, I lived as earth and stones, plants, birds, and many other animals. You, too, have had past lives as earth and stones, plants, birds, and animals. Perhaps you are here before me today because of some connection we shared in a past life. Perhaps in another life we brought one another joy or sorrow.

“Today I would like to tell you a story that took place several thousand lifetimes ago. It is the story of a heron, a crab, a plumeria tree, and many small shrimp and fish. In that life, I was the plumeria tree. Perhaps one among you was the heron or the crab or one of the shrimp. In this story, the heron was a wicked and deceitful creature who caused death and suffering to many others. The heron made me, the plumeria tree, suffer, too. But from that suffering, I learned a great lesson and that was—if you deceive and harm others, in turn, you will be deceived and harmed.

“I was a plumeria tree growing close to a fragrant, cool lotus pond. No fish lived in that pond. But not far from that pond was a shallow and stagnant pond in which many fish and shrimp and one crab lived. A heron flying overhead saw the crowded situation of the fish and shrimp and devised a scheme. He landed at the edge of their pond and stood there with a long, sad face.

“The fish and shrimp asked him, ‘Mister Heron, what are you thinking about so seriously?’

“I'm thinking about your poor lot in life. Your pond is muddy and foul. You lack adequate food. I feel terrible pity for your hard lives.’

“Do you know of any way to help us, Mister Heron?’ asked the small creatures.

“Well, if you would allow me to carry each one of you over to the lotus pond not far from here, I could release you in the cool waters there. There is plenty to eat over there.”

“We would like to believe you, Mister Heron, but we have never heard that herons care anything about the lot of fish or shrimp. Perhaps you only want to trick us in order to eat us up.”

“Why are you so suspicious? You should think of me as a kind uncle. I have no reason to deceive you. There really is a large lotus pond not far from here filled with plenty of fresh, cool water. If you don’t believe me, let me fly one of you over there to see for himself. Then I’ll fly him back to tell you whether or not I’m telling the truth.”

The shrimp and fish discussed the matter at some length before at last agreeing to allow one of the elder fish to go with the heron. This fish was tough and bristly, his scales as hard as stones. He was a swift swimmer who could also maneuver well on sand. The heron picked him up in his beak and flew him to the lotus pond. He released the old fish into the cool waters and let him explore every nook and cranny of the pond. The pond was indeed spacious, cool, refreshing, and a plentiful source of food. When the heron returned him to the old pond, the fish reported all he had seen.

Convinced of the heron’s good intentions, the shrimp and fish begged him to fly them to the pond one by one. The crafty heron agreed. He picked up a fish in his beak and flew off. But this time, instead of releasing the fish into the pond, he landed near the plumeria tree. He placed the fish in a fork of the tree and ripped off its flesh with his beak. He tossed its bones by the plumeria’s roots. Then he returned to transport another fish. He devoured it as well, and discarded its bones by the foot of the plumeria tree.

I was that plumeria, and I witnessed all this taking place. I was enraged, but there was nothing I could do to stop the heron. A plumeria’s roots are firmly anchored in the earth. There is nothing a plumeria can do but grow branches, leaves, and flowers. It cannot run anywhere. I could not call out and warn the shrimp and fish about what was really happening. I could not even stretch my branches to prevent the heron from eating the helpless creatures. I could only witness the horrible scene. Every time the heron brought a fish in its beak and began to tear at its flesh, I was filled with pain. I felt as though my sap would dry up and my branches break. Drops of moisture like tears collected on my bark. The heron did not notice. Over a number of days, he continued to bring the fish over to devour them. When all the fish were gone, he began to eat the shrimp. The pile of bones and shells that piled up by my roots could have filled two large baskets.

I knew that as a plumeria tree my job was to beautify the forest with my fragrant flowers. But at that moment I suffered terribly from not being able to do anything to save the shrimp and fish. If I had been a deer or a person I could have done something. But anchored by my roots to the ground, I could not move. I vowed that if I were reborn as an animal or a human in a future life, I would devote all my efforts to protect the weak and helpless from the strong and powerful.

When the heron had devoured all the shrimp and fish, only the crab remained. Still hungry, the heron said to the crab, ‘Nephew, I have carried all the fish and shrimp to the lotus pond where they now live happily. You are all alone here now. Let me take you to the new pond, too.’

“How will you carry me?” asked the crab.

“In my beak, just as I carried all the others.”

“What if I slipped out and fell? My shell would shatter into a hundred pieces.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll carry you with utmost care.”

The crab thought carefully. Perhaps the heron had kept his word and truly carried all the shrimp and fish to the lotus pond. But what if he had deceived them and eaten them all? The crab devised a plan to insure his own safety. He said to the heron, ‘Uncle, I’m afraid your beak is not strong enough to hold me securely. Let me wrap my claws around your neck to hold on while you fly.’

The heron agreed. He waited for the crab to crawl onto his neck and then he spread his wings and flew into the air. But instead of carrying the crab to the lotus pond, he landed by the plumeria tree.

“Uncle, why don’t you put me down by the lotus pond? Why did we land here instead?”

“What heron would be so stupid as to carry a bunch of fish to a lotus pond? I am no benefactor, nephew. Do you see all those fish bones and shrimp shells at the foot of the plumeria? This is where your life will end, as well.”

“Uncle, the fish and shrimp may have been easily fooled, but you can’t trick me so easily. Take me to the lotus pond at once or I will cut off your head with my claws.”

The crab began to dig his sharp claws into the heron’s neck. Seized by sharp pain, the heron cried out, ‘Don’t squeeze so hard! I’ll take you to the lotus pond right this minute! I promise I won’t try to eat you!’

The heron flew to the lotus pond where it intended to let the crab down by the water’s edge. But the crab did not release its hold on the heron’s neck. Thinking about all the fish and shrimp so cruelly deceived by the heron, the

crab dug his claws deeper and deeper into the heron's neck until he cut right through it. The heron dropped down dead and the crab crawled into the water.

"Children, at that time I was the plumeria tree. I witnessed all these events. I learned that if we treat others kindly, we will be treated kindly in return; but if we treat others cruelly, sooner or later, we will suffer the same fate. I vowed that in all my future lives, I would endeavor to help other beings."

The children were moved by the pain of the plumeria tree, the helplessness of the fish and the shrimp, and the cruelty of the heron.

Rising from his seat, King Bimbisara bowed to the Buddha. He requested him to accept the gift of a beautiful bamboo forest two miles north of Rajagaha as a place for the Buddha and his followers to practice the Way. Pouring clear water from a golden vase over the hands of Gautama, the King said, "Master, as the water in this vase pours over your hands, the Bamboo Forest is transferred to you and your sangha."

Gautama gracefully accepted.

### *The Bamboo Forest or Venuvana, in the Kingdom of Magadha | 3<sup>rd</sup> Monsoon Retreat*

Gautama, his senior bhikkhus and King Bimbisara visited the Bamboo forest. Situated in the forest was the Kalandaka lake, and all around grew bamboos of different kinds. It would be an ideal place for the bhikkhus to practice their meditation, and would provide shelter for the bhikkhus during the months of the monsoon retreat.

Mogallana, a senior bhikkhu, supervised the building of the monastery. Nagasamala, a young monk who had been a follower of Uruvela Kassapa, built a small hut for Gautama and a low platform for him to sleep on. On one side of the hut was a grove of golden bamboos, and on the other, a thicket of tall green bamboo. Placed behind it was a large earthenware pot for washing.

Sariputta arranged for a large bell to be donated by a lay disciple. He hung it on the branch of an ancient tree by the lake. The bell was used to announce times for study and meditation, and became a special part of the practice of mindfulness. Gautama instructed the bhikkhus to pause and observe their breath whenever they heard the bell ring.

King Bimbisara was a regular visitor at the monastery. One day, after observing the Buddha give a talk while the rain poured, he offered to build a large Dhamma hall which would shelter the bhikkhus. Gautama agreed and work on the hall began soon.

### *Visitors from Kapilavatthu*

Kaludayi, the Buddha's childhood friend, and Channa, his charioteer visited the Bamboo Forest. It had been seven years since Channa had left Siddhartha at the banks of the Anoma.

Some months ago, news had reached Kapilavatthu that the Buddha had attained the Way and was teaching a group of monks in Magadha. King Suddhodana had asked Kaludayi to go meet him and request him to visit Kapilavatthu. On Yasodhara's request, Channa had been asked to accompany Kaludayi. It had taken them three days to prepare for the journey and a month to travel to the Bamboo Grove.

They were happy to see that Siddhartha had not only attained the path he sought, but was well and cared for. The Buddha told them that he will visit Kapilavatthu after the end of the monsoon, and requested both of them to stay on for a few days at the Bamboo Grove.

After spending just seven days at Bamboo Forest, Kaludayi confided his wish to be ordained as a bhikkhu. Gautama nodded his acceptance. Channa felt the same desire but aware of his duty to the royal family, he wanted to first ask Yasodhara's permission. He resolved to wait until Gautama's return to Kapilavatthu before making his request.

As the monsoon retreat was coming to an end, Gautama decided to travel to Kapilavatthu. He requested Kaludayi and Channa to precede him, to inform his family that he would arrive at Kapilavatthu in the spring.



## *Return to Kapilavatthu*

Gautama along with several members of the Sangha left the Bamboo Forest and headed towards Kapilavatthu. Just before they reached the city, they stopped to rest at Nigrodha Park, three miles south of the capital city. This, they decided, would be the place where the Sangha would live while they were in the Sakya kingdom.

After a night's of rest at Nigrodha Park, three hundred bhikkhus entered the city of Kapilavatthu, walking with their begging bowls held in outstretched hands. The people of the city recognised their former prince. King Suddhodana arrived in the city to see his son, and looking upon Gautama, realised that he was now a venerated teacher, no longer the crown prince. He understood that Master Asita's prophecy had been true. He got off his chariot, went up to Gautama, folded his hands and bowed.

As they were nearing the palace, Queen MahaPajapati, Yasodhara, Princess Sundari Nanda and Rahula stood at a balcony and watched them arrive. Yasodhara turned to Rahula, saying, "Son, do you see that monk walking towards the palace? That monk is your own father. Run down and greet him. He has a very special inheritance to pass on to you. Ask him about it."

Rahula ran down and was almost out of breath as he reached Siddhartha who immediately recognised him. As he embraced Rahula, the young boy said, "Respected monk, mother said I should ask you about my special inheritance. What is it? Can you show it to me?" Gautama smiled at the young boy and took his hand.

Seeing Queen Gotami and Yasodhara, he said, "Father, I have returned. Mother, I have returned. See, Gopa, I came back to you." The women wept tears of joy.

He told them about his journey since leaving the palace on Kanthaka. He learned that Yasodhara, since his departure, had given up all ornaments and now lived a simple life, dedicating her days to caring for the poor people of the Sakya kingdom. Queen Gotami had joined her in this.

King Suddhodana announced his wish to build a hut for Siddhartha in Nigrodha Park, just like the one in the Bamboo Forest. He also invited the Buddha along with all his bhikkhus to a meal at the palace.

## *Nigrodha Park, near Kapilavatthu*

Soon after, Nigrodha Park was transformed into a monastery. Many people from Kapilavatthu and the Sakya clan were ordained. Yasodhara too frequented the monastery and spoke to the Buddha about her work with the poor. He explained to her that in order to continue helping others, it was necessary for her to find peace and joy within her own heart. She was happy to discover that she could practice the way of awareness in the very midst of her efforts to serve others. Means and ends were not two different things.

## *Beneath the Rose-Apple Tree, Again: Megha and the Flower Girl- A Jataka Tale*

One day, Yasodhara arranged for the Buddha, Queen Gotami, Rahula, Nagasamala and Kaludayi to accompany her to the village where she worked with children. In that hamlet was the rose-apple tree that many years ago, young Siddhartha had first meditated under. The children now playing under the tree greeted the Buddha and his companions, and sat down to listen to him. He told them about the swan and Prince Devadatta, and about the kindness of the children of Uruvela village.

Then he told all the children a past life story.

"Long ago, at the foot of the Himalayas, lived a young man named Megha. He was kind and industrious. Though he was without money, he confidently set out for the capital where he hoped to study. He took no more than his walking stick, a hat, a water jug, the clothes he was wearing, and a coat. Along the way, he stopped and worked on farms for rice and sometimes money. By the time he reached the capital of Divapati, he had accumulated five hundred rupees.

"When he entered the city, the people seemed to be preparing for an important celebration. Wondering what the occasion was, he looked around for someone to ask. At that moment, a beautiful young woman walked by him. She was holding a bouquet of half-opened lotus flowers.

“Megha asked her, ‘What is the celebration today?’ “The young woman answered, ‘You must be a stranger to Divapati or you would surely know that today the enlightened Master Dipankara is arriving. He is said to be like a torch lighting the path for all beings. He is the son of King Arcimat who left in search of the True Path and has found it. His path brightens all the world and so the people have organized this celebration in honor of him.’

“Megha was overjoyed to hear about the presence of an enlightened teacher. He wanted very much to offer something to the teacher and request to become his student. He asked the young woman, ‘How much did you pay for those lotus flowers?’

“She looked at Megha and could easily see he was a bright and considerate young man. She answered, ‘I only paid for five. The other two I picked from the pond at my own house.’

“Megha asked, ‘How much did you pay for the five?’

“‘Five hundred rupees.’

“Megha asked to buy the five lotuses for his five hundred rupees in order to offer the flowers to Dipankara. But the woman refused, saying, ‘I bought these to offer to him myself. I had no intention of selling them to someone else.’

“Megha tried to persuade her. ‘But you can still offer the two you picked from your own pond. Please let me buy the other five. I want to offer something to the Master. It is a rare and precious opportunity to encounter such a teacher in this life. I want to meet him and even ask to become his student. If you agree to let me buy your five lotus flowers, I will be grateful to you for the rest of my life.’

“The woman looked at the ground and did not answer.

“Megha implored her. ‘If you let me buy those five flowers, I will do anything you ask.’

“The young woman appeared embarrassed. She did not lift her eyes from the ground for a long moment. Finally, she said, ‘I do not know what connection we have shared in a past life, but I fell in love with you the moment I saw you. I have met many young men, but my heart has never trembled in this way before. I will give you these flowers to offer to the Enlightened One, but only if you promise me that in this life and all our future lives, I may be your wife.’

“She said these words hurriedly and was almost out of breath when she finished. Megha did not know what to say. After a moment of silence, he said, ‘You are very special and most honest. When I saw you, I also felt something special inside. But I am seeking the path of liberation. If I married, I would not be free to follow the path when the right opportunity presented itself.’

“The young woman answered, ‘Promise that I will be your wife and I vow that when the time comes for you to seek your path, I will not prevent you from going. On the contrary, I will do everything I can to help you fully achieve your quest.’

“Megha happily accepted her proposal, and together they went to find Master Dipankara. The crowds were so dense that they could barely see him up ahead. But even just catching a glimpse of his face was enough for Megha to know that he was a truly enlightened one. Megha felt a great joy and vowed that he, too, would one day attain such enlightenment. He wanted to get closer to be able to offer Dipankara the flowers, but it was impossible to move through the throngs of people. Not knowing what else to do, he tossed his flowers into the air in the direction of Dipankara. Miraculously, they landed right in the arms of the Master. Megha was ecstatic to see how the sincerity of his heart had made itself known. The young woman asked Megha to throw her flowers to the Master, too. Her two flowers also landed in the Master’s arms. Dipankara called out, asking the persons who had offered the lotus flowers to present themselves. The crowds parted for Megha and the young woman to pass. Megha clasped the young woman’s hand. Together they bowed before Dipankara. The Master looked at Megha and said, ‘I understand the sincerity of your heart. I can see you have great resolve to follow the spiritual path to attain total enlightenment and to save all beings. Take comfort. One day in a future life, you will attain your vow.’

“Then Dipankara looked at the young woman kneeling by Megha’s side, and he spoke to her. ‘You shall be Megha’s closest friend in this life and in many lives to come. Remember to keep your promise. You will help your husband to realize his vow.’

“Megha and the young woman were deeply moved by the Master’s words. They devoted themselves to studying the path of liberation taught by the Enlightened One, Dipankara.

“Children, in that life and in many lives thereafter, Megha and the young woman lived as husband and wife. When the husband needed to leave in order to pursue his spiritual path, his wife helped him in every way she could. She never tried to prevent him. Because of that, he felt the deepest gratitude towards her. At last, he realized his great vow and became a truly enlightened one himself, just as Dipankara had predicted so many lifetimes ago.

“Children, money and fame are not the most precious things in life. Money and fame can fade very quickly. Understanding and love are the most precious things in life. If you have understanding and love, you will know happiness. Megha and his wife shared happiness for many lives, thanks to their understanding and love. With understanding and love, there is nothing you cannot accomplish.”

Yasodhara joined her palms and bowed to the Buddha. She was moved to tears. She knew that although he told the story to the children, he meant it especially for her. Then, to her surprise, the Buddha said, “Do you know who Megha is in this life? He is the Buddha. In this very life he has become an enlightened one. And do you know who Megha’s wife is in this life? She is none other than your own Yasodhara. Thanks to her understanding, Prince Siddhartha was able to follow his path and attain awakening. We should offer thanks to Yasodhara.”

### *Nanda and Rahula join the Sangha*

King Suddhodana invited the Buddha and the bhikkhu Sariputta to a meal at the palace. At the end of the meal, as they walked the monks to the gate, Prince Nanda, the Buddha’s younger brother, held his bowl. To the Prince’s bewilderment, Gautama did not take his bowl back from him as he left the palace. And so, the Prince kept walking alongside the Buddha towards the monastery, holding his bowl. When they reached the monastery, Gautama asked the young prince if he would like to stay at the monastery for a few days, to experience the life of a bhikkhu. The prince, out of curiosity, agreed. At the end of a week, the Buddha asked Nanda if he would like to join the Sangha. The prince agreed and was ordained. However, at the end of one month at the monastery, the young man pined for his life in the royal palace, and most of all, for his fiancé, Princess Kalyani. The Buddha was aware of this, and asked Sariputta to see that Nanda was no longer sent to do his begging in Kalyani’s neighborhood. When Nanda learned of this, he felt a mixture of both resentment and gratitude towards Gautama. He understood that he could see into his deepest thoughts and needs.

One day, when the Buddha was begging for food in the area near the royal palace, Yasodhara and Rahula spotted them. Yasodhara asked Rahula to run down to his father and ask him again for his inheritance. Rahula did as his mother had instructed. Gautama answered, “Come to the monastery, and I will transmit it to you.”

Rahula spent the day at the monastery and that night, slept in Sariputta’s hut. All the monks were very kind to the young boy and Rahula asked Sariputta if he could stay there for ever. Sariputta told him that only monks could do that. So Rahula ran to the Buddha and asked to become a monk. To Sariputta’s surprise, the Buddha asked him to ordain Rahula.

“But, Master, how can one so young become a bhikkhu?”

The Buddha answered, “We will allow him to practice in preparation for full vows in the future. Let him take the vows of a novice for now. He can be given the task of chasing away the crows that disturb the bhikkhus during sitting meditation.”

Sariputta shaved Rahula’s head, gave him the three refuges, and taught him the precepts. And thus, Rahula became the first child to be ordained as a novice in the Sangha. Sariputta did not want Rahula to become weak and so, in addition to the daily meal of the bhikkhus, the young boy was given an additional meal every evening. Lay disciples, too, started to bring milk and extra food for the little monk.

### *Leaving Kapilavatthu, Again*

Within six months of the Sangha’s arrival, the monastery at Nigrodha had a sizeable population of bhikkhus and there was a strong relationship between the people of Kapilavatthu and the monks at Nigrodha. It was time for the Buddha to leave, to return to the Bamboo Forest in Magadha.

Before he departed, the Buddha and members of the Sangha were invited by King Suddhodana to partake a meal at the royal palace. For this occasion, the King invited many eminent members of the Sakya clan and administration including his younger brother, Dronodanaraja.

The Buddha used this occasion to speak about applying the Way to political life.

Prince Dronodanaraja, listening to the sermon, spoke up, “To rule by virtue is truly beautiful. But I believe that you alone possess the character and virtue needed to realize such a path. Why don’t you stay in Kapilavatthu and help create a new form of government right here in Sakya kingdom which will bring peace, joy, and happiness to all people?” King Suddhodana asked the Buddha to take over the throne, saying that he himself was old and wished to abdicate. “With your virtue, integrity, and intelligence, I am sure all the people will stand behind you.”

Gautama listened to them, and declined, saying, “I am no longer the son of one family, one clan, or even one country. My family is now all beings, my home is the Earth, and my position is that of a monk who depends on the generosity of others. I have chosen this path, I believe I can best serve all beings in this way.”

With this, the Buddha left Kapilavatthu and departed for Magadha, promising to return in the future. He and his followers made their way to Rajagaha, but first on their journey was Anupiya, in the Kosala kingdom.

### *Anupiya, in the Kosala Kingdom*

The Kosala kingdom (present day location: Awadh or south-central Uttar Pradesh) shared a border with the kingdom of Kapilavatthu. Anupiya, a city in the Kosala kingdom was the land of the Malla people. On his way from Kapilavatthu to Rajagaha, the Buddha and his followers stopped here for a few months.

#### *“There is no Caste in the Sangha”*

The Buddha and his Sangha were camping in a forest two miles northeast of Anupiya city. Some time after the Buddha and his companions had arrived there, a group of seven young men from the Sakya kingdom entered the monastery asking to be ordained.

Among these was Anuruddha, the younger son of a Sakya noble family. After the Buddha had left Kapilavatthu, Anuruddha had sought permission from his family to become a monk. His older brother, Mahanamma had harboured the same desire. But learning about his brother’s wish, he decided that of the two of them, it should be Anuruddha who should pursue the path of a monk. Anuruddha was greatly pleased with this, but his mother was not. At first, she refused to give Anuruddha permission to leave. Finally, she deigned that he could leave to pursue the Way only if his closest friend, Baddhiya, who was a governor of the northern provinces, agreed to go with him. She was sure that Baddhiya would not agree.

Anuruddha implored Baddhiya to join him on the path. Baddhiya was wary at first, saying that he needed seven years to settle the affairs of the state. But Anuruddha pleaded and bargained with him until finally Baddhiya agreed to settle all his responsibilities and join him in seven days.

At the end of seven days, Baddhiya, Anuruddha and four of their friends, all princes of the royal clan, took a carriage to Anupiya. Among them were Devadatta and Ananda, the Buddha’s cousins, sons of Prince Dronodanaraja.

Just before they crossed over the border of the Sakya kingdom, they decided to get off the carriage and walk the rest of the way. They removed their jewels and ornaments and decided to give them to a poor person. As monks they would have no need for these. They noticed a tiny barber shop run by a young man about their own age. He was an attractive, shabbily-dressed fellow named Upali, a member of the lower castes. On Anuruddha’s request, Upali led the young men to the border. Before leaving, they handed to Upali a cloak that contained all their jewellery, thanked him for his help, and started to wade across the water.

As Upali opened the cloak and looked inside he was he was filled with a fear he had never before experienced. He knew there were many people who would kill to get at the contents of the cloak. Reflecting, Upali hung the cloak on the branch of a nearby tree and ran to catch up with the young men. They were surprised to see him. Catching his breath, Upali explained: he had always had a sense of contentment, even through times of hardship, but suddenly

possessing so much wealth had unnerved him. He realised that the wealth would take away his sense of well-being. Instead, he wanted to pursue the path of true happiness and liberation, and so, decided to join the young noblemen in becoming followers of the Buddha.

And so it was that seven young people from Sakya reached the forest near Anupiya.

Standing before the Buddha, Baddhiya spoke on behalf of his companions. He requested the Buddha to accept them into the Sangha, and that Upali be the first to be ordained as that would make him their elder brother in the Dhamma, releasing any vestiges of false pride and discrimination within the noblemen.

After resting for a few days at Anupiya, the Buddha and his followers continued on their journey to the Bamboo Forest in Rajagaha. On the way they rested for three days at the Mahavana Park in Vesali.

## *Bamboo Forest*

### *“The Sangha is not ready for Women”*

At the Bamboo Forest, the Buddha received a young man named Mahakassapa. He was the son of a wealthy man from Rajagaha, married to Bhadra Kapilani.

The husband and wife both longed to immerse themselves in a life of spirituality. Early one morning, Mahakassapa woke to see a snake slithering up the side of the bed where his wife slept. He remained still, afraid of startling the snake and endangering Bhadra Kapilani's life. As he watched, the snake slowly moved up the arm of the sleeping woman, and out of the room. He woke his wife and told her what had happened. The incident brought home the transience of life. She urged him to find a teacher who could guide them on the path to liberation. Because he had heard about the Buddha, he went at once to Bamboo Forest. He requested the Buddha to let him and his wife join the Sangha. The Buddha agreed to ordain Mahakassapa but said that the time was not yet ripe to admit women into the sangha and that she would need to wait a little longer.

## *Meeting Sudatta (or Anathapindika)*

During their stay in the Bamboo Forest, the members of the Sangha were invited to a meal at the house of a rich merchant in Rajagaha. Early on that morning, while walking in the forest, the Buddha saw a young man walking restlessly into the bamboo grove, muttering to himself. Passing him by, the Buddha paused. The man was Sudatta, a young merchant from Savatthi, in the kingdom of Kosala. He was the brother-in-law of the merchant at whose house the monks were invited to eat later that day. He had arrived at Rajagaha the previous day and had learned of the Buddha from his brother-in-law. Hearing about the Buddha and his teachings, he had been filled with a joyous restlessness and couldn't wait till later in the day to meet the teacher, and so, after a restless night, had got out of the house and made his way to the Bamboo Forest. As the Buddha spoke to him, Sudatta experienced immense joy and peace and requested the Buddha to accept him as a lay disciple. He also asked the Buddha if he would honour him by coming to a meal the next day at the same house, but this time with him as host. The Buddha accepted.

When the Buddha came to the merchant's house, Sudatta approached him saying, “The people of Kosala have not had the opportunity to learn the Way.” He requested the Buddha to come to Kosala and spend some time there.

Some days later, Sudatta and the bhikkhu Sariputta left for Savatthi to prepare for the Buddha's arrival in the Kosala kingdom.

## *The City of Vesali (present day location: north-west of Patna)*

A few months after leaving the Bamboo Forest Monastery, on their way to Savatthi, the Buddha and his followers decided to halt at Vesali for a few days. Sariputta and Sudatta had already passed that way. Knowing that Ambapali the courtesan, a resident of Vesali and the consort of King Bimbisara, was a lay disciple of the Buddha, they had requested her to make arrangements for the Buddha's stay there. And so it was that when the monks reached Vesali, they rested at the Mango Grove owned by Ambapali the courtesan.

Ambapali requested Gautama's permission to have a meal prepared the next day for all of the bhikkhus and he consented.

As she was riding back, ready to make preparations for the next day's meal, Ambapali's carriage came wheel to wheel, axle to axle with that of the Licchavi nobles- the young aristocrats that ruled the city. They mocked her for hosting the Buddha, offering her a hundred thousand pieces of gold to host them instead. She declined saying, "even if you were to offer me all of Vesali and its tributaries, i would not forego the chance to serve a meal to the bhikkhus."

Angered by her arrogance, the Licchavis went to the Mango Grove to see for themselves this venerated monk. The Buddha received them and spoke to them kindly. He could see that they were just as intoxicated by wealth and power as he might have been as a young prince. He spoke to them about the path of liberation and slowly their attitude transformed.

They requested the Buddha and his followers' presence at their palace for the next day's meal. Gautama informed them that he had already agreed to be hosted by Ambapali. Now humbled, the young men requested him to a meal the day after that.

And thus, while the Sangha rested in Vesali, they were hosted first by Ambapali and then by the Licchavi aristocrats. Ambapali offered the Mango Grove as a place of rest and retreat for the community of the Sangha, and the Licchavis offered the Great Forest at the edge of the city for the same. The Buddha accepted both offerings and then, headed north to the city of Savatthi.

### *Savatthi, in the Kosala Kingdom (or Sravasti, in present day Gonda district of Uttar Pradesh)*

Anāthapindika, accompanied by bhikkhu Sariputta, had reached Savatthi, the capital of the Kosala kingdom, a few months before the Buddha and his retinue.

#### *The Making of Jetavana Monastery*

Seeking a suitable place for the Buddha's residence in Savatthi, Sudatta discovered a park belonging to Prince Jetakumāra. When he asked to be allowed to buy it, Jeta replied: "Not even if you could cover the whole place with money." Anāthapindika said that he would buy it at that price, and when Jeta answered that he had had no intention of making a bargain, the matter went before the Lords of Justice, who decided that if the price mentioned were paid, Anāthapindika had the right of purchase.

Sudatta had gold brought down in carts and covered Jetavana with pieces laid side by side. The money brought in the first journey proved insufficient to cover one small spot near the gateway. So Sudatta sent his servants back for more, but Jeta, inspired by Anāthapindika's earnestness, offered to give that spot. Sudatta agreed and Jeta erected a gateway, with a room over it, there. Anāthapindika built a great monastery in the park, and Prince Jetakumara spent all the money that Sudatta had paid him in building a grand gate that was his gift to the monastery.

The place was entirely ready when Gautama and his followers reached Savatthi. The ceremony of dedication was of great splendor. Not only Anāthapindika himself, but his whole family took part. The festivities in connection with the dedication lasted for nine months. Prince Jeta who had heard much about Gautama from Sariputta and Sudatta became a follower and supporter of the Sangha.

#### *Sunita, the Untouchable joins the Sangha*

One day, as the Buddha and bhikkhus were begging in a village near the banks of the Ganga, the Buddha spotted a man carrying night soil. The man was an untouchable named Sunita.

Sunita had heard about the Buddha and bhikkhus, but this was the first time he had ever seen them. He quickly moved off the path and made his way down to the river. Gautama followed him. Panic-stricken, Sunita entered the river and stood in the shallow water. He was afraid that he would be punished for polluting Gautama, an upper caste man. Gautama stood by the river and requested Sunita to speak to him. He said, "On our path, we no longer

distinguish between castes. You are a human being like the rest of us. We are not afraid we will be polluted. Only greed, hatred, and delusion can pollute us. A person as pleasant as yourself brings us nothing but happiness.

Gladdened to hear his kind words, Sunita bowed and agreed to become a disciple of the Buddha. Then Gautama and the bhikkhu Sariputta entered the water, bathed Sunita and ordained him a monk.

The ordination of Sunita caused an uproar among the Brahmins of the kingdom. They complained to King Pasenadi that the Buddha was planning to revolt against the existing order. King Pasenadi went to Jetavana to speak to Gautama about the matter. As he entered the park, he saw a young monk giving a sermon to a few others. He stopped to listen briefly, enthralled by the words of the monk. But remembering the purpose of his visit, he walked on.

But Pasenadi had been so impressed that the first thing he asked Gautama was, “Who is that young monk giving a sermon there?” Gautama smiled, “He is Sunita, he used to carry night soil in the city of Savatthi.” and he continued, “In the Way of Liberation, there is no caste. To the eyes of an enlightened person, all people are equal.” King Pasenadi understood what the Buddha meant, and respectfully bowed.

### *Kutagara Monastery, in the Great Forest in Vesali | 7<sup>th</sup> monsoon retreat*

The following year the Buddha returned to Vesali for the retreat season. The Licchavi princes had transformed Great Forest into a monastery. They had built a two-story Dharma hall with a roof, which they named Kutagara.

One day, near the end of the retreat season, Mahanama, a royal courtier of King Suddhodana and a prince of the Sakya clan arrived in Vesali. King Suddhodana was on his deathbed and had sent for Gautama. At Mahanama’s special request, the Buddha agreed to travel in the carriage in order to save time. Anuruddha, Nanda, Ananda, and Rahula accompanied him. They left so quickly that even the Licchavi princes and Ambapali were unable to see them off. After the carriage departed, two hundred bhikkhus, including all the former princes of the Sakya clan, began to walk towards Kapilavatthu. They wanted to be with the Buddha at his father’s funeral.

### *Return to Kapilavatthu*

#### *King Suddhodana’s Passing*

The royal family met the Buddha at the palace gates. Queen Mahapajapati led him into the king’s chambers. The king’s face, pale and wan, brightened when he saw Gautama. He sat down by the bed and took the king’s hand in his own. The king, now eighty-two years old, was thin and frail.

“Father, look at the green leaves on the branches outside your window. Life continues. As life continues, so do you. You will continue to live in me and in Nanda and Rahula, and in all beings. The temporal body arises from the four elements which dissolve only to endlessly recombine again. Father, don’t think that because the body passes away, life and death can bind us. Rahula’s body is also your body.”

Gautama asked Mahanama, who had been the king’s primary adviser for some years, to take the throne. Mahanama was hesitant, claiming that it Prince Nanda or Rahula, being the descendants of the king were the rightful heirs. However, all the courtiers as well as King Suddhodana agreed with Gautama, and Mahanama was given charge of the kingdom.

Gautama promised the old king that he would stay on in Kapilavatthu until Mahanama was established as the king. Thus assured, the old king passed on.

As per his promise, the Buddha stayed on at the monastery in Nigrodha forest near Kapilavatthu. During his stay, Queen Gotami requested that she and other women be allowed into the Sangha as full disciples. Gautama disagreed. He believed the Sangha was not yet ready to accept women. Queen Gotami requested him three times and three times she was refused. Disappointed, she returned to the palace.

Some days later, Gautama left Kapilavatthu and headed to Vesali.

Vesali

### *The Ordination of Women*

One morning, bhikkhu Ananda saw Gotami with a group of fifty women standing not far from the Buddha's hut. Their heads were shaved, they were wearing yellow robes. Their feet were bloody and swollen. They had walked all the way from Kapilavatthu to Vesali, stopping on the way to beg for food at cities and villages.

Queen Gotami explained, "We are a group of fifty one women who wish to be ordained into the Sangha. We have given up all our worldly possessions and our homes. In the Way of Awakening, all people are equal. Everyone has the capacity to be enlightened and liberated. The Buddha has said so himself. He has accepted untouchables into the sangha. There is no reason he should not accept women. We are full persons too. We can attain enlightenment and liberation." She beseeched Ananda to plead their case to Gautama.

Gautama could no longer deny the determination of Gotami and her companions. He consulted with his senior-most bhikkhus. They came up with a set of eight ordinances for the women-disciples.

"First, a nun, or bhikkhuni, will always defer to a bhikkhu; second, all bhikkhunis must spend the retreat season at a center within reach of a center of bhikkhus in order to receive spiritual support and further study; third, twice a month, the bhikkhunis should delegate someone to invite the bhikkhus to decide on a date for uposatha, the special day of observance. A bhikkhu should visit the nuns, teach them, and encourage them in their practice.

"Fourth, after the rainy season retreat, nuns must attend the Pavarana ceremony and present an account of their practice, not all nuns and monks. Fifth, whenever a bhikkhuni breaks a precept, she must confess before both the bhikkhunis and the bhikkhus. Sixth, after a period of practice as a novice, a bhikkhuni will take full vows before the communities of both monks and nuns. Seventh, a bhikkhuni should not criticize or censure a bhikkhu. Eighth, a bhikkhuni will not give Dhamma instruction to a community of bhikkhus."

Ananda conveyed the eight statutes to Gotami and the fifty women. She knew that the acceptance of women into the Sangha would create an uproar. Bitter opposition would undoubtedly result, and many people would condemn the Buddha and his sangha. She knew the Buddha would have to face many difficulties. She understood that the Eight Rules were temporarily necessary to protect the sangha from harmful conflict. She was sure that later on, once the ordination of women was an established fact, the Eight Rules would no longer be necessary.

All fifty-one women were ordained that same day. Bhikkhu Sariputta arranged for them to live temporarily at Ambapali's mango grove.

### *Kosambi (present day location: Allahabad)*

#### *The Quarrelsome Monks of Kosambi*

While the Buddha was at the Ghosita monastery in Kosambi, a conflict arose between two senior bhikkhus.

A sutra master forgot to clean out the wash basin he had used and was charged with a violation of a lesser precept by a precept master. The sutra master was a proud person and contended that since he had not intentionally left the basin dirty, he was not to blame. Students of each bhikkhu took the side of their own teacher, and the argument escalated.

The Buddha's intervention did not improve the situation. On three different occasions he instructed the monks to make peace with each other, and three times his instructions bore no fruit. On the fourth occasion, he held a sermon and "Enough, monks! No quarreling!" he continued, "Monks, quarrels, strifes, contentions, disputes, – all these are unprofitable. For because of a quarrel even a tiny quail brought about the destruction of a noble elephant."

He went on to tell them a story from his past life:

"The Bodhisatta was once an elephant. He lived in the Himalayas, and a herd of eighty thousand followed him as their leader. A quail laid her eggs in their feeding ground and the hatchlings had just broken out of their shells when



the herd arrived. Worried that an elephant would step on her young, the quail stood before the Bodhisatta and begged him to protect them; and he did, standing over the nest until the entire herd had passed by. Before he left, he warned the quail that a rogue elephant was walking behind them, so she would need to talk to him too.

When the rogue elephant arrived, the quail made the same plea. But this elephant was evil, and he intentionally trampled the chicks and urinated on their mangled corpses. The quail cursed the elephant and vowed revenge, stating that a strong mind was more powerful than a strong body.

Soon after her chicks died, the quail did favors for a crow, a fly, and a frog, and then she enlisted them to return the favors by helping her murder the rogue elephant. When the time came, the crow pecked out the elephant's eyes, blinding him. Then the fly laid eggs in his eye sockets, and when they hatched into maggots the elephant was maddened by the pain. Then the frog went up a mountain and croaked. The elephant followed the sound, assuming the frog was near water. And as the elephant climbed, the frog hopped down a cliff and croaked again, leading the elephant to step off and fall to his death. The delighted quail did a victory dance on the elephant's body before flying away." And so, he explained, that a quarrel can result in the destruction of even the mightiest of creatures.

After the sermon, a monk stood up, "O Buddha, let the Exalted One, remain at home, let the Exalted One live a life of inaction and ease in this present world. We shall make ourselves notorious by our quarrels, strifes, contentions, and disputes."

Gautama then told another story:

"Once upon a time, monks, Brahmadata reigned at Benāres as king of Kāsi. Brahmadata fought against Dīghati Kosala, took away his kingdom, and killed him while he was living in disguise. Dīghati's son, Prince Dīghāvu, although he knew that Brahmadata was the murderer of his father, spared his life. Thenceforth they were at peace with each other. Such, monks, is said to have been the patience and gentleness of these kings who took scepter and sword."

But in spite of his admonition he was unable to reunite them. Without bidding farewell, he took his own bowl and robe, and went alone to the village of Bālaka, the salt-maker, where the bhikkhu Bhagu lived and practiced alone. From there, he went to the Deer Park in the Eastern Bamboo Forest where three of his disciples lived in harmony.

### *Rakkhita Forest, south west of Savatthi | 10<sup>th</sup> retreat season*

From the Eastern Bamboo Forest, he came to the Rakkhita forest, south west of Savatthi, and there he spent his tenth monsoon retreat, without the company of his disciples. Instead, he was cared for and attended by the elephant Parileyyaka.

### *Parileyyaka, the Elephant Disciple*

In the Rakkhita forest, Gautama lived under a sal tree. Parileyyaka the elephant left his herd to come care for the monk. He would break the branches off the sal tree to sweep away the dust to prepare the Buddha's seat. He would take a water pot in his trunk and fill it with cool water from the river. He would spark dried twigs and create a fire to heat water. Lowering his trunk and finding the water hot enough, he would go to Gautama and make obeisance. The Buddha would ask, "Is your water hot, Parileyyaka?" and go to bathe. After that Parileyyaka would bring various kinds of wild fruits and presented them to Buddha.

When Gautama went to the village for alms, the elephant would take his bowl and robe, put them on top of his head, and accompany him. When they reached the vicinity of the village, Gautama would say, saying, "Parileyyaka, farther than this you are not permitted to go. Fetch me my bowl and robe." And Parileyyaka would do as told.

When Gautama returned from begging, the elephant would take his bowl and robe and deposit them near the sal tree, and fan him with a leafy branch. At night, to ward off danger from beasts of prey, he would take a big club in his trunk, and pace back and forth until sunrise. And so it was that the forest got the name Rakkhita- Protected Forest.

When a monkey saw the elephant performing these tasks, he said to himself, "I'll do something too." One day, as he was running about, he happened to see some stick-honey free from flies. He broke the stick off, took the honey-comb, stick and all, broke off a plantain-leaf, placed the honey on the leaf, and offered it to the Buddha. Gautama, after taking the honey, sat down without eating. "What can be the matter?" thought the monkey. He took hold of

the stick by the tip, turned it over and over, and discovered some insect's eggs in it. He removed these gently and again gave the honey to Gautama who ate it. The monkey was joyous. He swung from branch to branch and in his excitement fell on a stick, was impaled and died.

At the end of the monsoon, bhikkhu Ananda and several other disciples came seeking the Buddha. They wished for him to return to Jetavana with them. The Buddha agreed to leave.

As the group was leaving, the elephant went and stood crosswise on the road.

Ananda asked, "Teacher, what is the elephant doing?"

"Monks, he desires to give alms to you." The elephant entered the forest, gathered bananas and various other fruits, heaped them together, and on the following day gave them to the monks. The five hundred monks were unable to dispose of them all. When they had finished eating, Gautama took bowl and robe and set out. The elephant, threading his way through the monks, went and stood crosswise in front of him. Buddha explained to Parileyyaka that he must leave. The elephant was heartbroken and walked with the disciples as far as the village.

When they reached the village, Gautama turned to Parileyyaka and said, "Pārileyyaka, farther than this it is unsafe for you to go. The habitations of men are fraught with danger to you. Halt!" The elephant halted where he was and wept. As Gautama passed out of sight, he died of a broken heart.

### *Jetavana, Savatthi*

After having spent the last retreat season by himself, Gautama returned to the Sangha at Jetavana. Most of his senior disciples are there. They told him that after he had left, the people of Kosambi had refused to give alms to the quarreling bhikkhus chastising them for not listening to the Buddha. After some time of such treatment, the bhikkhus had grown weak and their anger at each other subsided. The lay disciples however, said that resolving the conflict among themselves was not enough; they must apologise to their teacher in order for the lay disciples to accept them again.

So, when they learned that the Buddha had come to Jetavana, the quarreling monks of Kosambi came there to seek his forgiveness. King Pasenadi of Kosala kingdom, and Anathapindika, the lay disciple who cared for the Jetavana monastery refused to allow the monks in, saying that they had disrespected the Dhamma. But Gautama assured the two that the monks were coming to ask his forgiveness.

Gautama then gave instructions that the quarreling monks be made to stay separately from all others, and no one sit or eat with them. Whenever someone came and asked him where the Kosambi monks were, he would point to them and say, "There they are- the quarrelsome monks of Kosambi." Thus shamed, the monks begged forgiveness of the Buddha and reformed their ways for good.

### *Ekhnala, near Rajagaha | 11<sup>th</sup> retreat season*

One afternoon as the bhikkhus passed by rice fields near Ekhnala, they were stopped by a wealthy farmer named Bharadvaja. It was the season for plowing, and he was directing the efforts of hundreds of workers. When he saw the Buddha, he stood directly in his way and said with some contempt, "We are farmers. We plow, sow seeds, fertilize, tend, and harvest crops in order to eat. You do nothing. You produce nothing, yet you eat. You are useless. You don't plow, sow, fertilize, tend, or harvest."

The Buddha responded, "Oh, but we do. We sow the seeds of faith in the earth of a true heart. Our plough is mindfulness and our buffalo is diligent practice. Our harvest is love and understanding. Sir, without faith, understanding, and love, life would be nothing but suffering."

Bharadvaja prostrated himself before the Buddha and asked to be accepted as a lay disciple.

## *Vejanra | 12<sup>th</sup> retreat season*

The following year the Buddha spent the retreat season in Vejanra with five hundred bhikkhus. Halfway into the retreat season, drought hit the area, and the heat was almost unbearable. The Buddha spent most of each day beneath the refreshing shade of a nimba tree.

By the beginning of the third month of retreat, the bhikkhus were receiving fewer and smaller food offerings. Food was scarce because of the drought, and even the food reserves maintained by the government for difficult times had dwindled to almost nothing. Many monks returned to the monastery with empty bowls.

Ananda told him how he met a horse merchant who had recently arrived in Vejanra with five hundred horses. Because the merchant saw the plight of the bhikkhus, he told Ananda that anytime the bhikkhus were unable to receive food offerings, they could come to his stables and he would offer each bhikkhu a handful of the bran he used to feed his horses. That day he offered two handfuls to Ananda, one meant for the Buddha. Ananda promised he would announce the merchant's generous offer to the other bhikkhus. The bran was soon toasted and fragrant. Ananda along with Svasti offered the bran to Gautama. The Buddha asked Svasti if he had received any food offerings, and Svasti showed him the sweet potato he had been lucky enough to receive. The Buddha invited them to sit down and eat with him. He lifted his bowl with great reverence. Svasti held his potato mindfully in his hand. As he watched the Buddha scoop up the bran and eat it with grateful appreciation, he felt like weeping.

The retreat ended, the bhikkhus made their way south.

## *Return to Kapilavatthu*

### *Conflict between the Sakyas and Koliyas*

One summer in, a conflict broke out between the Sakya and Koliya kingdoms over the use of the waters of the Rohini river which flowed between the two states. It was a time of drought and neither kingdom had enough water, and so, each was fighting for control over the river. Soldiers were lined up on either side of the river. It looked as if war could erupt at any moment.

Gautama spoke to farmers on either side of the river to learn the cause of the conflict. Then, he arranged for a meeting between King Mahanama of the Sakyas, and King Suppabuddha of the Koliyas. Thanks to the Buddha's counsel, the two sides quickly reached an agreement. Warm and cordial relations were re-established.

King Mahanama asked the Buddha to remain and spend the retreat season in Sakya.

## *Kapilavatthu | 15<sup>th</sup> retreat season*

### *Enmity Between Kosala and Kapilavatthu*

The kingdom of Kapilavatthu now appeared to be subordinate to that of Kosala. According to some literature, Vasa Bhakhattiya was the adopted daughter of King Mahanama, who had adopted her after the death of her father, Mahanama's steward.

Once when the king of Kosala, Prasanjit, came on a hunting expedition to Mahanama's game reserve he crossed paths with Vasa Bhakhattiya and proposed marriage to her. The king of Kapilavatthu sent her to him to be made queen, and in due course they gave birth to a son named Vidudabha. During one of the latter's visits to Kapilavatthu, the Sakya youths insulted him for being of low origin, causing him to vow vengeance upon the Sakyas. Shortly after, he usurped the throne, and his father fled to Rajagaha seeking the help of Ajatasattu.

## *The Massacre of the Sakyas*

Vidudabha, carrying through on his vow, invaded the Sakya country but was unsuccessful since the Buddha, then in Sravasti, interceded, and the young king returned. He again attacked Kapilavatthu for the second time and succeeded in gaining victory over the Sakyas, who had fought very bravely. The inhabitants of the town were killed, and the surviving Sakyas fled in different directions. A few years later Ajatasattu of Magadha invaded and conquered both Kosala and Kapilavatthu.

## *The Buddha's Fourth and Last Visit to Kapilavatthu*

After the destruction of Kapilavatthu by King Vidudabha, the Buddha visited the desolation of the city caused by Virudhaka's army. Ananda, who had become his constant companion, from the time when Buddha was 55 years of age, was greatly affected at seeing the city like a cemetery. The walls, houses, doors, and windows were destroyed; and the gardens, orchards, and lotus ponds were all ruined. The orphaned children followed him with piteous cries for help. Ananda was especially pained to see the mangled bodies of his countrymen, trodden by elephants in the park.

*Alavi | 16<sup>th</sup> retreat season*

*Bamboo Forest, Magadha | 17<sup>th</sup> retreat season*

*Koliya Kingdom | 18<sup>th</sup> retreat season*

*Vulture Peak, Rajagaha | 19<sup>th</sup> retreat season*

*Magadha | 36 years since Enlightenment*

## *Devadatta's Deceit*

Prince Devadatta, a cousin of the Buddha, had joined the Sangha many years ago along with several members of the Sakya and Koliya clans. Jealous of the Buddha's power over the Sangha as well all the lay disciples, Devadatta sought to become the next leader of the Sangha. One day, after Gautama gave a sermon, Devadatta stood up, bowed and said, "Glorious Buddha, now you are old, far advanced in age and on the threshold of the last stage of life. Venerable Sir! Let the Exalted Buddha now live in peace without bothering about anything. Let him hand over the Sangha to me. I will lead and look after the Sangha."

The Buddha said: "Devadatta! That is not proper. Do not wish to look after and lead the Sangha." For the second time Devadatta made the same request and the Buddha rejected it. When Devadatta made the request for the third time, the Master said: "Devadatta! I would not hand over charge of the Sangha even to Sāriputta and Moggallāna. Why should I hand it over to you, you evil one, eater of spittle?"

The words of the Buddha rankled Devadatta and his anger against Gautama grew manifold.

Devadatta saw that Prince Ajatasattu, son of King Bimbisara of Magadha, wanted to take over his father's kingdom, and saw in him a powerful potential ally. To impress Ajatasattu, Devadatta used his supernatural powers. One day as Ajatasattu sat alone, suddenly a young boy draped in snakes appeared sitting in his lap. Utterly terrified, Ajatasattu pushed the child away and with trembling voice asked: "Who are you?" "I, Prince, am Devadatta." The prince replied with trembling voice: "If you are really Devadatta, then please assume your true form." Devadatta complied and stood smiling in front of the astonished prince who became his staunch follower.

According to Devadatta, King Bimbisara's support was essential for the Buddha's continuing spiritual leadership and so he convinced Ajatasattu to murder his father, playing on his greed for becoming king.

Soon, Devadatta hatched a plan to kill the Buddha with the help of Ajatasattu. The plan was to send two mercenaries to kill the Buddha; those two would later be killed by another four hired mercenaries; those four by some others, and thus Ajatasattu and Devadatta would cover their tracks. But this plan failed since the hired mercenaries confessed before the Buddha and asked to become lay disciples.

So Devadatta took matters into his own hands. He climbed the Gijjakuta or the Vulture Peak, and when sent a large rock tumbling down towards the Buddha as he walked around. But before it reached the Buddha, the rock hit another rock which diverted it, only a splinter hitting the Buddha in his foot.

Devadatta tried again. He instructed the palace mahouts to release an angry elephant Nalagiri in the path of the Buddha as he walked with his monks in the streets of Rajagaha. The next day, a small group of monks was confronted by the sight of a big, angry Nalagiri. The monks called the Buddha to turn back but he continued to calmly walk on. As the angry elephant approached, the Buddha spoke to it lovingly and it calmed down.

In the meanwhile, Devadatta prevailed on Ajatasattu to kill his father Bimbisara. First, Ajatasattu tried to enter his father's chambers with a hidden dagger. This plan was thwarted by the king's guards. However, Bimbisara, saddened by his son's actions, abdicated the throne and made Ajatasattu king. The latter was still insecure, so he imprisoned the old king and deprived him of food. Only Queen Kosaladevi was allowed to visit the old king. She would rub *catumadhura*, a nutritious cream, on her body and the old man would lick it off, which kept Bimbisara alive. When, after two weeks, he was still not dead, King Ajatasattu sent men into the prison cell to kill him. Thus ended the life of Gautama's follower.

## *Bamboo Forest, Magadha*

### *Splitting the Sangha*

Having failed many times at killing Gautama, Devadatta decided to split the Sangha. He created five rules to impose greater austerity on the monks: that monks should only live in the forest, that they only eat food that they had begged for, that they only wear robes made out of rags, that they should not live in monasteries and that they should be vegetarian. The Buddha refused, because he knew that outward practices like these did not necessarily bring about a change in the heart, and would distance the bhikkhus from the laity. He left it to the individual wishes of monks to follow these rules.

Devadatta used this against the Buddha, claiming that he had become lax and used to luxury. Following him, five hundred monks left the Buddha and created a separate Sangha under the guidance of Devadatta. This group left Rajagaha and moved to Uruvela (Gaya) where Ajatasattu built them a large monastery on Gayasisa hill.

Thus, the Sangha was split, accusations of lax discipline were being made and the lay people did not know which group to support.

Sariputta and Mogallana decided to act on the Buddha's behalf.

## *Gayasisa Hill, Uruvela*

### *Bringing back the Wayward Monks*

Seeing Sariputta and Mogallana at his monastery, Devadatta believed they too had abandoned the Buddha and had come to join him. Ecstatic, he gave a long sermon to his followers defending his stance on austerities and requested Sariputta and Mogallana to give another sermon while he went to rest.

After he had gone, Sariputta and Mogallana both gave calm and well-reasoned talks, explaining that no ascetic practices or, for that matter, any outward rites or acts in themselves could change the heart. They also appealed for loyalty to their compassionate teacher, the Buddha, and for unity and harmony in the Sangha. When Sariputta and Mogallana had finished, they said: "That is all we have to say. We will now return to Rajagaha." As they got up and left almost all the five hundred monks got up and followed them.

When Devadatta awoke in the morning, he found he only had a few followers left. It is said that he was so angry that blood came out from his mouth. Alone and disgraced, in the following years Devadatta continued to complain about and criticise the Buddha to anyone who would listen. Towards the end of his life he began to regret his past actions and decided to apologise to the Buddha. But before the two men could meet again, Devadatta died.

## Part 4: The Last Days of the Buddha

The Buddha, having reached the age of seventy-nine, began his last journey:

From Rajagaha he went to Nalanda followed by a large retinue of monks. After Nalanda he travelled on towards Pataligrama, where he gave a discourse to the laity on the merits of the five moral precepts. After this he continued his journey with his disciples, miraculously crossing the overflowing Ganges in the rainy season to Kotigrama, and thence to Nadika, where he delivered courses on duty, self-transcendence, and insight. Then it was on to Vesali, where he took abode in a mango grove belonging to the well-known courtesan Ambapali, who visited him and was in return for her visit honoured with a religious discourse. He exhorted the monks of Vesali saying, “Subject to decay are compound things; strive with earnestness and in no long time the Tathagata will attain Nirvana.”

### *Village of Beluva, near Vesali | The 80<sup>th</sup> year of the Buddha*

Since the last twenty three years, Gautama had been accompanied by bhikkhu Ananda who had been given the task of attending to him and of remembering all his sermons and teachings. Thus, Ananda and Gautama travelled together everywhere.

### *The Buddha's Illness*

When they were passing through the village of Beluva, near the city of Vesali, Gautama experienced sharp pains in his stomach. Gautama was aware that he was now old and his mortal life was at its end. He decided that he wanted to give a last set of teachings and guidance to his followers. He suppressed the pains through mindfulness and they carried on.

Ananda was relieved to see that his teacher had recovered.

### *Vesali, Capala Shrine*

After begging for some time in the streets of Vesali, Gautama and Ananda walked towards the Capala Shrine.

### *Gautama's Suggestion to Ananda*

Gautama said, “Pleasant, Ananda, is Vesali, and pleasant are the shrines of Udena, Gotamaka, Sattambaka, Bahuputta, Sarandada and Capala. Whosoever has developed to perfection the four constituents of psychic power (dhyana, or jhana) could, if he so desired, remain throughout the world-period or until the end of it.”

But Ananda failed to grasp the suggestion. As though his mind was clouded by Maara, he was unable to say, “May the Buddha remain, may the Happy One, the Exalted One remain, throughout the world period, for the welfare and happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, well-being and happiness of gods and men!”

Gautama repeated his words a second and third time, and yet Ananda failed to grasp his intent.

### *Maara's Appeal: Relinquishing the Will to Live*

When Ananda had gone, Maara appeared. He reminded the Buddha of the words he had spoken many years ago, when he had vanquished Maara, that he would relinquish life only after he had spread the Dhamma, the knowledge of the Path to Enlightenment across the lives of many people and many regions.

The Buddha answered Maara, “Do not worry Maara, do not trouble yourself. Three months hence, I shall pass on to Parinirvana.” And at that moment, at the Capala Shrine in Vesali, the Buddha relinquished his will to live. And there was an earthquake, the earth trembled and thunder rolled.

Ananda returned and Gautama told him that many years ago, soon after he had attained enlightenment, he had assured Maara that he would give up life after he had established the Dhamma and the Sangha and established bhikkhus and bhikkhunis who could preach the path.

### *Ananda's Appeal*

Ananda then asked the Buddha to stay, to stay on in the world for the benefit of the multitude, for the well-being of the gods and men. But it was too late. Gautama had made the suggestion to Ananda and Ananda had failed to grasp it.

Ananda appealed again, and Gautama replied, "At Rajagaha, Ananda, when dwelling at Vultures' Peak, I spoke to you, saying that if the Tathagata so desired he could remain throughout the world-period of until the end of it. I did so again at the Banyan Grove, at Robbers' Cliff, at Sattapanni Cave on Vebhara mountain, at the Black Rock of Isigili, at Serpents' Pool in the Cool Forest, at the Tapoda Grove, at the Bamboo Grove, at the Mango Grove, and at the Small Nook in the Deer Park. But each time you failed to grasp my meaning and ask me to remain."

Now it was too late; Gautama had decided to leave the tusita realm (earth, or mortal realm) and advance towards the final nirvana (parinirvana).

Then the Buddha and Ananda went to the monastery in the Great Forest of Vesali and the Buddha gave his last admonition to the bhikkhus present. And finally, he told them of his departure.

In the late hours of the morning, Buddha and Ananda departed Vesali. As they did, Gautama turned to take a last look at the city, and then walked on. They departed for Bhandagama. From Bhandagama, they went to Hatthigama. Then Ambagama and Jambugama, then to Bhoganagara, where they stayed at the Ananda shrine.

### *The Mango Grove at Pava (south east of present day Kushinagar)*

From Bhoganagara they went to Pava, where they resided at the Mango grove that belonged to Cunda, the metalworker.

### *The Last Meal at Cunda's House*

Cunda requested to prepare a meal for the Buddha and his community of bhikkhus.

For the meal Cunda prepared a variety of foods, including sukara-mandavva. The Buddha asked that Cunda serve only him the *sukara-mandavva* and serve the other dishes to all other bhikkhus. After he had eaten, Gautama asked Cunda to bury what remained of the sukara-mandavva in a pit in the earth saying, "for i do not see in all this world, with its Maaras and its gods, anyone who could eat it and entirely digest it, except the Tathagata alone."

Cunda did as told.

Soon after eating, Gautama experienced severe pain and dysentery. He said to Ananda, "Let us go to Kusinagar."

On the way to Kusinagar, Gautama felt weak and asked Ananda to fold his upper robe and place it on the ground so he may lie down for a while. While he was resting, he felt thirsty and asked Ananda to bring him water from the nearby stream of shallow water. Ananda said, "Lord, five hundred carts have just passed through that stream and have muddied the water." He suggested that they drink from the clear waters of the Kakuttha river which was just a little further along. However, Gautama was very thirsty and asked Ananda a second and third time for water. Ananda went to the nearby stream to fill water. As he approached it, he saw the water clear.

While Gautama was resting under the tree, he as approached by Pukkusa of the Mallas who was a disciple of the late master Alara Kalama. Pukkusa saluted Gautama and asked him if he had noticed the five hundred carts go by. Gautama said he had not. Pukkusa was surprised and told of how when Master Kalama had been in a state of meditation he had not noticed the passing of a long caravan of carts.

Then Gautama told Pukkusa of a time when he was staying at Atuma. Near Gautama's hut was farm. On a day of immense rain, thunder and lightning, two brothers who ran the farm and four of their oxen died because of the



weather. A large crowd gathered around the site. When Gautama stepped out of his hut and enquired about the crowd he was told of the deaths. But Gautama had noticed nothing, so deep had he been in his state of meditation.

Bowing deeply, Pukkusa asked Gautama to accept his regards, and the gift of two gold-hued robes. Gautama accepted and asked that one robe be for him and the other for Ananda. When Ananda put the robe on the Buddha, its colour seemed to fade, and Ananda remarked at how radiant Gautama's skin appeared, that the gold of the robe faded against it.

Gautama explained: "There are two occasions, Ananda, when the skin of the Tathagata appears extremely clear and radiant. One is the night when he attains enlightenment. And the other, when the Tathagata comes to his final passing. So, in the last watch of the day, in the Sal Grove of Malla country, between two sal trees, I will attain parinirvana."

The two resumed their journey towards the Kakuttha river.

## *The Kakuttha River*

### *The Last Bath*

Gautama bathed in the clear waters of the Kakuttha river. He was attended by several disciples, among them Cunda. Gautama wanted to comfort Cunda, to assure him that it was not his ill fate or ill deed that he served the Buddha his last meal. And so, he said to Ananda, that if anyone were to ever rebuke Cunda for this, then they must be told that there are two meals by serving which one does the greatest good. One is the meal served to the Tathagata just before he attains enlightenment, and the second is served before he attains parinirvana.

After having rested a while, Gautama and Ananda resumed their journey to Kusinagar.

## *The Sal Grove at Kusinagar*

Kusinagar (present day location: Kushinagar district, Uttar Pradesh) was a small city but important to the Mallas.

### *The Last Resting Place of the Buddha*

On reaching the Sal grove at Kusinagar, Gautama asked Ananda to prepare for him a place to lie down between twin sal trees, not far from the banks of the Hirannavati river.

He spoke to Ananda:

"Do not weep. Have I not told you before, monks, that it is in the very nature of things near and dear to us that we must part from them? All that is born, brought into being and put together carries within itself the seeds of dissolution. How then is it possible that such a being should not be dissolved. Be earnest in effort and you too shall be free from the great evils and ignorance".

As he lay down, his head was towards the north, and his feet rested one upon the other. The sal trees, unseasonally, broke out in full bloom, and from the heavens mandarava flowers and clouds of sandal rained down over the Buddha's body. The sound of heavenly voices and musical instruments filled the air in reverence for the Buddha.

Innumerable deities, invisible to the disciples, were standing around, on earth and in heaven, seeking a glimpse of the Buddha's face before he passed on from this world. The monk Upavana was standing before the Buddha fanning him lightly. Gautama asked Upavana to move away, so the deities could see him clearly.

Gautama said to Ananda that though celestial flowers and those of the sal tree, and sandalwood rain down upon him, these are not the greatest tribute to him. The greatest tribute is when monks and nuns abide by the Dhamma, live by it and walk in the way of the Dhamma.

Ananda then expressed a concern to Gautama, "So far, the disciples of the Dhamma would travel to come see the Buddha, to hear him speak about the Way; others would learn of his teachings from those who had been in his

presence. But when the Buddha would be no longer in this world, current and future followers would be bereft of such opportunity.”

Gautama told Ananda that the followers of the Dhamma should visit four places to express their reverence: the first is the place of Siddhartha’s birth, the second is the place where he attained enlightenment, the third is where he first turned the wheel of Dhamma, and the fourth where he attained parinirvana.

Ananda then asked him “How should a bhikkhu conduct himself towards women?”

“Do not see them”, Gautama answered. “If you see them, do not speak to them, and if they speak to you, maintain mindfulness.”

Ananda asked, “And how should we respect the body of the Buddha?”

He answered, “Do not hinder yourself to honour the body of the Buddha. Instead, apply yourselves towards your own good. There are wise noblemen, layperson and brahmins who are followers of the Dhamma. Let them honour the body of the Buddha by first wrapping it in fresh linen, then with teased cottonwool, then placing it in an iron oil vessel, and then in a second iron vessel. Then the body is to be burned at a pyre formed of perfumed woods, and a stupa constructed at a crossroads in honour of the Tathagata. Monks and lay disciples, may come to the stupa, bringing incense, garlands and sandalwood paste, and find peace and guidance.”

Ananda was overcome with grief. He moved away from the Buddha’s side and went into the vihara to be by himself. Gautama was aware of his grief, and he asked Ananda to be brought to him and said, “Ananda, do not grieve. I have always taught you that all that is dear will come to pass, and so must I. You have served me with compassion and wisdom. Now apply the same to yourself. And soon, you too, shall attain enlightenment.”

Addressing all present, he praised Ananda for his characteristic of bringing joy to those who met him, those he spoke to, be it brahmins, nobles, householders or ascetics; and when he chose to not speak, people were saddened.

Ananda asked him why he had chosen Kusinagar for his parinirvana, instead of a great city such as Savatthi, Isipatana, Kosambi or Rajagaha. Gautama told Ananda of Kusinagar’s glorious past as the city of Kusavati under the King Mahasudassana.

He instructed Ananda to go into the town and call people to come and see him before he passed on.

That day, the Mallas were all gathered in a public hall in Kusinagar. Ananda addressed them there, informing them that in the last watch of the night, the Buddha would pass on. They were all grief-stricken and went with Ananda to the Sal Grove. Instead of seeing the Buddha one by one, as that would take forever, the Mallas saw him in groups, each group consisting of a clan or a family.

### *The Last Convert*

At that time, an ascetic named Subhadda was present in Kusinagar. He heard of the impending passing of the Buddha and went to see him. He requested Ananda to let him speak to the Buddha but Ananda refused saying that Gautama was tired. Three times he made his request and the third time he was refused. Gautama heard the conversation and asked Ananda to let Subhadda speak to him.

Subhadda approached the Buddha, “There are many teachers, sects and religions in this world. Have some, all or none of the leaders of those sects and religions attained realisation?”

Gautama answered that in whichever Dhamma or Discipline was found the Noble Eightfold Path, in that would be found persons who had or would attain realisation. If disciples of the Buddha’s Dhamma live righteously by the Dhamma, the world will not be devoid of persons who have attained enlightenment or arhatship.

Having his doubt cleared, Subhadda asked to be ordained into the Sangha. He was the last bhikkhu to be ordained in the presence of the living Buddha.

## *The Passing of Gautama*

As the hour for his passing neared, Gautama said to Ananda, “It may be that after I have passed, some disciples think that they have lost their teacher, but it is not so. What I have taught- the Dhamma and the discipline- is your teacher.”

He instructed Ananda that the higher penalty or the brahma danda be imposed on the bhikkhu Channa, formerly the charioteer of Koliya kingdom, for having been arrogant towards other bhikkhus. Until he were to reform his ways and seek forgiveness, no bhikkhus were to speak to him.

He asked all bhikkhus present to come forth and speak to him if they had any doubts or perplexities. He did this three times, saying that they must not later feel remorse. However, no bhikkhu came forward, for all those present were sure of their belief and the teachings of the Buddha.

And then he uttered his last words: *appamadena sampadetha*, which means “Reach consummation through heedfulness.”

And then, Gautama Buddha passed into a state of dhyana (or jhana) ascending from one stage of consciousness to the next. And finally, he passed away.

Sakka, the king of gods (or Indra) then spoke:  
“Transient are all compounded things,  
Subject to arise and vanish;  
Having come into existence they pass away,  
Good is the peace when they forever cease.”

Bhikkhu Anuruddha spoke:  
“No movement of the breath but with steadfast heart,  
Free from desires and tranquil- so the sage  
Comes to his end. By moral pangs unshaken,  
His mind, like a flame extinguished, finds release.”

Bhikkhu Ananda spoke:  
“Then there was terror and the hair stood up, when he,  
The All Accomplished One, the Buddha, passed away.”

## *Honouring and Cremating the Body*

The Mallas paid homage to the body with song, dance, garlands, and perfumes. After seven days of such veneration, they wished to cremate the body but when they tried to lift it up, they couldn't. Anuruddha explained to them that though they wanted to cremate the body at the southern end of the city, the deities wanted it cremated at the northern end.

In accordance with the wishes of the deities, the Mallas carried the body northwards.

Directed by the bhikkhus, they wrapped the body in linen and cottonwool and encased it in two iron vessels. However, when they tried to light the pyre nothing happened. Anuruddha explained to them: the bhikkhu Mahakassapa was on his way from Pava to Kusinagar and it was the wish of the deities that he behold the body of the Buddha one last time. And so, the Mallas waited for Mahakassapa to arrive.

Mahakassapa had, while on his journey to Kusinagar, heard of the passing of the Buddha. He arrived at the chaityabhoomi of the Mallas, the Makuta Bandhana in Kusinagar. He paid homage to the remains of Gautama by circling the pyre three times and bowing at his feet. And the pyre burst into flame on its own.

Only bones remained, which the Mallas gathered and placed in their public hall, surrounding the remains with a lattice of spears and a fence of bows. For the next seven days, they honoured the remains with garlands, song and dance.

### *The Distribution of the Remains*

King Ajatasattu sent a message to the Mallas, saying “The Buddha was of warrior caste and so am I. We should receive a portion of the Buddha’s remains so we can honour them by building a stupa over them and celebrating them.” Similar messages were sent by the Licchavis of Vesali, the Sakyas of Kapilavatthu, the Bulis of Allakappa, the Kolis of Ramagama, the brahmin Vethadipa, and the Mallas of Pava.

While at first, the Mallas of Kusinagar did not wish to part with the remains of Gautama, the brahmin Dona (or Drona) prevailed on them, saying that a strife over the remains would be a dishonour to the teachings of the Buddha. The remains were divided into eight equal parts and distributed to the eight different groups. The Brahmin Dona took the urn in which the remains had been kept. And the Moriyas of Pippalivana, who made their request only after all the relics had been distributed were allowed to take the ashes from the funeral pyre.

Over each portion of relics, a stupa was built, and the Buddha was honoured.

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