The Inspiring Life of the Buddha



Sumanā

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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato
Sammāsambuddhassa

Homage to Him, the Blessed One,
the Perfected One,
the Fully Awakened Buddha



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“One individual arises in the world
for the welfare and happiness of the people,
out of sympathy for the world, for the benefit, welfare,
and happiness of gods and humans.
What one individual?
The Realised One, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha.”

Aṅguttara Nikāya 1.170

Descending into the World

Majjhima Nikāya 123

Before his rebirth into the world, he lived in the host of joyful gods and remained there for the entirety of his life.

After passing away from the realm of joyful gods, he was reborn into the capital city of Kapilavatthu. His father was King Suddhodana and his mother was Queen Māyā.

When he was conceived in his mother's womb, four godlings approached her to guard the four quarters, so that no human, non-human, or anyone at all shall harm him or his mother.

His mother became naturally ethical and did not suffer from any illness when he was conceived in her womb. She refrained from killing living creatures, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, lying, and consuming beer, wine, and liquor intoxicants.

Born into the World

Majjhima Nikāya 123

When having him conceived in her womb, Queen Māyā
was happy and did not feel tired. After exactly ten months,
at Lumbinī Park, she gave birth to him while standing.
His body emerged pure and clean from his mother's womb.
Before he reached the ground, four godlings received him
and placed him before his mother, saying,
"Rejoice, O Queen! An illustrious son is born to you."

Two showers of water appeared from the sky, one cool,
one warm, for bathing him and his mother. Standing firm
with his own feet on the ground, facing north,
he took seven steps and made the proclamation:

"I am the foremost in the world! I am the eldest in the world!
I am the first in the world! This is my last rebirth;
now there'll be no more future lives."



"Ānanda, you should also remember this
as an incredible and amazing quality of the Realized One.
It's that the Realized One knows feelings as they arise,
as they remain, and as they go away."

Majjhima Nikāya 123



"This is peaceful; this is sublime—
that is, the stilling of all activities,
the letting go of all attachments,
the ending of craving, fading away,
cessation, extinguishment."

Majjhima Nikāya 64

Meditating in His Early Years

Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.39 & Majjhima Nikāya 36

His lifestyle was delicate, most delicate, extremely delicate.
In his father's home, lotus ponds were made just for him.
In some, blue water lilies blossomed, while in others,
there were pink or white lotuses, just for his benefit.
He only used sandalwood and clothing from Kāsi.

He had three stilt longhouses—one for the winter,
one for the summer, and one for the rainy season.
He stayed in a stilt longhouse without coming downstairs
for the four months of the rainy season, where he was
entertained by musicians—none of them men.

During his early years, while his father was working,
he sat down meditating in the cool shade of
a black plum tree, blissfully entering deep meditation.

Marriage

When the time had come, he married Princess Yasodharā.
They lived in the three stilt longhouses together,
one each for the winter, the summer, and the rainy season.

Some time later, they had a son,
who was named Rāhula by his grandfather.
Later Princess Yasodharā became an enlightened nun.



"When both are faithful and bountiful,
disciplined, living righteously,
then wife and husband say nice things to each other."

Aṅguttara Nikāya 4.55



“Intoxicated with the vanity of youth, health, and life,
an unlearned ordinary person does bad things
by way of body, speech, and mind.

When their body breaks up, after death,
they’re reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell.”

Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.39

Reflections

Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.39 & Sutta Nipāta 4.15

Having had such a prosperous and delicate lifestyle,
he thought,

“When an unlearned ordinary person—
who is liable to grow old, get sick, and die,
not being exempt from old age, sickness, and death—
sees someone else who is old, sick, and dead, they’re
horrified, repelled, and disgusted, overlooking the fact that
they themselves are in the same situation.

But since I, too, am liable to grow old, get sick, and die, it
would not be appropriate for me to be horrified, repelled,
and disgusted when I see someone else who is old,
sick, and dead.”

After reflecting on the vanity of youth, health, and life,
he entirely gave them up with disgust.

He also felt fear looking at people in conflict, and was stirred
with a sense of urgency. Seeing renunciation as a sanctuary,
he committed to the spiritual life.

Permission to Go Forth

Dīgha Nikāya 16 & Majjhima Nikāya 26

Then he thought,
"Why do I, being liable to be reborn,
grow old, fall sick, sorrow, die, and become corrupted,
seek things that have the same nature?"

Some time later, while still with pristine black hair,
blessed with youth, in the prime of life, seeking freedom
from rebirth, old age, sickness, death,
the supreme sanctuary, at the age of twenty-nine,
though his parents wished otherwise,
weeping with tearful faces, he shaved off his hair and
beard, dressed in ochre robes, and went forth
from the lay life to homelessness.

Once he had gone forth, he sought out the spiritual
teachers Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta.
But he realised that their teachings did not lead to
disillusionment, dispassion, cessation, peace,
insight, awakening, and extinguishment.
He left disappointed.



“Sensual pleasures
give little gratification and much suffering and distress,
and they are all the more full of drawbacks.”

Majjhima Nikāya 14



“These two extremes should not be cultivated by one gone forth.
What two?
Indulgence in sensual pleasures,
which is low, crude, ordinary, ignoble, and pointless.
And indulgence in self-mortification,
which is painful, ignoble, and pointless.“

Saṁyutta Nikāya 56.11

Severe Austerities

Majjhima Nikāya 12 & 85

After leaving Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta,
he travelled to Uruvelā. There he practised severe austerities.
He practised breathless meditation and ate so little that
his body became extremely emaciated. Due to eating
so little, the skin of his belly stuck to his backbone.

When he tried to urinate or defecate, he fell face down
right there. Yet he did not achieve enlightenment.
Then he recalled sitting under the tree in his early years
and entering deep meditation. Stemming from that
memory came the understanding:
“That is the path to awakening!”

Afterwards, he realised that awakening could not
be achieved with such a severely emaciated body.
He abandoned the austerities and ate solid food.

Enlightenment

Majjhima Nikāya 36

After eating and gathering his strength, he practised
meditation as he had in his early years.
Then, in Uruvelā at the root of the Bodhi tree,
he entered the deep meditations known as *jhāna*.

When his mind was stilled, he extended it towards insight.
He then realised the truth of rebirth, the law of karma,
and the ending of defilements. Knowing and seeing like this,
his mind was freed from the defilements of sensuality,
of desire for rebirth, and of ignorance.

He truly understood: “This is suffering;
this is the origin of suffering;
this is the cessation of suffering;
this is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering.”

He knew his mind was freed and understood:
“Rebirth is ended; the spiritual journey has been completed;
what had to be done has been done;
there is nothing further for this place.”

He became a fully awakened Buddha.



"This is the noble truth of the practice
that leads to the cessation of suffering,
that is, right view, right purpose,
right speech, right action, right livelihood,
right effort, right mindfulness, and right stillness."

Saṁyutta Nikāya 56.11



“Flung open are the doors to freedom from death!
Let those with ears to hear commit to faith.“

Majjhima Nikāya 26

Teaching out of Compassion

Saṁyutta Nikāya 6.1

When the Buddha was first awakened, he thought,
“This teaching is deep, hard to see and understand,
peaceful, sublime, beyond the scope of logic, subtle,
comprehensible to the wise.

But people like clinging, they love it and enjoy it.
It’s also hard for them to see this reality, that is, the stilling
of all activities, the letting go of all attachments, the ending
of craving, fading away, cessation, extinguishment.”

Reflecting like this, his mind inclined to not teaching
the Dhamma.

Then Brahma Sahampati appeared in front of the Buddha
and said, “Let the Buddha teach the Dhamma!
There will be those who understand!” Out of compassion for
sentient beings, he replied in verse to Brahma Sahampati:

“Flung open are the doors to freedom from death!
Let those with ears to hear commit to faith.
Thinking it would be troublesome, Brahma,
I did not teach the true, sublime Dhamma among mankind.”

The First Teaching

Khandhaka 1, Majjhima Nikāya 26, Saṁyutta Nikāya 56.11

After deciding to teach the Dhamma, he thought of first teaching Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. But a god came to him and informed him of their passing. Then he thought of teaching the group of five ascetics who had left him when he decided to abandon the severe austerities and eat solid food, and who were now staying in the deer park at Isipatana near Varanasi.

After travelling to Varanasi, the Buddha taught them that one should not cultivate two extremes, namely indulgence in sensual pleasures and self-mortification.

He taught the middle way of practice and the four noble truths: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the practice leading to its cessation, which is the noble eightfold path. They understood his teaching and asked for ordination.

The Buddha also taught and ordained others there. He said, "Come, monks. The Dhamma is well-proclaimed. Practise the spiritual life to make a complete end of suffering." After listening to the Dhamma, they all became enlightened.

Upon having 60 enlightened monks, the Buddha instructed them: "Go wandering, monks, for the benefit and happiness of humanity, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and humans. Proclaim the Dhamma that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, that has a true goal and is well articulated. There will be those who understand."



“Proclaim the Dhamma that is good in the beginning,
good in the middle, and good in the end,
that has a true goal and is well articulated.”

Khandhaka 1



“Not to do any evil;
to embrace the good;
to purify one’s mind;
this is the instruction of the Buddhas.”

Dhammapada 183

Teaching 1,250 Monks

Dhammapada 183–185

One night, 1,250 enlightened monks came to the
Bamboo Grove in Magadha, without prior agreement.
On that occasion the Buddha gave the following teaching:

“Not to do any evil;
to embrace the good;
to purify one’s mind;
this is the instruction of the Buddhas.

Patient acceptance is the ultimate fervour.
Extinguishment is the ultimate, say the Buddhas.
No true renunciate injures another,
nor does an ascetic hurt another.

Not speaking ill nor doing harm;
restraint in the monastic code;
moderation in eating; staying in remote lodgings;
commitment to the higher mind
this is the instruction of the Buddhas.”

Teaching His Family

Udāna 3.2, Majjhima Nikāya 61 & 147

Several years later, after teaching Dhamma to many people and giving ordination to numerous monks, he went back to Kapilavatthu to teach his parents, his family, and the Sakyan people. He ordained many of them as well, including his brother, Nanda, and his son, Rāhula.

When Venerable Nanda led the spiritual life dissatisfied, the Buddha motivated him to stay on and keep it up. He eventually became enlightened.

He also told Venerable Rāhula that deeds of body, speech, and mind should be done only after repeatedly checking. If an act leads to hurting oneself, hurting others, or hurting both, if it's unskilful, with suffering as its outcome and result, then one should not do such a deed.

If an act doesn't lead to hurting oneself, hurting others, or hurting both, if it's skilful, with happiness as its outcome and result, then one should do such a deed.

Later Venerable Rāhula became enlightened.



“When someone is not ashamed
to tell a deliberate lie,
there is no bad deed they would not do, I say.
So you should train like this,
‘I will not tell a lie, even for a joke.’”

Majjhima Nikāya 61



"Those things that you know lead to passion,
to bondage, to an increase in things, to great desires,
to discontent, to socializing, to laziness, to being burdensome—
you should definitely regard them
as not the Dhamma, not the training,
not the Teacher's instruction."

Khandhaka 20

Teaching about Gender Equality

Khandhaka 20

After King Suddhodana had passed away, the Buddha's foster mother, Mahāpajāpati Gotamī, and several Sakyan ladies asked for the ordination to become bhikkhunīs. At first, the Buddha refused. Venerable Ānanda then asked him if the ladies would be able to live the spiritual life and realise its fruits, which the Buddha confirmed.

The Buddha then instructed, inspired, and gladdened Mahāpajāpati with a teaching. Afterwards, he addressed the monks:
"I allow monks to give the full ordination to nuns."

On another occasion, Venerable Mahāpajāpati went to the Buddha, bowed down, and asked for a brief teaching to recollect while staying by herself, secluded, heedful, energetic, and diligent. Later she became enlightened.

Teaching without Discrimination

Theragāthā 12.2

One day, the Buddha met the outcast Sunīta.
He was very poor and his job was to
remove discarded flowers.
He was shunned, disregarded,
and held in contempt by many people.

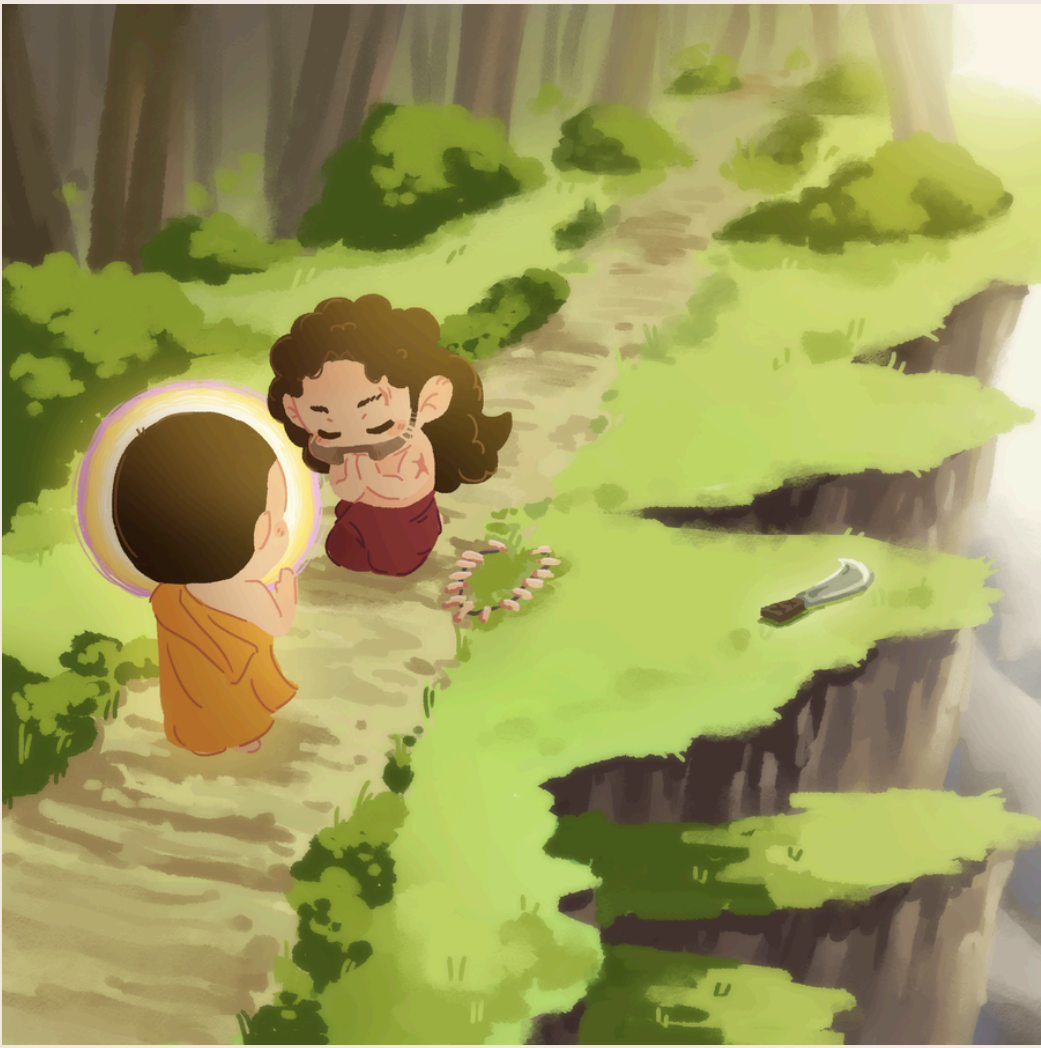
When the Buddha came to him, Sunīta dropped his flail
and approached him to pay homage.
Out of sympathy for him,
the Buddha stood still. When he had paid homage
at the Buddha's feet, he asked the Buddha
for the going-forth.

The Buddha, having sympathy
for the whole world, said to him, "Come, monk!"
That was his ordination. Afterwards, he stayed alone
in the wilderness, meditating tirelessly,
and eventually became enlightened.
The Buddha smiled when gods paid respect
to Venerable Sunīta.



“By fervour and spiritual practice,
by restraint and by self-control,
that’s how to become a brahmin,
this is the supreme brahmin.”

Theragāthā 12.2



“Ever since I was born in the noble birth, sister,
I don’t recall having intentionally taken the life of a living creature.
By this truth, may both you and your baby be safe.”

Majjhima Nikāya 86

Teaching One to Purify One's Deeds

Majjhima Nikāya 86

At one time, in Kosala, lived a hardened killer named Aṅgulimāla. He was constantly murdering humans and wore their fingers as a necklace. He thought to take the Buddha's life. Following behind him, Aṅgulimāla could not catch up with him no matter what, even though the Buddha walked at a normal speed.

Aṅgulimāla stood still and asked the Buddha to stop, to which he replied, "I've stopped, Aṅgulimāla—now you stop."

"I have stopped, but you tell me I've not.
How is it you've stopped and I have not?"

"Aṅgulimāla, I have forever stopped—I've laid aside violence towards all creatures. But you can't stop yourself from harming living creatures; that's why I've stopped, but you have not."

"Now that I've heard your verse on Dhamma,
I shall live without evil."

Aṅgulimāla asked him for the going-forth right away. Later, Venerable Aṅgulimāla became enlightened. One day, he saved a woman suffering from distressing obstructed labour by reciting a chant taught by the Buddha: "By this truth, may both you and your baby be safe."

Teaching Divine Beings

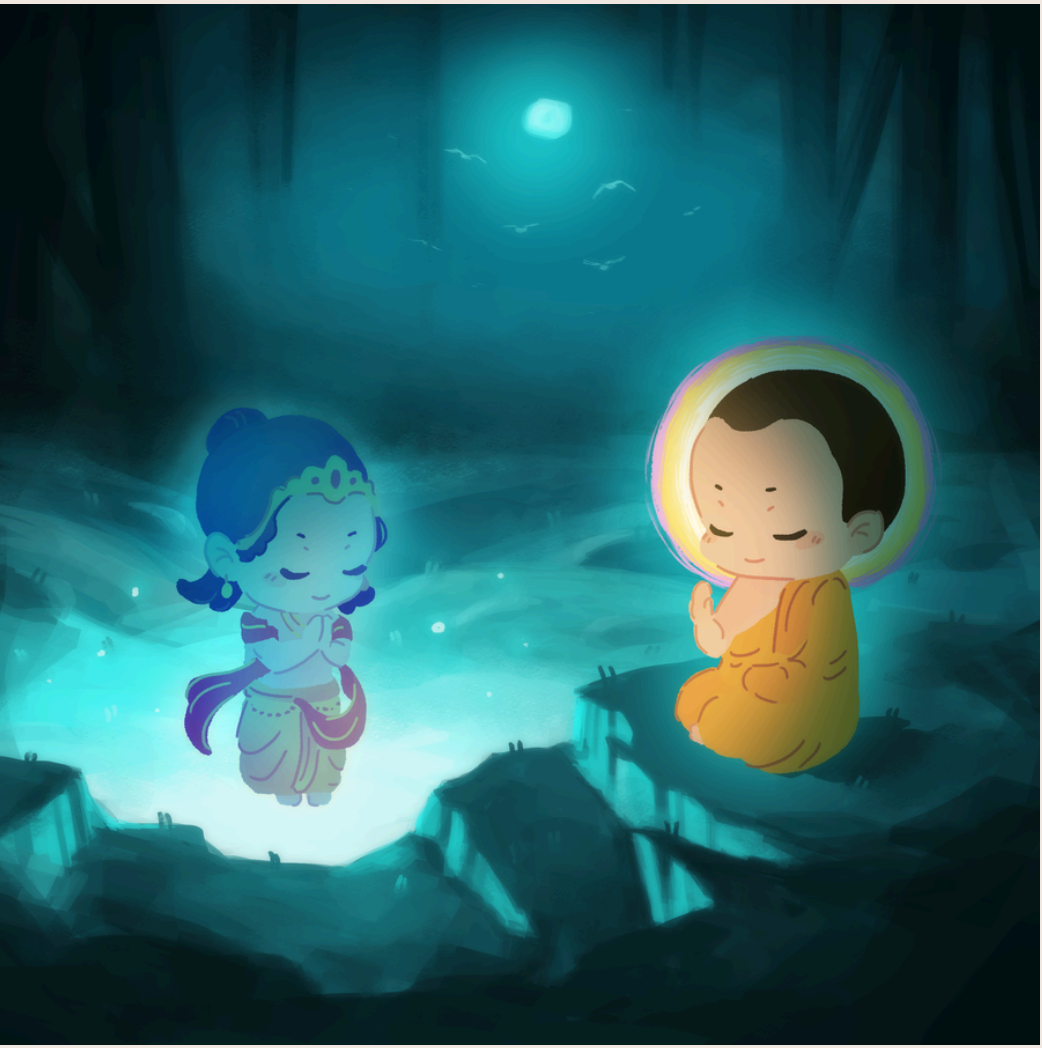
Saṁyutta Nikāya 6.4 & Sutta Nipāta 2.4

One time, the Buddha was staying near Ukkaṭṭhā, in the Subhaga Forest. At that time Brahma Baka had the following harmful misconception: “This is permanent, this is everlasting, this is eternal, this is whole, this is not liable to pass away. For this is where there’s no being born, growing old, dying, passing away, or being reborn. And there’s no other escape beyond this.”

The Buddha told him that he was lost in ignorance. The state of which Brahma Baka spoke was actually impermanent and incomplete, liable to birth, old age, death, and rebirth The Buddha continued: “Baka, the lifespan here is short, not long, though you think it’s long.”

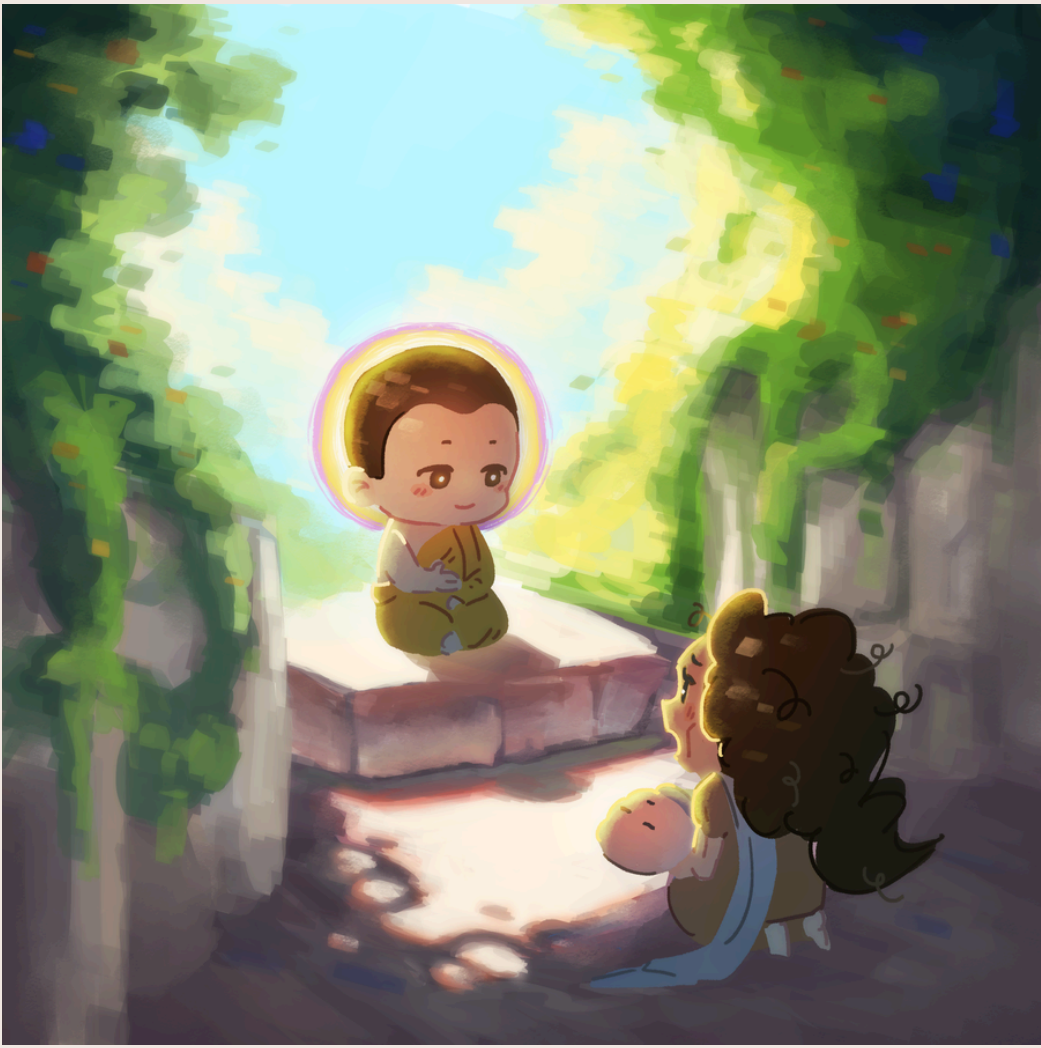
After listening, Brahma Baka paid respect to the Buddha.

At another time the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthī. Then, late at night, a glorious deity, lighting up the entire Jeta’s Grove, went to the Buddha, bowed, and stood to one side, asking the Buddha about the highest blessing. The Buddha told him that the highest blessing is all about acts of kindness.



"To support one's mother and father,
to cherish one's partner and children,
and to have a job without stress.
This is the greatest good fortune."

Sutta Nipāta 2.4



"Associate with true persons,
for that is how wisdom grows.
Should you associate with true persons,
you would be freed from all suffering."

Therīgāthā 10.1

Teaching about Letting Go

Kisāgotamī couldn't accept her son's death and thought,
"I will find a medicine to cure my son." Carrying her son
on her hip, she went from house to house, asking,
"Do you know of a medicine that will cure my son?"

Then she met the Buddha and asked him for help.
He told her to bring him white mustard seeds
from any family where there had never been any death.
Realising that every family had experienced death,
she finally had a funeral performed for her son.

She said, "Oh woe is you whose family is lost;
the suffering you have undergone has no measure;
you have been shedding tears for many thousands of lives."

After that, she became a bhikkhunī. She later developed
the noble eightfold path leading to freedom from death
and became enlightened.

Loving Kindness towards Animals

Udāna 2.3 & 4.5

At one time, the Buddha was staying near Kosambī.
At that time, the Saṅgha was arguing
and refusing to listen to him.
He then set out without companion wandering alone
towards the Pārileyyaka forest.

There he lived attended on by an elephant.
It used its trunk to clear vegetation and to supply water
for drinking and washing.
Then, while he was reflecting in private,
the Buddha thought,
“Now that I’m alone, away from those monks,
I’m happy and at ease.”

At another time while he was staying near Sāvatthī,
he saw some boys hitting a snake.
He told them not to harm others for their own enjoyment,
for every living being loves happiness.
If you hurt others,
after death you will find no happiness.



“Creatures love happiness,
so if you don’t harm them with a stick
in search of your own happiness,
after death you will find happiness.”

Udāna 2.3



“Whoever would nurse me
should nurse one who is sick.”

Khandhaka 8

Caring for the Sick

Khandhaka 8

On one occasion there was a monk who had dysentery.
He was lying in his own faeces and urine. Just then,
as the Buddha was walking about with Venerable Ānanda
as his attendant, he came to the dwelling of this monk.

When the Buddha saw his condition,
he said to Venerable Ānanda,
“Go and get some water, Ānanda. Let’s give him a wash.”
And so the Buddha and Venerable Ānanda cleaned him up.
They then laid him on a bed.

Soon afterwards the Buddha had the Saṅgha gathered
and questioned them: “Why don’t you nurse him?”
The monks replied, “Because he doesn’t do anything for us.”

The Buddha advised them to nurse the sick, saying,
“Monks, you have no mother or father to nurse you.
If you don’t nurse one another, who will?
Whoever would nurse me should nurse one who is sick.”

Leaving the World

Dīgha Nikāya 16

When the Buddha was eighty years old, he walked in stages
from Rājagaha to Kusinārā, all the while inspiring people
with Dhamma talks on ethics, stillness, and wisdom.

After the Buddha had eaten his last meal, he fell severely ill
with bloody dysentery and was close to death.
But he endured unbothered and walked on to Kusinārā.

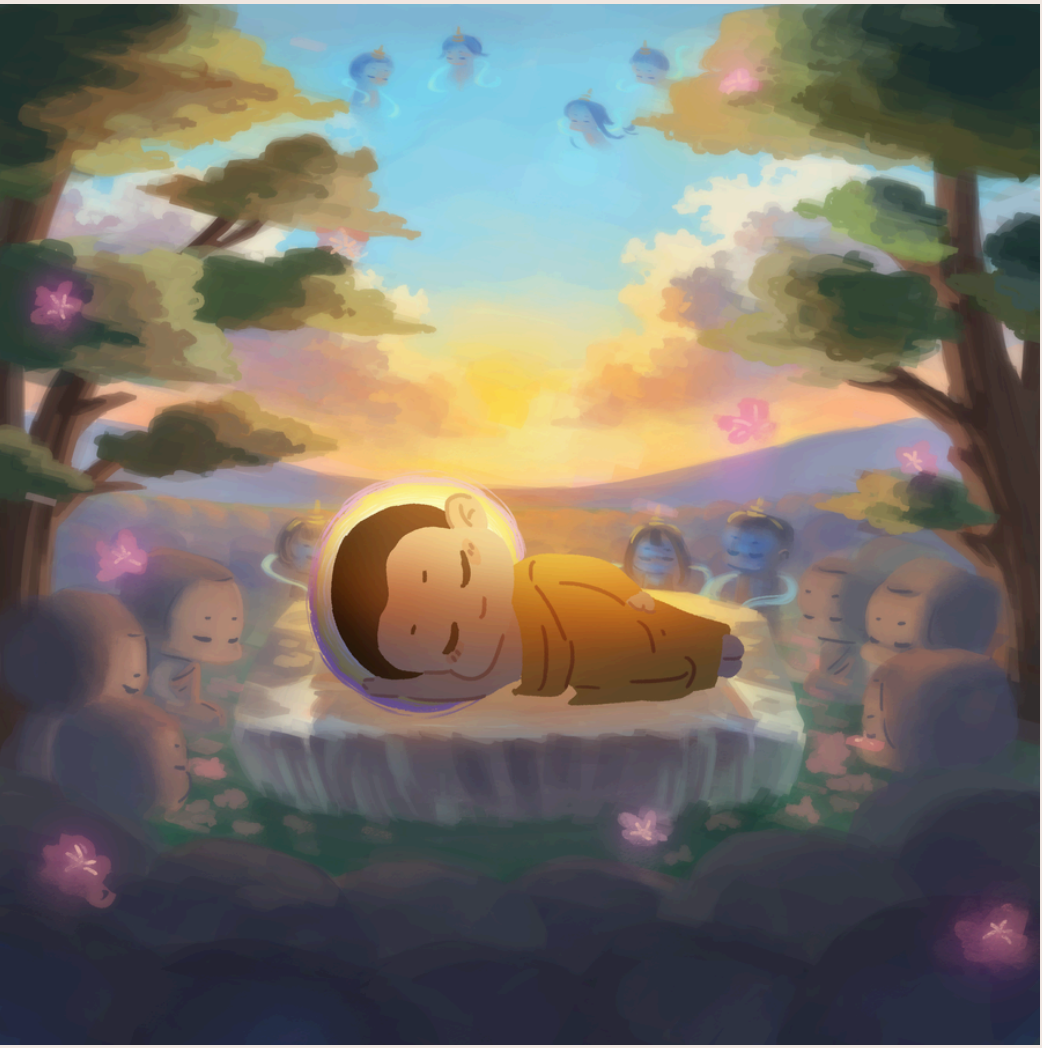
When he arrived, he said,
"Ānanda, set up a cot for me between the twin sal trees.
I am tired and will lie down." The twin sal trees
burst out in full blossom with flowers out of season.

"Ānanda, you should train like this, 'We shall practise
properly in line with the Dhamma.' That's how you honour,
respect, revere, venerate, and esteem the Realised One
with the highest honour.

The Dhamma and training that I have taught and pointed
out for you shall be your teacher after my passing."

Then the Buddha passed away.
Numerous gods and humans cried and lamented,
"Too soon the Buddha has vanished!"

Venerable Anuruddha addressed them by saying,
"Enough, do not grieve or lament. Did not the Buddha say
that we must be parted and separated
from all that is dear and beloved?"



“Phenomena fall apart.
Persist with diligence.”

Dīgha Nikāya 16

The Discourse on Love

Sutta Nipāta 1.8

Those who are skilled in the meaning of scripture
should practise as follows to realise the state of peace.
Let them be capable and upright, very upright,
easy to speak to, gentle and humble;

content and unburdensome,
unbusied, living lightly,
alert, with senses calmed,
courteous, not fawning on families.

Let them not do the slightest thing
that others who are wise would blame.
May they be happy and safe!
May all beings be happy!

Whatever living creatures there are
with not a one left out—
frail or firm, long or large,
medium, small, tiny or round,

seen or unseen,
living far or near,
those who have been born and those about to be born—
may all beings be happy!

Let none deceive another,
nor look down on anyone anywhere.
Though provoked or aggrieved,
let them not wish pain on each other.

Even as a mother would protect with her life
her child, her only child,
so too for all creatures—
unfold a boundless heart.

With love for the whole world,
unfold a boundless heart:
above, below, all round,
unconstricted, without enmity or foe.

When standing, walking, sitting,
or lying down while yet unweary,
keep this ever in mind;
for this, they say, is a divine meditation in this life.

Avoiding harmful views,
virtuous, accomplished in insight,
with desire for sensual pleasures dispelled,
they never return to a womb again.

The Discourse on Good Fortune

Sutta Nipāta 2.4

“Many gods and humans,
desiring well-being,
are seekers of good fortune.
Please tell me the greatest good fortune.”

“Not to associate with fools,
but to associate with the wise,
and to honour those worthy of honour.
This is the greatest good fortune.

To live in a suitable place,
having previously done good karma,
and to apply oneself in the right way.
This is the greatest good fortune.

To be educated and to have a vocation,
to be well-trained in one’s chosen field,
and to speak words that are well-spoken.
This is the greatest good fortune.

To support one’s mother and father,
to cherish one’s partner and children,
and to have a job without stress.
This is the greatest good fortune.

Generosity and an upright life,
kindness towards one’s relatives,

and the doing of blameless deeds.
This is the greatest good fortune.

To refrain from what is unwholesome,
to abstain from all intoxicants,
and to be steadfast in good qualities.
This is the greatest good fortune.

Respect and humility,
contentment and gratitude,
and the timely hearing of Dharma.
This is the greatest good fortune.

Being patient and easy to correct,
the seeing of monks and nuns,
and timely discussion on Dharma.
This is the greatest good fortune.

Asceticism and the spiritual life,
insight into the noble truths,
and the seeing for oneself of Nirvana.
This is the greatest good fortune.

A mind that remains unshaken
by the ups and the downs of the world,
sorrowless, stainless and safe.
This is the greatest good fortune.

Having performed these things,
nowhere can they be conquered—
they are secure wherever they go.
This is their greatest good fortune."

Recollection of the Buddha

Aṅguttara Nikāya 6.10

Itipi so bhagavā
arahaṁ sammāsambuddho
vijjācaraṇasampanno
sugato lokavidū
anuttaro purisadammasārathi
satthā devamanussānaṁ
buddho bhagavā'ti.

That Blessed One is perfected,
a fully awakened Buddha,
accomplished in knowledge and conduct,
holy, knower of the world,
supreme guide for those fit for training,
teacher of gods and humans,
awakened, blessed.

Not to do any evil;
to embrace the good;
to purify one's mind;
this is the instruction of the Buddhas.

Dhammapada 183

