

The World of Lord Buddha

From the beginning of their history, human beings spread around the globe. What did they contribute to their fellow beings? What were their struggles? What were their main ambitions? What were their victories?

They carried with them an insatiable passion to emulate and surpass each other. They desired to become more powerful by destroying each other. They sought means to best please their senses. In search of that goal they shed blood in frightening wars.

They conspired, made sacrifices, set boundaries and fences to mark territories, made buildings that were bigger and better. They made merry with food and drink.

In spite of all their gainful achievements mankind faced continuing challenges. Fire, water, sun moon, darkness, vegetation, animals – all these became challenges. Man

understood he could not conquer everything as he wished. He became angered about the complex world around him.

His ignorance and craving combined. He sought solutions to his problems from a world he did not see. He sought the help of Gods to resolve problems that were beyond his comprehension. He made sacrifices and offerings to please his Gods. He prayed and implored. In spite of all these things, the world remained full of complex problems and beyond his comprehension.

With that background mankind was facing a rapid revolution in thinking twenty-seven centuries ago. The world was witnessing the birth of wonderful people who were to take it into a new era.

The Western world which was now comfortable with the wherewithal to satisfy the sensuous life it delighted in found itself being influenced by thinkers like Plato and Heraclitus of Ephesus who strove to understand the world and themselves. They presented new ideas about life.

China saw the birth of a new thinker named Confucius. He searched for the Golden Rule to keep a community or a civilization together. In ancient Iran Zarathustra (or Zorro-aster) searched a path that leads to goodness. He saw life as a cosmic struggle between the Truth and the Lie.

In the Indian continent thinkers looked beyond the rituals of the Four Vedas – **Rig, Yajur, Shyam** and **Atarvan** – and started homeless lives as meditating recluses. They became **Rishis**¹. They investigated: Is man's journey of life something permanent? Does it end at the end of one's lifespan? How did the world become such a complex but wonderful place? Is there a way to rid life of suffering and sorrow?

They discussed and debated all these things. Disciples learnt from teachers, and so evolved a new wave of thinkers. That is how the Upanishads had their beginnings. Yet there was no answer to the riddle of the complexity of life.

The **Rishis** began to search their minds: Would a person of vast knowledge and compassion be born in this world for the benefit of mankind? They began to ponder on things to come in this world. They used their tremendous powers of absorptions (*jhana*).

They realized that in the near future a wonderful man of incomparable qualities was coming into this world to fulfil that need. Full of curiosity and hope, they continued their search for the man of wonder who was yet to come. They named the being of the future 'the Buddha'.

¹ Rishi – An ascetic, who lives in jungles, offered their lives for hard meditations.

The **Rishis** were men of great mental power. They declared this wise man could be identified by special marks upon his body. They called these ‘the Marks of the Great Man’. They confirmed that the great man to become the Buddha would be born with thirty-two special marks.

All Devas, Brahmas, Rishis, ascetics, monks, Brahmans, and other worldly beings were eager to welcome him. The message that stirred all the worlds was that of the coming of the Buddha.

In our present day signs of things to come are different. They are frightful. The present, replete with conditions begetting mistrust, malicious curiosity, jealousy, untruths and impatience is leaving for future generation destructive weapons, a philosophy of revenge and a fear of annihilation. Our imagination conjures visions and nightmares of a destroyed world. The message that stirs the world today is ‘war’. A fully enlightened Buddha will not come into this world at any known time in the future.

2,630 years ago the man predicted to become Buddha was conceived in his mother’s womb. He entered in a dream in the guise of an elephant calf, pure white in colour, and carrying a white lotus in its trunk. The graceful lady who had the unique honour of being mother to the Buddha was the consort of King **Suddhodana** of **Kapilavastu**. Her name was **Mahamaya**. The **Rishis** knew this. She was, thus, honoured and blessed by ascetics living in the foothills of Himalayas.

There was a social expectation of ladies of the nobility in India at that time. Attachment to family values, moral practices, being charitable, and discipline of the senses were a part of those expectations. Queen Mahamaya was endowed with them all. She was very careful to provide the right care to the baby in her womb.

She gave birth in the morning of the day of the full moon in the month of **Vaisakha**² 2,630 years ago. This auspicious event took place in a grove of **Sal**³ trees in **Lumbini** Park. The sweet scent of Sal blooms filled the morning air. The child was born with a miracle. Seven lotus flowers sprang from the earth where he came into this world. He took seven steps on the seven lotuses. The mother and retinue watched in amazement and disbelief. He lifted his right hand and showed the sky. He was the human being born to become the Fully Enlightened One.

*He came from the **Deva**⁴ abode of **Tusita**⁵,
And reposed in His mother's womb.
He descended to this world at **Lumbini**,
With seven steps on seven lotus blooms.*

*Wafted sweet the smell of Sal flowers,
As **Devas** and Brahmas gently fanned incense.*

² Vaishaka – The month of **May**

³ Sal – Shorea robusta

⁴ Devas – Name of gods as in Buddhism. But they are not creators. It is only, one of births of this journey of *samsara*.

⁵ Tusita – There are six worlds of devas. **Tusita** is one of them.

*Queen Mahamaya lifted in her arms
The light that would brighten the three worlds.*

*The love that flows in a mother's heart –
Like a river it brimmed in Queen Mahamaya –
Her son a Bodhisattva⁶,
Her happiness the nearest state to Nibbana.*

The Royal parents were full of joy about their blessed and fortunate son. They invited wise Brahmins to foretell their son's future and give him an auspicious name. The wise men said the child would be of benefit to all beings. They called him '**Siddhartha**', meaning 'Accomplisher of goodness'. His family clan name was Gautama. So he came to be named **Siddhartha Gautama**.

When the Rishis and sages beheld the special marks of greatness on the child's body, they shed tears of joy and declared: "This child will excel in this world. He will be supreme in wisdom. His words will carry an indelible message of peace. His speech will be like a lion's roar that surpasses the sound of other animals. Like a full moon on a clear night sky, like the sun on a cloudless summer day, his wisdom will shine forth and light this world. He will be the perfectly enlightened one.

⁶ Bodhisatta – The living being, who definitely will be a Buddha in future.

The child manifested an advanced mind. He could memorize and understand in an instant. He learnt as soon as the teachers spoke. He surprised everyone around him with his prodigious aptitudes.

His father, King Suddhodana, soon saw that his son could become an emperor. He yearned to make that dream come true. He built three palaces named 'Charming', 'Very Charming' and 'Auspicious' (**Ramya, Suramya, Subha**) for the residence of the young prince.

When the time came, Prince Siddhartha's marriage to **Yasodhara** was an event of great jubilation for King Suddhodana. His daughter-in-law was a young princess of incomparable beauty. He had searched all friendly territories and noble families for just the right match for his son.

He spared no pains or fortune to create luxury and beauty around his son's life. What he wished to see most was the day his son became a 'universal monarch' (**cakkavatti**), an emperor of emperors, but not an enlightened Buddha.

Prince Siddhartha's physical well-being found no bounds, but his mind was becoming restless and desolate, as he strove to comprehend beings engulfed in suffering. The sound of sadness and lamentations of suffering beings completely eclipsed the music in his halls of residence. When damsels decked in sixty-four

kinds of apparel danced to graceful rhythms, he saw a panorama of ageing, decay, sorrow and lamentation.

In the gourmet dishes served for him in golden platters, he saw the hunger and starvation of those who were suffering old age and decay. In people around him attired in the finest clothes and jewellery he saw the sadness pervading all humanity. The suffering of living beings became the world of Prince Siddhartha.

He would imagine the tears of those afflicted with disease and pain. He would hear the murmur and lamentation of people in a state of decay from old age. Some of them cried in terror of impending death. He understood how a family lamented and bewailed the loss of their dear ones. Siddhartha was saddened by the thought of people who were crushed by poverty and despaired about the comfort they could not afford.

He sighed for the suffering of the world. Living in the three mansions Ramya, Suramya and Subha did not impair his ability to think about the sorrows of the world.

He observed people who were longing for a world free of suffering and sorrow. People distressed by suffering and sorrow placed offerings at sylvan temples, stretched their arms to the heavens and sought relief. They chanted invocations in the names of Gods and asked for help. They made offerings and vows.

Nevertheless, old age decay and death surely crept upon their lives, regardless of invocations and vows.

Man could not conquer old age, decay and death. Yet men sought war with each other. Mankind is deluded by life and enslaved by greed. Yet men succumbed to decay, old age and death. Men forsake loving-kindness to embrace hate and war. They dream of things they cannot acquire.

Man is groping within a dark world with a dark mind. If one's problems are external, then solutions, too, would be external, and so would already be found. However, if the problems are within one's own life the solution is to be found by contemplation of one's mind. Thus, Prince Siddhartha began a search for a way to end suffering.

Princess Yasodhara gave birth to a son. He was named **Rahula**. Prince Siddhartha was 29 years old.

The night Rahula was born Siddhartha left the luxury of royal life and became homeless. It was a hard decision for him, but he knew that his calling was not to rule a kingdom but to search a way to end suffering for all beings. He took leave of his wife and son and all his royal relatives while thinking of them in loving-kindness.

He became a recluse in the forest. He wore a robe made of discarded clothes. He carried a clay bowl to receive and eat his food. He was no longer a royal prince. Neither was he a Brahmin hermit. He was a **sramana**, a homeless recluse. In the world of meditating ascetics he was known as Sramana Gautama. He walked on banks of rivers, mountain tops, in caves, sylvan groves and rock surfaces.

In his travels he met other recluses who were also searching for deliverance from suffering. He met two famed teachers. One was **Alara Kalama** and the other was **Uddaka Ramaputta**. Under these two ascetics, Siddhartha learned rigorous religious austerities. He sat upon rock surfaces and practiced meditative absorptions (**jhana**). He did so sitting motionless from dawn until the rays of the setting sun rendered his body in hues of copper.

These absorptions did not help him explain the suffering of living beings. Sramana Gautama did not come across any teaching, practice, philosophy or path to the truth he was seeking. He possessed unequalled determination, unflinching energy, a keen mind, shining wisdom, wonderful patience, impeccable character and a broad view. He examined every philosophy and religious teaching of con-temporary India, but saw nothing that could throw light on the subject of his search.

Then he followed other ascetics of the time and practiced self-mortification – he practiced rigorous austerities that left his

body racked in pain. The star-studded sky was his canopy and shelter. His robe disintegrated in the sun and rain. His meagre, austere meals were a challenge to other ascetics. Gradually he stopped taking food altogether. His body wasted away until it appeared to be only skin and bone.

He sat with folded legs at the foot of a tree and held his breath until his ears began to ring and perspiration poured from his body. Undaunted, he strengthened his meditation. On nights when snow fell he waded into cold water and concentrated his mind. These were indeed things difficult to do. However painful, vexing and emaciating, he continued these difficult penances. His eyes were sunken in their sockets. His hair fell out.

But his determination never waned. His mind became even sharper to direct his search in a different direction. Now he realized that performing penances and acts of self-mortification were not the path to deliverance and emancipation. Therefore, he abandoned that method.

There was a group of five other *sramana* monks who were practicing similar difficult tasks of self-mortification. Each had pledged to let the others know of success in their endeavour.

Sramana Gautama now began to eat food. His reverting to the habit of eating food became a source of disappointment to

the group of five companions, and so they left him. Gautama looked upon the departing companions with equanimity.

He continued his effort with fortitude and determination for six years. Then, he practiced mindfulness of in-out breathing (***anapana sati***). Very soon, his mind became concentrated. He directed his effort and energy to look for the correct way of searching for deliverance. Then, the importance of the Noble Eightfold Path dawned on him.

It was 2,595 years ago. That night, in the month of Vaisakha, Gau-tama's sylvan rest was bathed in the mellow light of the full moon. Sramana Gautama was on the bank of the river **Neranjara**. A Bo tree growing in the forest of Neranjara gave him shelter. During the day, a Brahmin had gifted him with a sheaf of ***kusa*** grass to use as a seat. He spread the grass beneath the Bo tree.

He sat on the grass seat, his back straight and upright, and legs folded under him. He sat there with a firm determination. He was resolved never to rise from that seat until he had fully comprehended ***samsara*** – the continuity of rebirth and suffering. He vowed: “Even if I wither here and shed my skin and bones upon the earth, I shall summon all human courage and devices that I need to realize the truth of deliverance.”

The sheaf of grass was his diamond throne. No one in the world of Devas or humans could weaken his determination. In the

heart of this wonderful human being there was an all-pervading passion to attain enlightenment.

He practiced mindfulness of in-out breathing. He became calm and established in concentration. He attained meditative absorptions. His absorptions reached the four stages of fine-material worlds (*rupa-loka*).

This extraordinary ascetic was attempting to grasp knowledge fundamentally so unique that his mind had to struggle with negative and unwholesome influences that engulfed him. All the forces of evil in the world challenged him all the way during his search for the path of deliverance of mankind. His vast accumulated merit, unrivalled purity of character and prodigious determination conquered the darkness of evil. All the powers of darkness now realized that no one in the world could stop the dawn of the era of the Buddha Gautama.

He continued concentration on the path to deliverance. He was deep into the fourth stage of absorption. In an instant he gained knowledge of his past births. He acquired the ability to remember his past lives. He retraced his lives through previous births. He saw how he had been sojourning in *samsara* prodded by happiness as well as suffering in a long series of rebirths. This was the first knowledge he gained.

Then he wondered: Why was this journey so long and so complex? Is this the fate of all beings? He thought of Devas and Brahmas living happily in their worlds. He thought of human beings in enjoyment as well as suffering. He thought of **Peta** spirits suffering in the **Peta** world. He thought of the suffering of beings in Hell. He contemplated upon all beings in all worlds.

He analyzed the reason why enjoyment or suffering befell those beings. He saw with his mind's eye that beings exited one life and started another dependent upon good or bad actions they performed. Beings journey in a series of rebirths as a result of good and evil actions. Thus Sramana Gautama acquired knowledge of death and rebirth. This was the second knowledge he gained at the foot of the **Bodhi** tree.

All beings live in their respective worlds subject to aging, decay and death. They are deluded by feelings of comfort and discomfort but they do not know why either occurs. When can they become free from the grip of the cycle of rebirth?

Sramana Gautama began to search for the reason behind this cycle. Then he understood that it was not created by a God. It was the manifestation of cause and effect. When the cause is ended the effect ended also. He understood the reality and true nature of all things.

He saw that everything is impermanent and remained in a continuing state of change. Birth and rebirth are not of spontaneous origin. In life there is some temporary pleasure and mostly continual suffering. In reality pleasure and suffering are not determined by one's likes and dislikes. Life is mainly a delusion and a mirage.

Sramana Gautama understood the defilements and unwholesome volitions that distort one's clarity of mind. He summoned the utmost energy, concentration and wisdom to free his mind fully of all defilements and unwholesome volitions.

Without missing a single step he walked the Noble Eightfold Path. He separated himself from the world of suffering. All karma actions that cause suffering ceased. He acquired wisdom free of all defilements. That was the third knowledge that Sramana Gautama gained.

This was a most wonderful transformation that happened to a solitary man, who was meditating through-out the night. He fully conquered the darkness of evil and unwholesome volitions. Sramana Gautama had now attained enlightenment and had thus become the Buddha.

The unique teacher whom Devas, Brahmas, Rishis and holy men had wished to see for millennia in this aeon of the Maha Bhadra was at last in this world. That was 2,595 years ago, on a night of the full moon in the month of Vaisakha.

It was a moment of triumph in the history of humanity. It was the moment that opened the doors to the ambrosia of the Dhamma. The Supreme Buddha saw the world with compassion and wisdom. He illuminated the world in the light of His Doctrine. He brought to the world the crowning jewel of His aspiration and effort during immeasurable cycles of births, deaths and rebirths.

*In the shade of rustling Bodhi leaves,
A grass sheaf his diamond throne,
His stilled, relentless mind meditated in samadhi
To fulfil perfections brought from countless births.*

*There arose in him wisdom unequalled and unmeasured,
Showing the way and the bliss of Nirvana –
The glow of His enlightenment flooded the world,
Dispelling an aeon of darkness black and deep.*

*In the land that brought my Buddha,
The supreme master of the Dhamma –
May I smell the sweet scent of Nirvana,
In the land of the Well-gone One.*

The happiness of Nibbana was absolute. The Supreme Buddha rested seven weeks on the banks of the river Neranjara in that bliss. Then He began a slow trek searching for people who could understand and benefit from His Doctrine. His heart was full

of compassion for the suffering in decay, death and rebirth. He knew his mission was to bring about understanding and help.

Now He searched the world He left six years ago. He knew He would find such people who would understand. Like lotus flowers awaiting the morning sun to spread their petals, there surely would be people to receive and understand His Doctrine.

The city of **Baranasi**⁷ was one week's walk from the banks of the Neranjara. In a suburb of that city there was a deer park. It was an abode of Rishis. There were five monks residing in the park. They were **Kondañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama** and **Assaji**. These five monks had practiced austerity rituals with the Buddha many years ago in **Uruvela** district. The Enlightened Buddha found the monks in the deer park and decided they would be the first to hear His Doctrine.

The five monks recognized the Buddha as the ascetic who strove with them in the past years in Uruvela. However, they had no way of knowing their old acquaintance was the Enlightened One they all hoped to meet one day. The Buddha knew the best way the five monks could recognize Him was through His Doctrine.

The Buddha made His historic first Discourse to the five monks. This wonderful, enlightened man spoke of the truth of

⁷ Baranasi – Varanasi in India.

suffering, the origin of suffering, the extinction of suffering and the way leading to the extinction of suffering.

It was the knowledge and experience that surpassed all views. It was the truth that dispelled all delusions. It was the beautiful awakening to absolute reality. It was the vanquishing of all untruths with the Four Noble Truths.

This was the momentous day the Buddha set in motion the wheel of the Dhamma. No ascetic, Brahman, Deva, Mara and Brahma, nor anyone else could prevent or stop its motion. At the conclusion of the discourse the monk Kondañña understood the truths and became a Stream-enterer. On that historic day the Buddha's knowledge touched the wisdom of another person. Its impact echoed and was heard even in the remotest Brahma world.

The night sky was clear. An occasional veil of cloud drifted in the nightscape. The deer park was bathed in the mellow light of the second moon after Vaisakha. The deer in the park looked on, their eyes aglow in the moonlight. Gautama Buddha spoke enlightened words. In every mind that heard them it was as if a lotus had bloomed.

Beginning that day multitudes of disciples became his followers. Many of them followed in His foot-steps and became

Noble **Arahants**⁸. There were numerous Stream-enterers, Once-returned, and Non-returned as well. One special disciple became a luminary in His Dispensation. He was the **Arahat Sariputta**. There were other Arahats who developed their unique specialties.

*The path to the bliss of Nibbana
Is cleared of thorns, the defiling thoughts.
The mind saw only truth and reality
As the Buddha spoke to the world.*

The Buddha's world is populated by Noble Disciples. A Noble Disciple is a person who fully understands the Doctrine. Such persons have confidence, **saddha**, in the Four Noble Truths and the wheel of the Dhamma. The Doctrine sustains their confidence in the Buddha, the incomparable teacher who showed the path to liberation. Disciples abide by the Doctrine. The Buddha remains very close to them through the Doctrine. As the population of disciples grew so did the world of the Buddha. His world is illuminated by wisdom.

His disciples are liberated from the four Hells. The Stream-enterers (**sotapanna**) among them will be emancipated within seven rebirths. Once-returned (**sakadagami**) will return once more to the material world and then reach Nibbana. Non-returned (**anagami**) will be reborn in the Brahma world and thence attain **Nibbana**. Arahats have attained Nibbana in the present life.

⁸Arahant – The fully enlightened disciple of Buddha.

People who enter the Buddha's world need to possess some essential qualities: unstinting energy to pursue the Path, confidence, humility, wise consideration and good mental disposition. Any nature opposite to these will only keep one further away from His world.

Gautama Buddha was thirty-five years old 2,595 years ago. He walked the dusty trails of India to numerous villages and cities. He sought out people in need of spiritual comfort.

He had a wide circle of followers, admirers and patrons. Men of great wealth learned Brahmins, Bhikkhus, warriors, mendicants, the sick, high-way robbers, and artists – in other words, people from all walks of life.

All these people found solace in the Buddha's world. Higher or lower castes did not exist in it. No division by clan or birth existed that world. It made no discrimination between the educated and the non-educated. In fact, equality and compassion permeated everyone's life in the Buddha's world.

Entering that world and being a Noble Disciple is a protection in one's life-span. The power that guides one into it is the Four Noble Truths. Association with noble friends will place a person within the grasp of the Four Noble Truths. Over a period of forty-

five years the Buddha taught His golden message in this aeon of the Great **Bhadra**.

The extinction of the life of the Supreme Buddha occurred 2,550 years ago. It happened in the grove of Sal trees at **Kusinara**⁹. His mind and consciousness were sharp and clear until life became extinct in Him. The golden message of His Doctrine still lives with us.

*Pale was the light of the Vesak moon
As it hid among clouds this spring night;
Arahats looked on since sorrow they fully understood
But Devas and men vented theirs with tears.*

*The flood of ambrosia of His speech froze,
His eyes of compassion closed for ever,
His warm heart became still and lifeless,
Like a lamp burning out He reposed in Nibbana.*

In His lifetime no one felicitated Him with celebrations of birthdays or of other such days. He, however, gifted to the world his wisdom and the Doctrine He discovered.

Arahats received it as a sacred inheritance and guarded it. Three months after His **Parinibbana** five hundred of them met in **Rajagaha**¹⁰ by the **Saptaparna** cave and held a council for the

⁹ Kushinara – Kushinagar in India.

¹⁰ Rajagaha – Rajgir in India.

compilation of the Doctrine. They recited all the Discourses that the Buddha made and agreed to place them in three categories. That was the beginning of the ***Tripitaka***, the Three Baskets.

It was also the beginning of the Buddhist Era. However, we have come to regard the 'Buddha Year' as the number of years elapsed after His **Parinibbana**.

Even today, 2,550 years after the Buddha, we seek to enter the Buddha's world. We seek the solace of His Doctrine.

A person becomes a disciple in His Dispensation to reap the protection and benefit of the Doctrine. It is the right decision of a wise person. A wise person will refrain from foul and fruitless speech and abstain from unwholesome actions. Such a person will strive to focus the mind to achieve calm. He or she will thus strive to become a Stream-enterer.

Such people will live in the Buddha's world. The Dhamma lives in it as guide and mentor to them. The Buddha lives in that world...

