



*The  
Illumination of  
the Journey*

**Siddhartha Gautama Buddha**

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## Siddhartha Gautama

By Mark L. Prophet

(c. 563-483 B.C.)

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Gautama Buddha, the “Compassionate One,” was born Siddhartha Gautama in northern India, c. 563 B.C. He was the son of King Suddhodana and Queen Mahamaya, rulers of the Sakya kingdom, and thus a member of the Kshatriya (warrior or ruling) caste.

Ancient Pali texts and Buddhist scriptures record that before his birth, his mother, Mahamaya, dreamt that a beautiful silver-white elephant entered her womb through her side. Brahmins, called to interpret the dream, foretold the birth of a son who would become either a universal monarch or a buddha.

During the last days of her pregnancy, the queen began a journey to Devadaha to visit her parents, as was the custom in India. On the way she stopped with her attendants at Lumbini Park and reached for a flowering branch of a sal tree. There, under the blossoming tree, the Buddha was born on the full-moon day of the month of May.

On the fifth day following the birth, 108 Brahmins were invited to a name-giving ceremony at the palace. The king summoned eight of the most learned from among these to ‘read’ the child’s destiny by interpreting his bodily marks and physical characteristics.

Seven agreed that if he remained at home, he would become a universal king, unifying India; but if he left, he would become a Buddha and remove the veil of ignorance from the world. **Koṇḍañña**, the eighth and youngest of the group, declared he would definitely become a Buddha, renouncing the world after seeing four signs—an old man, a diseased man, a dead man, and a holy man.

The child was named Siddhartha, or “One Whose Aim Is Fulfilled.” Seven days after his birth, his mother passed on and he was raised by her sister Mahaprajapati, who later became one of his first female disciples.

The king, concerned about the Brahmins’ predictions and the possibility of losing his heir, took every precaution to shelter his son from pain and suffering, surrounding him with every conceivable luxury, including three palaces and forty thousand dancing girls.

In the *Anguttara Nikaya* (a canonical text), Gautama describes his upbringing in his own words: “I was tenderly cared for,...supremely so, infinitely so. At my father’s palace, lotus pools were built for me, in one place for blue lotus flowers, in one place for white lotus flowers, and in one place for red lotus flowers, blossoming for my sake....Day and night a white umbrella was held over me, so that I might not be troubled by cold, heat, dust, chaff, or dew. I dwelt in three palaces,...in one, during the cold; in one, in the summer; and in one,

during the rainy season. While in the palace of the rainy season, surrounded by musicians, singers, and female dancers, for four months I did not descend from the palace...”<sup>1</sup>

At sixteen, after proving his skill in a contest of arms, Prince Siddhartha married his beautiful cousin Yasodhara. He soon grew pensive and preoccupied, but the turning point of his life did not occur until the age of twenty-nine, when he set out on four journeys which presented in turn the four passing sights.

First he encountered a very old man, gray and decrepit, leaning on a staff; second, a pitiful one racked with disease, lying in the road; third, a corpse; and fourth, a yellow-robed monk with shaved head and a begging bowl. Much moved with compassion by the first three sights, he realized that life was subject to old age, disease, and death. The fourth sight signified to him the possibility of overcoming these conditions and inspired him to leave the world he knew in order to find a solution for suffering.

On his way back to the palace, he received news of the birth of his son, whom he named Rahula, or “obstacle.” That night he ordered his charioteer to saddle his favorite horse, Kanthaka. Before leaving the city, he went to the bedchamber for a farewell look at his sleeping wife and son. He then rode all night and at dawn assumed the guise of an ascetic, exchanging clothes with his charioteer, whom he sent back to his father’s palace.

Thus, Gautama began the life of a wandering monk. Immediately he went in search of the most learned teachers of the day to instruct him in truth, quickly mastering all they taught. Unsatisfied and restless, he determined to find a permanent truth, impervious to the illusions of the world.

Traveling through the Magadha country, he was noticed for his handsome countenance and noble stature. He arrived at a village called Senanigama, near Uruvela, where he was joined by a group of five ascetics, among whom was Koṇḍañña, the Brahmin who had foretold his Buddhahood.

Here, for almost six years, Gautama practiced severe austerities, which are recorded in his own words in the *Majjhima Nikaya*: “Because of so little nourishment, all my limbs became like some withered creepers with knotted joints;...the pupils of my eyes appeared sunk deep in their sockets as water appears shining at the bottom of a deep well;...the skin of my belly came to be cleaving to my back-bone...”<sup>2</sup>

As a consequence of these severe bodily mortifications, Gautama became so weak that he once fainted and was believed to be dead. Some accounts describe how he was found collapsed by a shepherd boy who restored him with drops of warm milk. Others say it was the devas, or gods, who revived him. Realizing the futility of asceticism, Gautama

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<sup>1</sup> Helena Roerich, *Foundations of Buddhism* (New York: Agni Yoga Society, 1971), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed., s.v. “Buddha.”

abandoned his austerities to seek his own path of enlightenment—whereupon his five companions rejected and deserted him.

One day Sujata, a villager's daughter, fed him a rich rice milk—a “meal so wondrous...that our Lord felt strength and life return as though the nights of watching and the days of fast had passed in dream.”<sup>3</sup> And then he set out alone for the Bo tree (abbreviation for *bodhi*, or enlightenment) at a place now called Buddh Gaya, or Bodh Gaya, where he vowed to remain until fully illumined. Hence, it has become known as the Immovable Spot.

At that point, Mara, the Evil One, attempted to prevent his enlightenment and confronted him with temptations much in the same manner that Satan tested Jesus during his fasting in the wilderness.<sup>4</sup>

The *Dhammapada* records the words of Mara, as she assailed Gautama: “Lean, suffering, ill-favored man, Live! Death is your neighbor. Death has a thousand hands, you have only two. Live! Live and do good, live holy, and taste reward. Why do you struggle? Hard is struggle, hard to struggle all the time.”<sup>5</sup>

Unmoved, he sat under the Bo tree while Mara continued her attack— first in the form of desire, parading voluptuous goddesses and dancing girls before him, then in the guise of death, assailing him with hurricanes, torrential rains, flaming rocks, boiling mud, fierce soldiers and beasts—and finally darkness. Yet still, Gautama remained unmoved.

As a last resort, the temptress challenged his right to be doing what he was doing. Siddhartha then tapped the earth,<sup>6</sup> and the earth thundered her answer: “I bear you witness!” All the hosts of the Lord and the elemental beings responded and acclaimed his right to pursue the enlightenment of the Buddha—whereupon Mara fled.

Having defeated Mara, Gautama spent the rest of the night in deep meditation under the tree, recalling his former embodiments, attaining the “superhuman divine eye” (the ability to see the passing away and rebirth of beings), and realizing the Four Noble Truths. In his own recorded words: “Ignorance was dispelled, knowledge arose. Darkness was dispelled, light arose.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, he attained Enlightenment, or the Awakening, during the night of the full-moon day of the month of May, about the year 528 B.C. His being was transformed, and he became the Buddha.

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<sup>3</sup> Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1930), p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1-13.

<sup>5</sup> P. Lal, trans., *The Dhammapada* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967), pp. 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> With the “earth-touching mudra”—left hand upturned in lap, right hand pointed downward, touching earth

<sup>7</sup> Edward J. Thomas, *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), pp. 66-68, quoted in Clarence H. Hamilton, ed., *Buddhism: A Religion of Infinite Compassion* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1952), pp. 22-23.

“The event was of cosmic import. All created things filled the morning air with their rejoicings and the earth quaked six ways with wonder. Ten thousand galaxies shuddered in awe as lotuses bloomed on every tree, turning the entire universe into ‘a bouquet of flowers sent whirling through the air’...”<sup>8</sup>

For a total of forty-nine days he was deep in rapture, after which he again turned his attention to the world. He found Mara waiting for him with one last temptation: “How can your experience be translated into words? Return to Nirvana. Do not try to deliver your message to the world, for no one will comprehend it. Remain in bliss!” But Buddha replied: “There will be some who will understand,” and Mara vanished from his life forever.

Contemplating whom he should first teach, he decided to return to the five ascetics who had left him. He began a journey of over one hundred miles to Benares and delivered to his old companions his first sermon, known as the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*, or “Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth.”

At the end of the sermon, in which he revealed the key discovery of his quest—the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the Middle Way—he accepted the five monks as the first members of his order. Koṇḍañña, was the first to grasp the teaching.

For forty-five years, Gautama walked the dusty roads of India, preaching the *Dhamma* (universal Doctrine), which led to the founding of Buddhism. He established the *sangha* (community) that soon numbered over twelve hundred devotees, eventually including his entire family—his father, aunt, wife, and son. When the people questioned him as to his identity, he answered, “I am awake”—hence, the Buddha, meaning “Enlightened One” or “Awakened One.”

At the age of eighty, Gautama became seriously ill and almost died, but revived himself, thinking it was not right to die without preparing his disciples. By sheer determination, he recovered and instructed Ananda, his cousin and close disciple, that the order should live by making themselves an island—by becoming their own refuge and making the *Dhamma* their island, their refuge forever.

After announcing that he would die in three months, he traveled through several villages and then stayed with Cunda, the goldsmith, one of his devoted followers. According to generally accepted tradition, Cunda invited Gautama to partake of *sukara-maddava*—a dish he had prepared unknowingly with poisoned mushrooms. After the meal, Gautama became violently ill, but bore his pain without complaint.

His only concern was to console Cunda, who might feel responsible for his death. And thus, he compassionately asked Ananda to tell Cunda that of all the meals he had eaten, only two stood out as special blessings—one was the meal served by Sujata before his

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<sup>8</sup> Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Colophon Books, 1958), p. 84.

enlightenment, and the other was the food from Cunda which opened the gates to his transition.

He passed during the full-moon of May, c. 483 B.C., after again advising Ananda that the *Dhamma*—the Truth—must be his master and reminding the monks of the transiency of all conditioned things.

Following the passing of Gautama, Buddhism began to develop in two major directions, leading to the establishment of the Hinayana (“little vehicle”) and the Mahayana (“great vehicle”) schools of Buddhism, from which many further subgroups evolved.

Adherents of the Hinayana school believe their teachings represent the original Buddhist doctrine taught by Gautama, and therefore refer to their path as the Theravada, or “Way of the Elders.”

The traditional Theravadin outlook centers around the monastic way of life and emphasizes the necessity for self-sacrifice and individual enlightenment in order to help others. Their goal is to become an arhat—perfected disciple— and enter Nirvana.

The Mahayanists, who believe that the Theravadins’ strict observance of precepts departs from the true spirit of the Buddha, concentrate more on emulating the Buddha’s life, stressing good works and compassion toward others in the process of gaining enlightenment. The Theravadins, however, claim that the Mahayanists have polluted the pure stream of Gautama’s teaching by incorporating more liberal doctrines and interpretations.

The Mahayanists consider their school to be the “greater vehicle,” as it provides more for the layman. Their ideal is to become a bodhisattva—one who attains Nirvana but voluntarily returns to the world to assist others in obtaining the same goal.

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## **Invocation to the I AM Presence for Divine Peace**

Beloved Mighty I AM Presence, Flame of Eternal Light within me,  
I lift my heart to You in reverence and devotion.

From the heart of Shamballa, may the peace of God flow through me—  
a gentle stream, a radiant ocean—  
stilling all turbulence and commanding, *“Peace, be still!”*

As Gautama has spoken:

“Peace, beloved ones, is the natural quality of Deity.  
It flows as a gentle stream ... the obedience of God manifest in the obedience of his  
creation.”

I call forth that peace now, in my mind, my heart, and my being.  
Let it radiate outward as a blessing to all life,  
until the earth is clothed in the “raiment of heaven,”  
the shining garments of Light spun from Your eternal flame.

O Beloved I AM Presence, awaken in me the holy patience that “possesses the soul,”  
that I may hold the stillness where the divine image is formed.  
Burn away the dust of illusion, the shadows of maya,  
that I may behold only the perfection of the Christ Mind within.

I open the door of my heart to Your shining glory.  
Flood my world with illumination,  
that I may walk the journey with steadfast peace,  
be a light in the world, and a witness of the freedom of the Spirit.

Beloved Presence, seal me now in the flame of peace and illumination.  
Make of my life a shining example,  
that through me others may find faith, hope, and divine joy.

So let it be, O Eternal One.  
So let it shine, O Radiant I AM.

Amen.

## Devotional Practice in Peace and Illumination

### Attunement (Centering the Heart)

- Sit quietly. Breathe deeply three times, feeling the breath settle into the heart.
- Visualize a lotus of pure white light opening in your heart.
- Silently affirm:  
*“Beloved I AM Presence, I open my heart as a temple of Light. Radiate your peace through me now.”*

Pause in stillness, letting the gentle stream of peace flow through your being.

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### Invocation & Visualization

- Speak aloud the **Prayer to the I AM Presence** above.
  - As you pray, see golden-white light descending from your I AM Presence above you, entering through the crown, filling your mind with clarity, your heart with peace, your body with light.
  - Imagine this light expanding outward until you are clothed in the **“raiment of heaven,”** Gautama’s shining garments of Light.
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### Affirmation of Peace

Repeat slowly, three times with focus:

*“Peace, be still! I AM the peace of God flowing as a river through my mind, heart, and world.”*

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### Decree of Illumination

Decree with rhythm and strength:

*“I AM the Light of Illumination blazing in me now!  
I AM the Flame of Peace expanding through the earth!  
I AM the Radiance of God that never fails!”*

(Repeat 3–9 times, as desired.)

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## Sealing Benediction

Close with gratitude, placing your right hand over your heart:

*“Beloved I AM Presence, I thank You for Your peace, Your light, and Your guidance. Seal me in Your flame of illumination that I may walk this day in harmony with the Divine. Amen.”*

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## Journaling Prompt

After the practice, write briefly:

- *Where in my life today can I choose peace instead of reaction?*
- *How is my I AM Presence showing me the next step of illumination?*