



The Great Buddha

Buddhism in Every Step 4

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The Great Buddha

Just as children must know their parents, students of the Buddha must know the Buddha. Some may say, “Oh yes, I know the Buddha. I’ve seen his statues all over.” But do we know the Buddha just because we see statues? No, we certainly do not. It is common for Buddhists to feel it unfortunate to have been born so long after the Buddha’s final *nirvana* and to have not had the opportunity to meet the Buddha. It is most regretful if students of the Buddha do not know what the Buddha was really like.

Some may think that the Buddha is an almighty immortal with supernatural powers who can appear and disappear without a trace. If you think this is the Buddha I am going to share with you, you will be disappointed. You may think that the Buddha is a being full of loving-kindness who will grant whatever you ask for in your prayers. This is not the case, either. I believe most people prefer the Buddha that sits cross-legged on the altar—serene, peaceful, quiet, and still.

If the Buddha spoke and instructed us now, telling us “Don’t do this,” or “That isn’t so,” we might not like the Buddha as much. Perhaps because the Buddha is not critical of us, and does not reproach us or argue with us, we are drawn to him. We willingly respect and bow to him.

Hopefully, we can learn more of value about the Buddha for our own lives by looking at the ways in which he dealt with experiences and situations during his own life. Therefore, first I will briefly introduce the life story of the Buddha, before looking into the way in which he dealt with common everyday troubles and experiences.

I. The Life of the Buddha

The Buddha was born around 500 BCE in the kingdom of Kapilavastu, in present-day southern Nepal, which was ruled by the Sakyas. The Buddha’s father, Suddhodana, was king of the Sakyas, and his mother, Maya, was a princess of Devadaha.

At the end of spring, Queen Maya gave birth to a prince in Lumbini Garden. The prince was named Siddhartha. As was the custom, King Suddhodana summoned the most learned wise men to foretell his son’s destiny. The renowned sage Asita predicted that Siddhartha would become a great king of the world if he remained a layperson, or he would become one

who liberates sentient beings if he left the home life. On the seventh day after Siddhartha's birth, Queen Maya died. Her sister, Queen Mahaprajapati, lovingly raised the child as her own.

The prince grew into a young man who excelled in everything he tried and was greatly admired for his strength, intelligence, dignity, and beauty. When Siddhartha reached marrying age, King Suddhodana arranged for his son to marry the beautiful and noble Yasodhara. She eventually bore him a son, Rahula.

Still, King Suddhodana feared that Prince Siddhartha might leave the palace and his royal position. King Suddhodana sheltered him from the world by building him special pleasure palaces and surrounding him with beautiful women, music, wine, and other luxuries. Nevertheless, these worldly pleasures could not satisfy the feelings that had crept into the prince's heart. One day, Siddhartha told his father that he wished to travel outside the palace walls to see the kingdom. Hearing this, King Suddhodana immediately ordered that the kingdom be decorated and cleared of anything unpleasant.

Travelling with Chandaka, his personal charioteer, the prince had his first encounters with people who were elderly, sick, and dead. Being sheltered by his father for Siddhartha's whole life, these were shocking new experiences. Siddhartha and Chandaka then encountered an ascetic who walked towards

them. The prince asked him who he was, and the man explained that he had renounced the world to seek liberation from the suffering of old age, sickness, and death. Siddhartha's heart filled with joy, and the encounter left an indelible mark in his heart.

Not long afterward, the prince decided to leave the palace to find a path to liberation from all forms of suffering. With one last look at his sleeping wife and infant son, Siddhartha vowed that he would return to see them after he had awakened to the truth. As everyone slept, he rode away from Kapilavastu with faithful Chandaka by his side.

When they reached a serene forest outside the city, the prince took off his fine silken clothing and removed his jeweled ornaments, and handed them to Chandaka. Then, with his sword, he cut off his long hair and severed all attachments to his old life.

Siddhartha sought teachers to learn how to be free from old age, sickness, and death. As an ascetic he practiced fasting and meditation under extreme conditions of hardship and deprivation. After six years had passed in this way, Siddhartha was near death. He realized that complete liberation still eluded him, so he abandoned asceticism.

After accepting an offering of milk rice, some strength returned, and Siddhartha traveled to Bodhgaya where he seated himself beneath a tree that would later be known as the "bodhi tree," and

began to meditate. He swore that he would not stir from his seat, even at the cost of his life, until he had found truth and freedom from birth, old age, sickness, and death.

Sitting in meditation, Siddhartha conquered all the demons of his mind—greed, anger, and ignorance. He then entered a deep meditative state called *samadhi*, and attained complete awakening. He was thirty-five years old. From this moment forth, he was known as Sakyamuni Buddha.

What the Buddha awakened to that night was the root of suffering, ignorance, and a path to remove suffering.

After the prince of the Sakyas became the Buddha, he traveled to the Deer Park where he gave his first discourse. While listening to the Buddha's words, Kaundinya, one of the five ascetic disciples, saw the truth of the universe clearly and purely. All five of the former ascetics were ordained and eventually attained awakening. The Buddha then continued teaching for forty-nine years. Among his followers, some were former leaders of other religious traditions, kings and queens, rich and poor, men and women, and people from all walks of life.

With great compassion and wisdom, he taught for the remainder of his life. At the age of eighty, under a pair of sala trees, the Buddha entered final *nirvana*. The legacy he left his disciples was profound, for

the Buddha had dedicated his earthly life to teaching others the path to awakening.

II. Was the Buddha Ever Displeased?

Human beings often feel displeased, disappointed, or let down. Did the Buddha ever feel this way? Of course! It is just that the reason for the Buddha's displeasure differed from that of ordinary human beings.

Ordinary people become incensed when others pick on them or get in their way. When their interests are compromised, they get irritated. This was not the case with the Buddha. The Buddha did not mind when people were not kind to him; however, the Buddha was displeased when others were mistreated.

Once the Buddha was traveling with a group of monks when they came to a temple to rest for the night. Now, some of the monks in the group were impatient and quick-tempered, while others had a calmer disposition. When the group began to settle in, the impatient monks quickly claimed all of the available beds.

“This one's mine!” or “I want that one!” they shouted. Soon all the beds were taken by the impatient monks, such that Sariputra, the Buddha's chief disciple, was left without a bed. Undeterred, Sariputra decided to practice walking meditation outdoors.

When the Buddha saw Sariputra walking outside, the Buddha asked, “Sariputra, it’s quite late now. Why aren’t you in bed? Why are you still walking outside?”

Sariputra told the Buddha what had happened, “There are many monks, and not enough beds for everyone. Some of the newer monks wanted to find a bed to retire for the night, so I let them rest first.” When the Buddha heard this, he immediately called the monks together and taught them that they should show respect for their elders, such as granting them first choice of beds.

When the elderly are not respected, the relationship between the elderly and the young is turned upside down, and society becomes disorderly. In the past, parents told their children, “Why won’t you listen to your Mom and Dad?” Nowadays, children complain to their parents, “Mom and Dad, why don’t you listen to me?” Even very young children know how to bargain for what they want, “If you don’t buy this for me, I won’t study!” It is common for students to criticize their teachers and employees to criticize their employers. Even in the military, enlisted personnel criticize officers. When there is no standard for our behavior, the fabric of society is weakened, social morality cannot be maintained, and disorder rules.

The Buddha was not pleased by those who were only concerned about their own welfare and had no regard for the hardships of others. The Buddha would also become displeased when a prank, even that of a youngster, ended up hurting others. For example, before the Buddha renounced his life as a prince, he had a son by the name of Rahula. When Rahula was still a young child, he followed in his father's footsteps and renounced his household life to become a monk. Because he was still young, he was very mischievous and liked to tell little white lies. Someone once asked Rahula, "Do you know where the Buddha is right now?"

Although he knew that the Buddha was in the room to his left, he purposely pointed to the right and said, "The Buddha is over there."

When the person returned confused, Rahula was very pleased with himself. Later, the Buddha learned of this incident and called Rahula before him. When Rahula saw the Buddha's stern expression, he did not dare say a word. Quietly, he went to fetch a basin of water for the Buddha to wash his feet because the Buddha would soon begin to teach. After the Buddha was done washing his feet, he said to Rahula, "Now take this basin and drink the water."

Rahula was shocked. He said to the Buddha, "But you just used this water to wash your feet. It's filthy. I can't drink it."

The Buddha instructed, “When you tell lies, your mouth becomes as filthy as the dirty water in this basin. Just as no one would want to drink such water, no one will want to hear your words, either.”

Rahula then went to discard the water. Afterwards, the Buddha said to him, “Now that you’ve thrown out the water, use the basin to take your meal.”

Rahula was troubled. “Even though the water is gone, the basin is still very dirty. I can’t put food in it.”

The Buddha reproached him, “When you tell lies, your mouth becomes as dirty as the basin. How can you put something clean, like wholesome words, in it?”

From this example, we learn that the Buddha does not tolerate those who lie to and deceive others. The manner the Buddha used to teach Rahula stems from the high hopes parents have for their children, which is why it is said that, “When the love is deep, the reprimand is severe.” The Buddha’s displeasure arises from compassion rather than anger. The love parents have for their children is very much like the love of the Buddha for all living beings!

III. Did the Buddha Feel Sorrow?

Do you think that the Buddha ever felt sorrow? There are actually stories of when the Buddha was so sad he cried.

King Mara, a malevolent supernatural being and adversary of the Buddha, once said to the Buddha, “I don’t like how widespread your teaching has become. From now on, my army of maras and I will fight you every step of the way!”

Unperturbed, the Buddha replied, “I’m not afraid of your subversion.”

“Everywhere we go, we will criticize you and slander you.”

The Buddha said calmly, “I am not afraid.”

“We’ll strike at you with clubs, knives, and spears!”

“Clubs, knives, and spears don’t frighten me.”

After this exchange, Mara thought to himself, “The Buddha isn’t afraid of anything.” Then he came up with a plan.

“Then we’ll become your disciples. We’ll wear the monastic robes and eat alms food, but we will not follow your teachings. When you speak about the threefold practice of discipline, meditative concentration, and wisdom, we’ll practice the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance. We will be opposed to every part of Buddhism, and in this way, we will undermine you.”

At this point, the Buddha compassionately thought about all the catastrophes sentient beings of the future would then have to face. He was moved to tears; finally the Buddha cried.

Today, there are many people who claim to be disciples of the Buddha; they carry the Buddha's banner and wear monastic robes, yet they are a disgrace to the good name of Buddhism. How could the Buddha not feel sorrow? When children misbehave, the whole family suffers. Similarly, when his followers disgraced the teachings, the Buddha lamented such cases and even shed tears.

Within the monastic system, there are ways to deal with these kinds of people, they are disciplined by the group shunning and ignoring them. This is a passive method of discipline, but it is much harder to control such impostors who are not monastics. Within a family, it is important that children are nurtured and taught firmly, just as in Buddhist there must be firm organizational and educational systems to ensure that people stay on the correct path.

IV. Did the Buddha Feel Happiness?

The Buddha lived a happy life. The Buddha's daily life exemplified dedication to the benefit of both self and others.

What we spend on our own clothing, food, housing, and transportation is for our own benefit. What we spend on charity to help those in need is for the benefit of others. In the Buddha's case, the joy of the Dharma and the serenity of meditation were for his

own benefit. The Buddha's teaching, his compassion, and all the karmic connections he forged with sentient beings were for the benefit of others.

As Buddhists, each of us should learn how to practice Buddhism; we should understand which aspects of Buddhism are for the benefit of self and which are for the benefit of others. Paying respect to the Buddha, chanting, sitting meditation, developing patience, applying the right effort, and upholding the precepts are for the benefit of self. When we compliment, help, come to the aid of, act compassionately towards, give charity to, and build strong relationships with others, we are practicing Buddhism for the benefit of others.

In Buddhism, the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month is known as Ullambana or Sangha Day. This day is also called "The Buddha's Happy Day." Why is the Buddha happy on this day? During the time of the Buddha, all the monks would begin their summer retreat on the fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month. Three months later their period of intense cultivation was complete, and lay devotees would often make offerings during this time to dedicate the merit to their ancestors and to share in the blessings of the monastics' cultivation. It was a joyful occasion for both human and heavenly beings, and this made the Buddha happy.

Buddhism is a religion of happiness, and as such Buddhists should try to develop a joyful character. Some people always look depressed and glum. Every day throughout their entire lives, they are worried, depressed, and agitated. This is most unfortunate. There is a saying, “A face without anger is a true offering; a mouth speaking no anger emits a wonderful fragrance. A heart with no anger is a priceless treasure. This truth is lasting, and cannot be destroyed.” Not only should we learn to control our anger and not speak of it or show it in our face, we should learn to prevent anger from arising. When our hearts do not harbor any anger, peace and happiness will show through our face, and everything will turn out well.

It does not matter that we might not have anything tangible to offer to others. What is most important is to offer happiness to others. Our days may be filled with problems and headaches, but when we sleep, we should leave them behind and not bring them to bed with us. When we eat, we should eat our meals happily rather than be consumed by our own sorrows. We should not carry unhappiness with us from one day to the next, and we should not constantly display our sadness so as to wear people down. For example, I have many students and devotees. They never come to me when they are happy. They seek me out only when they have problems and headaches. I ask them jokingly sometimes, “When I see all of you, I express

my joy and share happy words with you every day. Why do you only give me your problems and headaches? It becomes unbearable for me to see worried faces all the time. In the future, why don't you share your happiness rather than your sorrows with me? How does that sound to you?"

I have always maintained that we should greet others with three pleasantries, such as "You look great!" or "What a nice day!" When we greet others with three pleasantries, we can make others feel comfortable. Some people are very stingy with their words; this is why I encourage greeting others with pleasantries. When we fight, however, we should stop after one round.

Let us say that a wife is slaving over the stove to prepare dinner for her husband. She sets the table and tells her husband, "Time for dinner." The husband becomes annoyed and replies, "All right, all right. Wait a minute!"

This is one round of exchange and the wife should stop at this point, but the wife continues another round of exchange: "Every time I call you, you always say 'All right, all right.' How many times do you want to be called before you actually come!"

Now the husband becomes really irritated and retorts, "Don't you see how busy I am?"

The wife gets even by saying, "Busy, busy! You're always busy. Don't you realize I'm busy too?"

In this way, after two or three rounds of heated exchange, a fight erupts. So, please remember we should always stop after one round. In the old days, duels were often settled after one round. If the conflict were to continue, there would be no end to it! If we keep fighting, how can we lead happy lives?

Buddhists should learn to give happiness to others as the Buddha did. We should learn the real essence of the Buddha. We should endeavor to give others confidence, give others joy, give others hope, and render service to others.

V. Did the Buddha Enjoy Things?

We all hope to have nice things to enjoy. Even in attending a Dharma talk, we want to have a good seat where we can sit comfortably, or hope that the room is air-conditioned and the floor is carpeted—the list goes on. These are things we enjoy in our daily lives.

People pursue fame and wealth to improve their living conditions, so that they can better enjoy life. In actuality, fame and wealth can bring its own set of problems. The enjoyment we gain from our senses is very limited. The eyes crave pleasing sights, the ears crave delightful sounds, and the body craves the feel of soft and luxurious clothes. But when these sensations pass, we soon feel empty and lonely again.

This is no different than the end of a party when dirty dishes and trash are left behind. The price we pay for worldly fame and wealth is enormous. When we are controlled by the external environment, we cannot find inner peace. But, if we are not affected by what we see and hear, then there is nothing that can bind us. The Dharma joy within us will begin to flow; this is not the same as normal joy. It is unattached to anything around us so it can continue no matter how our circumstances change.

One of the Buddha's disciples was the former Prince Bhadrika. Once, while he was doing sitting meditation with the other monks, he suddenly called out, "What happiness! What happiness!"

It so happened that the Buddha was passing by, so he asked, "Who yelled out 'happiness?' What brings such happiness?"

Bhadrika replied: "In the past while I was still living in the palace, I was constantly surrounded by guards, yet I was afraid that others would harm or assassinate me. In the palace, the food was of the best quality and the bed was very comfortable, yet I didn't enjoy the food nor did I sleep soundly. Now that I've renounced the secular life, I can cultivate in the remote hills and woods. Now that I feel free, I'm not afraid of anything. I find the simple vegetables and carrots that I get for alms very delicious. When I sit here to meditate, I just feel cleansed and free from

worries. I enjoy the path of cultivation so much that I can't control myself and must cry out with elation!" Is this not another form of enjoyment?

What kinds of things did the Buddha enjoy? The Buddha enjoyed the tranquility of *nirvana*. *Nirvana* has four special characteristics: it is permanent, blissful, pure, and is the true self. When the Buddha felt the expanse of life, he was happy. When the Buddha felt the natural joy of life, he was happy. When the Buddha felt the existence of life, he was happy. When the Buddha felt the simplicity of life, he was happy. Nowadays, many people are so busy that they forget about themselves. When they lose touch with themselves, they also lose touch with happiness.

Serene happiness is a characteristic of *nirvana*. If we truly understand the Buddha's teachings, we can easily find such happiness within our daily lives. We can enjoy happiness in contentment. We can even find happiness when we are truly remorseful. We can also find happiness by showing respect to others, having faith, and remaining calm and peaceful. We should not look for happiness from our senses; the source of happiness lies within our hearts and we will find true happiness when we uncover our hearts. There is happiness in reciting the Buddha's name, in meditation, and in paying homage to the Buddha. Sometimes, when you do sitting meditation, you will discover that all your thoughts are calm and no desire is in

sight; you want to stay in this peaceful Dharma joy forever. Is this not happiness? Or, we can enjoy happiness by proactively aiding those in need and helping repair roads and bridges. When we form positive karmic connections with others, we will find support from all sides and live a happy life.

In the past, many Buddhists equated cultivation with asceticism, but this is misleading. Buddhism is a religion of happiness, it does not ask that its devotees suffer. Rather, Buddhism teaches that suffering is simply part of life; it is a stage that we must pass through in order to attain happiness. A butterfly has to come out of its cocoon before it can fly. A tree has to be cut down before it can be used for lumber. In Buddhism, we must cross the sea of suffering before we reach liberation. When others reprimand us, criticize us, or even slander us, we should not get angry; rather, we should thank them for giving us the opportunity to rid ourselves of the roots of our anger. When others defraud us of our hard-earned money, we might become very frustrated if we lack an understanding of the Dharma; however, if we practice the Dharma, we would look at the situation as a way to pay off old debts. To be free of anger, debt, and worry is a great cause for happiness! In this way, we can even find happiness in adversity. Like the Buddha, we too can enjoy the constant serene happiness of *nirvana*.

In this world, we are happy when good things happen. When we have the Dharma, we will be capable of handling misfortunes and disappointments with equal ease. The *Vimalakirti Sutra* says, “When the mind is pure, the land is pure,” we can use our pure and calm mind to transform the world. Grief is *bodhi*, and affliction is happiness. If your mom and dad are very strict, you need not be distressed. You should think to yourself, “It’s good my parents are stern with me; they help me stay out of trouble.” With every situation in this world, as long as we can change our perspectives, we will always find happiness!

Let me share something that many of you may not know. For many years now, unless I am dining with guests, I have always eaten my dinner standing up. Usually there are no chairs in my living quarters, so I just stand up and eat. I lead a very simple life, yet I do not enjoy my meals any less.

The life of the Buddha may have been very simple and fraught with hardship, but because of the Buddha’s *prajna*-wisdom, he always enjoyed the wondrous happiness of *nirvana*.

VI. Was the Buddha Loving?

Do you think the Buddha was loving? Buddhists like to deify the Buddha and claim that the Buddha was completely different from other human beings.

Because love can be tainted and can bring us desires, some say that the Buddha was not loving. But this is not the case. The Buddha was actually very loving! The Buddha's love, however, was spread equally among all sentient beings.

The Buddha felt great, unconditional loving-kindness, and great, universal compassion. Beyond ordinary love is loving-kindness, and beyond even that is great, unconditional loving-kindness, and great, universal compassion. It is difficult for us to understand the love and affection of the Buddha.

What is unconditional loving-kindness? If we examine to whom we are kind, we will notice that it is limited. We are kind toward those with whom we have relationships: our neighbors, our classmates, our colleagues, or our relatives. This type of kindness is conditional. The Buddha's loving-kindness involves sharing happiness with all unconditionally. When we can help a total stranger, when we can help just because the person needs our help, and when we can help without expecting anything in return, we are truly practicing unconditional loving-kindness.

What is universal compassion? It means that I feel your pain as though it were mine and I want to relieve your pain as much as I want to relieve my own. Often our compassion is given sparingly, and we get tired if we are called upon to be compassionate

time and time again. The Buddha's compassion is not like this at all. For example, suppose my hand has an infected wound with a repulsive smell. Because the hand is a part of my body, I take very good care of it. I will not get tired of it, but instead clean up the infection and dress the wound. When we can see all sentient beings like they are related to us, like they are an extension of our own bodies, then we will have universal compassion.

To practice great, unconditional loving-kindness and great, universal compassion, we should learn to place ourselves in others' shoes, and project ourselves into their situation. Then the spirit of great, unconditional loving-kindness and great, universal compassion will bloom within us.

The Buddha went to the Trayastrimsas Heaven to teach the Dharma to his mother, and he was the pallbearer at his father's funeral. Do you think the Buddha was sentimental? While I was writing the *Biography of the Buddha*, I was most impressed by the way the Buddha showed his sentiment—purely, immaculately, and subtly.

The second year after the Buddha's awakening, he returned home to teach to his father and cousins. Princess Yasodhara, the Buddha's wife before he renounced his household life, waited impatiently to see him. What was taking him so long? After a prolonged wait, the Buddha finally arrived. Princess Yasodhara

thought to herself, “When I see him, I’m really going to give him a piece of my mind for being so ungrateful and heartless.”

When she finally saw him, she was moved by the compassionate and majestic aura of the Buddha and immediately fell to her knees. When I reached this point in my writing I wondered to myself: What will the Buddha do? By this time, the Buddha was a completely awakened being; he was no longer an ordinary person and no longer the husband of Princess Yasodhara. How would he face her? The great Buddha was remarkable. He looked at Princess Yasodhara and said to her, “Yasodhara, I am sorry. But, please be happy for me. I have fulfilled my responsibility to all sentient beings. I have attained Buddhahood; I am now the Buddha.”

With these words, the Buddha managed to put Yasodhara at ease, yet conveyed the point of view of the fully-awakened one. For most of us, although we may have the aspiration to cultivate, it is difficult for us to achieve perfection in both compassion and wisdom.

As I had not seen my own mother for a few decades, I really hoped I could reunite with her in Japan. When the opportunity finally came, I waited for her arrival at the airport. When I spotted her at a distance, I wondered, “Is that really Mother?”

As she drew close, the emotions of reuniting with her son after so many years finally hit home, and tears began to well up in her eyes. I said to her, “Don’t cry here. Come with me.”

I could almost see her trying to draw her tears back into her eyes. But, before we cried together, we should consider that we are in a public place. Regardless of the kind of emotions and sentiments we experience, they should not consume us. We need to manage our emotions and sentiments so that they do not get out of control.

The Buddha served his sick disciples tea and water and threaded needles to help his older disciples mend their clothing. This pure affection is what is meant by “compassion” in Buddhism.

VII. Would the Buddha Lie?

Would the Buddha lie? This is indeed a very serious question. The five precepts are to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, unwholesome speech, and consuming intoxicants. These are very important precepts, so how could we dare say that the Buddha would lie?

The Dharma is alive. It is dynamic. Therefore, if acts of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, unwholesome speech, and consuming intoxicants are committed out of greed, anger, and ignorance, they are

indeed very severe violations. If the violations are performed out of compassion, then they constitute another form of the bodhisattva path.

Suppose there was an armed sociopath on a rampage, ready to kill innocent people. What are we supposed to do? Do we just stand by and watch him destroy the lives of innocent people? Of course not. There may be a case in which, out of the compassion to save innocent victims, we may have to first kill the sociopath. This is markedly different from killing someone out of hatred. Let us say that I found out you were plotting to gun down another person, or poison them, so I tried to hide the gun or the poison. Would you say that as this constitutes stealing that I should not try to hide the weapon to prevent the murder? Under these circumstances, the Buddha would use his wisdom to handle the situations in different ways.

Once while the Buddha was meditating in the woods, a rabbit was shot by a hunter. The rabbit ran to the Buddha and hid under his robe. The hunter who was chasing the rabbit stopped to ask the Buddha, “Did you see my rabbit?”

Of course, the Buddha saw the rabbit, but he could not tell the hunter where the rabbit was. So, the Buddha replied, “No, I haven’t.”

“You must be hiding it. That rabbit is my dinner. Hand it over!”

“Oh, it was for dinner?” The Buddha then asked the hunter, “If I cut off my arm, will that be enough to compensate you for the rabbit? You can have my arm for dinner!”

Did the Buddha lie? In order to save a sentient being, the Buddha told a fib out of great, fearless compassion. This is not an ordinary lie, but is in accordance with what is said in the *Diamond Sutra*, “The Tathagata is one who speaks of things as they are, of what is true, and in accordance with reality.”

Once when the Buddha was cultivating his practice in a past lifetime as a bodhisattva, he saw a bandit who was about to rob and kill five hundred merchants. He killed the bandit without hesitation, for he would rather accept the bad karma of taking a life than allow five hundred innocent people to lose their lives. The Buddha would not lie to deceive others, but he would also weigh the different sides of the issue before acting accordingly.

VIII. Did the Buddha Have a Job?

Do you think the Buddha had a job? Yes, he did. How do we know? The Buddha once went to Devadaha for his alms round. The king of the city was King Suprabuddha, the Buddha’s father-in-law before he renounced his secular life. When the king saw the Buddha, he was furious and had only these words for

the Buddha, “You have forsaken your country and your wife. Your life serves no purpose, and you are of no benefit to the world. You don’t have a job and don’t produce anything useful. I forbid you from collecting alms in my country.”

How did the Buddha respond? He replied, “King Suprabuddha, you’re mistaken. Every day, I use the plough of compassion to till the fields of blessings for sentient beings. The seeds I sow are *bodhi* seeds. I work hard every day, how can you say I produce nothing?” Since the time of the Buddha the job for Buddhist monastics has been to cultivate the practice and teach the Dharma. With their compassion and cultivation, they serve to elevate the moral standards and trends in their society. Is this not work?

Other major endeavors of the Buddha have been to avert war. When King Ajatasatru was about to attack Vrji, the Buddha prevented the conflict by convincing the king’s minister that his attempt would be futile. When King Virudhaka tried to attack the kingdom of Kapilavastu, where the Buddha grew up, the Buddha stood in the path of his armies on three occasions. By getting the disrespectful daughter-in-law of Elder Sudatta to mend her ways, the Buddha helped build family harmony. The Buddha was also able to get the child-eating demon Matanga to turn over a new leaf, and convinced the serial-killer Angulimala to end his life of crime. The Buddha has liberated

millions of people, opening the door of wisdom so that they may truly see themselves. His work is both significant and noble!

IX. Did the Buddha Experience Hardship?

Did the Buddha face difficulties and hardship? In this world, we have to constantly deal with hardship and distress. The Buddha was born into this world, and no one born into this world can totally escape hardship, not even the Buddha. No one is free from aging, sickness, death, and suffering. The Buddha had to deal with many forms of adversity in his life.

When he was cultivating his practice, he survived on a sesame seed and a grain of wheat a day. This was a form of hardship. During years of famine, everyone was impoverished and hungry. When the Buddha went on his alms rounds, he could only find leftover horse feed to allay his hunger. Although the Buddha accepted his predicament, this was still a form of hardship.

The Buddha's cousin, Devadatta, attempted to kill the Buddha and seize control of the sangha on several occasions. Once, in an effort to crush the Buddha, he pushed a huge boulder down a hill towards the spot where the Buddha was sitting. He also caused a drunken elephant to charge at the Buddha. The Buddha survived both of these attempts, but they were hardships nonetheless.

Devadatta also once plotted to start a fight with the Buddha. When the disciples of the Buddha learned of the plot, they quickly readied themselves with sticks and clubs to protect the Buddha. After the Buddha heard of this, he laughed and told Ananda, “Does one who has become the Buddha still need others to use sticks and clubs to protect him?”

On another occasion the brahman Uruvilva-Kasyapa, before he had taken refuge in the Buddha, knowingly invited the Buddha to spend the night in a room inhabited by a poisonous snake; but the snake stopped in its tracks as soon as it saw the Buddha.

When the serial-killer Angulimala tried to murder the Buddha, he instead fell to his knees and surrendered his weapons. Like everyone else, the Buddha had to deal with hardship, but he used his magnanimity and virtue to overcome them rather than protecting himself with sticks or clubs.

The Buddha also had to endure physical hardships in his old age, such as headaches and joint and back pain. The Buddha was also had to endure slander from a number of persons. Such hardships are consequences of the Buddha’s previous unwholesome karma, for even a Buddha cannot escape the effects of karma. But, for a great noble person, such hardships have little impact, and pass through like a rainstorm passing to reveal a clear blue sky.

X. Was the Buddha Ever Slandered by Others?

The Buddha was slandered as mentioned above and he is slandered even now. To those who believe in him, he is a deity, a noble person, or a Buddha. To those who do not believe in him, he is a demon, a sinner, or a charlatan. It is inevitable that there will be slanderous remarks from those who do not believe.

During the time of the Buddha there were many who would criticize the Buddha when someone close to them left the household life to join the sangha. They would say, “You took our sons and daughters away from us,” or “You took my husband (or wife) away, and broke up my family!” They would say that Buddha had no regard for families, parents, spouses, and children. These types of remarks were inescapable, especially when Buddhism began to take root and Buddhist followers multiplied in numbers at the expense of other religious traditions.

There were ill feelings among those of other traditions. A follower of another teacher once hired a prostitute to make a false accusation against the Buddha. While the Buddha was teaching, she stood up with her stomach protruding and shouted at him, “Sakyamuni, you may teach the Dharma well, but what are you going to do about your baby that I’m carrying?”

Was the Buddha the father of this child? This caused quite a stir in the audience. How would the Buddha respond?

The Buddha did not say a word. Among his disciples, Maudgalyayana was the foremost in supernatural powers. Through his heavenly vision, he was able to see that the protruding stomach of the woman was nothing more than a basin tied to her waist. Then, using his telekinesis, Maudgalyayana severed the ropes holding the basin and it dropped to the ground. The Buddha never responded to the woman and continued to teach the Dharma.

The Buddha taught the Dharma for forty-nine years and gave over three hundred Dharma talks. In his life he endured many hardships to bring us the truth. As sentient beings, we are deeply indebted to the Buddha. But, in this world, In Buddhism, the symbol of a lotus is commonly used, for although the lotus is pure and beautiful, it grows in filthy, muddy waters. In this world, how can there be light without darkness? How can we see the beauty of virtue without the ugliness of vice? Without mud and dirt, how can the pure lotus bloom?

XI. Did the Buddha Feel Helpless?

We like to think that the Buddha had many supernatural powers and could do everything. In reality,

the Buddha sometimes felt helpless too.

Once there was a man named Kandatta; he had many faults and did many horrible things while he was alive. He was kind, however, on one occasion. One day, while he was walking, he saw a spider and was about to step on it when it occurred to him that his step would no doubt kill the spider. At that time, a thought of kindness overcame him and he stepped over the spider and spared its life.

After Kandatta died, he fell into the depths of hell. The spider wanted to repay Kandatta for his kindness. When the Buddha learned of the spider's intentions, he helped the spider drop its thread all the way into hell so that Kandatta could use it to climb out. When all the beings suffering in hell saw the spider thread, they pushed and shoved trying to grasp at it.

Anger then arose in Kandatta's mind. He pushed everyone aside and said, "Go away, this is my spider thread. I'm the only one who's getting out of here! Go away!"

Kandatta grabbed the spider thread with so much force that it broke. Kandatta, together with all the others, fell back into hell. The Buddha, who saw the entire incident, sighed and said, "Alas, sentient beings are so selfish. What can I do?"

If we are selfish, hateful, and unwilling to share any benefits with others, if we are not compassionate

toward others, and do not form good karmic connections with others, then even the Buddha cannot help us save ourselves!

Once there was a young man climbing a mountain. Halfway up, he lost his footing and fell. Luckily, he managed to grab a vine growing out of the side of the mountain. As he looked down, he realized there was no solid ground for many feet beneath him, and above him was a steep cliff. In panic, he called out, “Buddha! Buddha, please save me!”

The Buddha then appeared and said to him, “Young man, I want to save you, but I’m afraid that you won’t listen to me.”

The young man said, “In a moment like this, how could I not listen to you?”

“Really? Are you going to do exactly what I tell you to do, no matter what it is?”

The young man was very compliant and said, “Oh Great Buddha, I’ll absolutely follow your instructions!”

Immediately, the Buddha said to the young man in a serious tone of voice, “That’s good. I want you to let go of what you’re holding onto.”

“Oh no!” the young man replied in shock. “You want me to let go? If I let go, won’t I break every bone in my body?”

The Buddha sighed and said, “How can I save you if you won’t let go?”

In this world, whether we can be saved or not depends on whether we can see through all phenomena, rise to the occasion, and let go. If we want the Buddha to liberate us, we have to be willing to let go of the shackles in our everyday lives before we can enter into the world of the Buddha.

We have to build our faith upon the understanding of the Buddha who lived on this earth; from the faith of this understanding we can slowly rise up to know the real Buddha. It is not unlike one who has to start from elementary school, and then proceed through high school before one can enroll in college. The virtues and accomplishments of the Buddha are vast and limitless; they cannot be comprehended in a moment of deliberation or seen with a single glance. They have to be understood gradually, through many steps. When we can understand the Buddha who lived among us, then we can begin to understand the Buddha who lives within our hearts. When we can comprehend the Buddha who lives within our hearts, then we can finally perceive the true form of the Buddha.