

C. Supreme Enlightenment



Kusa Grass Temple: The temple is on the Neranjara river bank; across the river is Bodh Gaya. The temple situates at the location that is believed to be where Sujata found the unconscious acetic Gautama (Photo taken in December 2001).

Then a young lady, Sujata, found Bodhisattva Gautama lying nearly dead in the forest. She gave him some milk. After regaining his consciousness, the Bodhisattva abandoned self-mortification and took normal meals with simple food. His five ascetic companions left him in disappointment and continue their austerity.

Alone, in sylvan solitude, the Bodhisattva came to a pippala tree on the bank of Neranjara River at Gaya. He spent most of his time in meditation under the tree. While concentrating on in-and-out breathing (ana-apana sati), the Bodhisattva found his mind becoming calm. Going more deeply into meditation, he recognised that all things were interdependent and conditional. He remembered the events happening in the ploughing ceremony he had attended in his childhood. He realised that a rice plant originated from a grain, and the plant could not grow up without

the sunshine, soft soil and water. He saw that all phenomena, from the universe to very tiny particles, were impermanent: they were changing even during a very short period of time (ksana). There was not what was called "self" (atman) in any thing in this phenomenal world. There was not a thing that was sustained by itself and unchanged with time. Eventually the Bodhisattva saw the emptiness nature (sunyata) of all phenomena, and slowly he realised the insight into all phenomena. He perceived that in the presence of a rice plant, there was the presence of others such as his father, the farmers, the insects, birds, soil, water, sunshine, etc. The Bodhisattva saw the presence of the whole universe appearing in the grain, the plant, the birds and the farmers.

Directing the contemplation towards his ultimate goal, the relieving of living beings' old age, sickness and death, Bodhisattva Gautama saw that all sufferings were conditional. All living beings, from the worms, the birds, to the farmers, the kings, etc. experienced sufferings due to their greed, hatred and delusion, which in turn were from ignorance and erroneous perception. If sufferings were caused by ignorance then breaking through ignorance would end all forms of sufferings. Hence the key for the ending of all sufferings was the right understanding (wisdom -prajna). With right understanding people could control their activities (by keeping precepts -silas) to have right thoughts, right speeches and right actions as well as to live in right livelihood, right diligence and right mindfulness. Living in such conditions one might easily achieve right concentration (samadhi), which in turn improved the right understanding. This was called the Eightfold Noble Path presented in the Three Disciplines (sila-samadhi-wisdom) format. The Bodhisattva realised in accordance with facts: *"This is the suffering, this is the arising of the suffering, this is the ending of the suffering, and this is the path, the noble path, leading to the ending of the suffering."* They were the Four Noble Truths.

With the insight into all phenomena, Bodhisattva Gautama directed his contemplation to all his mental activities including feeling and perception; he saw that they were also phenomena, and as a consequence, they were impermanent and conditional. As well, they had an emptiness nature. All phenomena did not originate, nor became extinct; they were neither impure nor pure; they neither increased nor decreased. Furthermore, in emptiness, there were no five aggregates, no six senses, etc. There were neither sufferings, nor origin, nor cessation, etc. (Heart Sutra). There was only a process-like coming and going. To experience sufferings was conditional: it was the result of ignorance, which caused wrong perception and prejudices. Faced with the same reality, one might experience sufferings while some other might not; that depended on whether they were free from ignorance or not. Therefore, with ultimate right understanding (prajnaparamita), all sufferings would end although phenomena might continue

appearing. The Bodhisattva then realised in accordance with facts: *"These are the taints, this is the arising of the taints, this is the cessation of the taints, this is the path leading to the cessation of the taints."*

One night, with unshakeable determination, Bodhisattva Gautama directed his calm and pure mind to the knowledge of the reminiscence of past births, and recalled numerous previous lives of his own and others. This is the first knowledge the Bodhisattva realised during the first watch of the night. He then directed his mind to the knowledge of the disappearances and reappearances of beings of varied forms, from the universe to small insects. He perceived that after disappearing from one state of existence, living beings reappeared in others, happier or more woeful depending on their thoughts, speeches and actions (karmas), performed in their pasts. He saw the karma of every individual living being. This was the second knowledge the Bodhisattva attained in the middle watch of the night. Bodhisattva Gautama then directed his contemplation on his mind itself. He saw that it was perfectly pure without a single trace of taints, i.e., there were no taints of sensual craving, of craving for existence or of ignorance. He knew: *"Rebirth is ended; fulfilled the holy life; done what was to be done; there is no more of this state again."* The Bodhisattva had realised the Supreme Enlightenment (Sammāsam-bodhi)! Darkness had vanished; the morning star had risen on the horizon!

The pipplā tree where the Buddha realised the Supreme Enlightenment has been called "The Bodhi tree" (the Tree of Enlightenment or the Tree of Wisdom, of Understanding). Emperor Asoka erected a pillar engraved with figures of lion heads near the very Bodhi tree. Now there is a great temple at Gaya called Bodhi-Gaya that attracts many pilgrims.



Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya: A branch of the original pippala tree was planted in Sri Lanka by a delegation of the Emperor Asoka; when the original tree was destroyed, a branch from the tree in Sri Lanka was brought back and planted at its original location (Photo taken in December 2001).



Emperor Asoka's Pillar at Bodh Gaya: The pillar is on the left of the main temple. Behind the photographer is a lotus pool where the Buddha spread the Avatamsaka Sutra (Photo taken in December 2001).