

## E. Buddha Entering into Nirvana



**Kusinara temple:** The temple was built in the Sala Grove, Kusinara (Kushinagara), North of India; the Buddha went to nirvana here after 45 years of spreading the Path (Photo taken in December 2001).

The Buddha was seriously ill while spending the 45<sup>th</sup> retreat season at Beluvagamaka village near Vesali. By the end of the retreat season, He regained His strength. Some of the Buddha's senior disciples had passed away: Moggallana, Sariputta, Uruvela Kassapa, Pajapati, Yasodhara, Rahula, etc.

One day, while Venerable Ananda was practising walking meditation outside a temple in Capala near Vesali, he felt the earth suddenly quaking beneath his feet, his mind and body shaken. He went inside the temple and told the Buddha of his feeling. The Buddha said: "*Ananda, the Tathagata,*" the term the Buddha often used to call Himself, "*has made His decision. In three months, I will pass away.*" Venerable Ananda instantly knelt before the Buddha and begged Him to stay

longer for the benefits of all disciples. The Buddha refused and just repeated that it was time for Him to enter into nirvana.

Later, the Buddha told to the whole Sangha:

*"Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis, whatever truths the Tathagata has expounded, you should study them well. Observe, practise and verify them for yourselves so that the Dharma can be transmitted to future generations, for the peace, joy and happiness of all beings.*

*"Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis, what are those truths? They can be found in the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, the Four Right Efforts, the Four Bases of Spiritual Strength, the Five Faculties, the Five Powers, the Seven Factors of Awakening, and the Noble Eightfold Path. Study, practise, realise, and transmit these teachings.*

*"Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis, transient are all conditional things. Be diligent! In three months, the Tathagata will pass away."*

The Buddha then continued spreading the Dharma, from village to village. One day, the Buddha arrived at Pava, where Cunda, a blacksmith's son offered the Buddha a special delicious dish made from mushrooms picked on a sandalwood tree. When the meal finished, the Buddha asked Cunda to bury all remaining mushrooms and do not let anyone else use them. After the meal, the Buddha went towards Kusinara. On the way, He was seized with severe stomach cramps. He had to stop many times on a journey of about ten kilometres. After taking a bath in Kakuttha River, the Buddha told Venerable Ananda:

*"Ananda, the meal at Cunda's home was the Tathagata's last meal. There were two meals I treasure the most: one offered by Sujata, and one by Cunda. These two offerings are of equal fruit and of equal profit, and of much greater fruit and of much greater profit than any other.*

*"Ananda, tonight the Tathagata will enter into nirvana."*

It was dusk when the Buddha arrived at the Sala Grove in the vicinity of Kusinara. Venerable Ananda prepared for the Buddha a place between two Sala trees. The Buddha lay on His right side, His head facing north with the Sangha around Him respectfully and serenely. Seeing Venerable Ananda and other disciples' sadness, the Buddha exhorted:

*"Ananda, a Bhikkhu, Bhikkhuni, Upasaka or Upasika who lives in accordance with the Dharma, conducts oneself dutifully, and acts righteously is the one who respects, reverences, and honours the Tathagata with the highest homage."*

The Malla people living in Kusinara heard that the Buddha would attain Parinirvana that night. They hastily went to the Sala Grove. Subhadda, an ascetic, was among them. He knelt before the Buddha and asked:

*"Lord, I have heard about spiritual leaders such as Purana Kassapa, Makhali Gosala, Ajita Kesakambala, Pakudha Kaccayana, Sanjaya Belatthiputta and Nigantha Nathaputta. I would like to ask if, according to You, any of them attained true enlightenment."*

The Buddha answered:

*"Subhadda, whether or not they attained enlightenment is not a necessary thing to discuss now. Subhadda, the Tathagata will show you the path by which you yourself can attain enlightenment."*

The Buddha then explained the Noble Eightfold Path, and concluded:

*"Subhadda, wherever the Noble Eightfold Path is truly practised, you will find people who have attained enlightenment. Subhadda, if you follow this path, you, too, can attain enlightenment."*

Subhadda was the Buddha's last disciple. The Buddha then asked if anyone had questions relating to His teachings. Venerable Ananda confirmed that the teachings were clear. No one had any doubt. The Buddha looked quietly over the whole community:

*"Behold, O disciples, I exhort you. Subject to change are all component things. Strive on with diligence."*

That was the Buddha's last words. The Tathagata then closed His eyes and entered peacefully into nirvana. Actually, the Tathagata is still with us. The Tathagata exists everywhere at anytime. If we sincerely practise the Buddha's teachings, we may always see the Tathagata, in the Dharma, in the Sangha, in every living being, in forests, rivers, trees, and especially, in our heart, the Dharmakaya.



**Vesali Relic Stupa:** This stupa is one of the eight stupas that were built to worship the Buddha's relic. This Vesali (Vaishali) stupa of 8 m in diameter was originally built with mud (Photo taken in January 2002).

After attaining nirvana, the Buddha's body was cremated and the remains (relics) was distributed in eight parts (based on the information at the Vesali relic stupa) for 1) Lichchavis of Vaisali (Vesali), 2) Ajatshatru of Magadha, 3) Shakyas of Kapilavatthu (Kapilvastu), 4) Bulis of Alikappa, 5) Koliyas of Ramgrama, 6) A Brahmin of Vethadipa, 7) Mallas of Pawa, and 8) Kusinara (Kushinagara). The relics of Shakya (Sakya) part were discovered in 1898, and brought to Bangkok.



**Buddha relic stupa in Bangkok:** In 1898, Peppe excavated a burial mound (stupa) in the area believed to be the city of Kapilavatthu, and discovered Buddha relics in an urn inscribed with ancient scripts. The relics were brought to King Rama V of Thai. Part of the relics was inserted into a bronze pagoda, which was put in the top of the Golden Mount, Bangkok, in 1899 (Photo taken in January 2002, details were take from the pagoda information).