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Pilgrimage Talks

given during the 2020 Pilgrimage

by Yuttadhammo
Bhikkhu

Introduction

Volunteers of Sirimangalo International were interested in organizing a pilgrimage trip to India and Nepal, and invited Bhante Yuttadhammo to join. We are thankful to Bhante for not only joining, but also for being our source of information for the places visited. In addition to briefing us about every place and its significance, Bhante also gave five Dhamma talks, at the five most important locations.

This booklet is a collection of talks that Bhante Yuttadhammo gave while doing the Buddhist pilgrimage tour in India in the year 2020. These talks were given to an audience of about twelve people who were traveling along with him for this pilgrimage. It was also recorded live, to be shared on YouTube. The work of transcribing Bhante Yuttadhammo's talks has been done by volunteers and some parts of the transcription have been edited to make it an easier read. All such editing of the original talks is the sole responsibility of the volunteers, and any mistakes evident here are to be accredited to that group.

Birth

Maya Devi Temple, Lumbinī, Nepal

February 1st, 2020

This area is the place where the Bodhisatta was born. Technically he wasn't the Buddha when he was born here, but the commentaries talk about two births of the Buddha. One is the birth of *rūpakāya* and the other is the birth of *dhammakāya*. This is the place of the birth of the *rūpakāya*, the Buddha's physical manifestation or physical form. The Buddha's second birth was at Bodh Gaya, the birth of the Dhamma, the actual Buddha-ness of the Buddha. Because his *rūpakāya* was born before the *dhammakāya*, you could say this is the birthplace of the Buddha.

You might think, "Why are we here?" or "What should we feel when we're here?" because again, it was only the *rūpakāya* that was born here, and you might say, "Well, it's true the Buddha was born here, but he wasn't a Buddha yet." In some sense, the birth that happened here was not even that remarkable, because it was simply the very last birth in a very long, arduous, incredible journey. There is, however, something important about the fact that this was the Buddha's last birth; this was the final culmination of birth for the Buddha.

Types of Birth

Besides being born as a Buddha, there are six types of birth: birth in hell, birth as a ghost, birth in the animal realm, birth as a human, birth as a *deva*, and birth as a *brahmā*. Those are the six types of "conceptual" birth, in the sense that it is merely a concept to say that a being is born. In reality both the physical and mental aspects of experience are born and die every moment. So you could say there are two types of birth, conceptual and momentary.

Even though it is a concept, It's worth talking about the first type of birth to remind ourselves that our existence as human beings is artificial; it's nothing special; this isn't the de facto birth where we have ten fingers, ten toes, two arms, and two legs. There are many other types of birth.

If you're full of anger, then your birth becomes a birth in a realm of great suffering, because your inclination of mind is to cause suffering to yourself and others. Of course it's very painful to be angry, but it's also the greatest cause of harm to others. The birth that comes from anger is birth in hell. Birth as a ghost comes from greed. If a person has a great amount of greed, and is stingy, miserly, and clingy, then the birth that comes from that is birth as a ghost. If a person has a great amount of delusion, then the birth that comes from that is birth as an animal.

These are important conceptually, to give us a broader picture of the nature of reality and the significance of mental defilements . It gives us a sense of the distinction between mind states and between beings. For example, we see humans who are like ghosts; hungry and

never satisfied. There is a word in Pāli for them: *manussa peto*. The stories that we hear about ghosts describe beings who are stuck in a place, some place that was very important to them. The intense clinging kept them there when they passed away. They're always wanting; they're always yearning for something. We have many ghost stories and descriptions of ghosts in Buddhism, but you can see humans who are like that, never satisfied. Drug addicts are a good example.

You see humans who are hellish, like a hell being, *manussa nerayiko*. If you've ever gotten really angry, you know what that's like. It's hell to be so angry. You may have seen people who are so angry they look like demons. We all have that in us. But a person who is intent upon that is most likely to be reborn in hell; angry about everything, mean and cruel. This doesn't mean just because we're angry, or greedy, that we're likely to go to these places. It is most likely to happen only if you allow these emotions to consume you, usually to the extent that they lead you to break the five precepts: killing, stealing, cheating, lying, and taking intoxicants.

As for the animal realm, we see humans who are mired in delusion, intent upon remaining ignorant, with no interest in higher qualities. There are humans who are just like the cows that we see, content to eat, ruminate, and chew their cud, as it were. Being born a cow can be a terrible thing, as many are slaughtered. Still, their life is quite peaceful compared to say, being born as a rabbit hunted by wolves, a mouse or squirrel hunted by cats, or animals that fight and kill each other.

Being born as a human requires something along the lines of keeping the five precepts; that's why the five precepts are given such importance. They are the five sort of general concepts that demarcate the boundary between birth in a good realm and birth in a not-good realm. You are born as a human if you keep the five precepts and are generally committed to them as an individual. Of course, it's more granular than that because of your experiences. If you get angry at someone, or are mean and cruel to people, you're going to get into hell on earth. On the other hand, if you keep the precepts, you'll find you can live a fairly civilized life. You won't get caught up with drunkards, murderers, thieves, liars, and so on. Human life will feel humane.

To be born as an angel requires not just keeping the five precepts, but also something called *mahā-kusala*: great goodness. Being humane and treating other people as you'd like to be treated is good, but those who go above and beyond this are the ones who are born as angels — those intent on purification. A lot of Buddhist meditators go to heaven because they're intent on purification. That's the whole thrust of Buddhism; it's not to believe in this, believe in that, or believe in the Buddha. What is the core of Buddhism? Purifying your mind. I don't think it's bragging or conceit to think that Buddhists are more likely to go to heaven, because we are intent upon it. We don't have views like, "if you follow this religion you will go to heaven" or "If you perform this ritual you will go to heaven." If you act heavenly, you will go to heaven. The things that lead to heaven are, in many ways, in line with the Buddha's teaching; things like renouncing entertainment and sensuality, eating only in the morning, that sort of thing. You're not doing it to torture yourself, or because the Buddha said, or because you want to feel good

about yourself. You're doing it because you understand that it's good training; that it helps you purify your mind. That sort of thing leads to heaven. Many non-Buddhists, of course, also go to heaven; for example, people who are very kind and charitable, even when they don't have to be. They're not just doing their ordinary duty as a human being; they intend to go out of their way, to help people who are not well off, to be kind, and to think good thoughts; people who practice *mettā-bhāvanā*, that sort of thing. *Mahā-kusala: dāna, sīla, bhāvanā*. Even just keeping *sīla* — someone who is set on not lying, “I'm never going to lie.” There is a story of Mahāmoggallāna meeting someone who went to heaven because of that. Keeping the eight precepts is a good example of this.

Some may be born as a *brahmā*, which is the Buddhist equivalent of God, or the closest thing we have to gods, only because they're different from *deva* (angels). They don't engage in sensuality. They're more high-minded, more lofty. To get there you have to practice *samatha jhāna*. A person who is intent upon entering into states of absorption that are one-pointed and outside of any sensuality doesn't have any experience of the world. Their whole world is one thing, one concept. That could be *mettā*, a candle flame, or different things like that.

All of these births can be thought of more granularly as well. It is not true that just because one is born as a human or even a *deva* that only good things happen to them. You can see in this life bad things happen even to a person who is kind and generous, while many good things happen to them and people love and appreciate them. Bad things happened even to the Buddha, and his birth was above and beyond any of these six types.

After the Buddha became enlightened, he walked to Sarnath, Isipatana Deer Park. On his way, he met a man who asked him, “What are you?” as he probably saw that the Buddha was special somehow. The man asked, “Are you human? Are you a god? Are you an angel? Are you a *māra*?” And the Buddha, in a roundabout way said, “I've learned what needs to be learned. I've conquered all the universe.” And then he said, “I have no teacher. There's no one like me. There's no one parallel to me, no one above me. I am a *sammāsambuddha*.” He didn't answer, I'm a human or a god. Some people say he wasn't really a human, he was a Buddha. I think you could say he was a human; it's pretty clear that to some extent, he was a human. But it's also proper to say he was simply a buddha or a *sammāsambuddha*. So we take this as an important event — the birth of the Buddha.

The Ten Pāramitās

To be born as a Buddha one must develop what we call the *pāramitās*: the ten perfections. The birth of a Buddha first requires giving birth to perfection in ten different way. The Buddha-to-be gave birth to all ten of these in his journey to be born as a Buddha.

1. He gave birth to *dāna pāramī* — charity. He gave away his own eyes once in a past life. What it really means is that he gave up any sense of possessiveness or self. This was a big part of why he was able to finally see non-self and have a sense that reality doesn't

admit of possession or ego. He sacrificed and made a determination to not take possession or claim ownership of things.

2. *Sīla pāramī* — he was intent on morality, ethics. However, he wasn't always a monk or an ascetic. He even had children in some lives. But what he developed, from the time of Dīpaṅkara Buddha, until the time of his last birth, was a profound sense of ethics. Even to save his own life, he wouldn't break a precept. He wouldn't do something immoral to save his own life or to save someone else's life. He went beyond our ordinary sense of ethics, because he had a greater goal of working to free other people from suffering. One might think that by killing one person it might help someone else, or a lot of other people, but the Buddha had a deeper understanding of *saṃsāra*. You can't free people from suffering by helping them to avoid it, because they will have to deal with it eventually as long as they are reborn again. He understood that the only way to help others would be to purify his mind and find the way out of the rounds of rebirth. Then he could help people. So he dedicated himself to purely ethical activity that would free him from *saṃsāra* even if it meant sometimes allowing harm to come to himself or others by not acting immorally to prevent it.
3. *Nekkhamma pāramī* — renunciation. Many times he gave up kingship and wealth, just as he did in his last life.
4. *Pañña pāramī* — wisdom. There's a very good story, the Mahā Ummagga Jātaka, where even at seven years old, the Buddha was solving people's problems for them, and displaying wisdom in various ways. He had appreciation for and dedication to leaving home and finding understanding — understanding of his own mind and the world.
5. *Viriya pāramī* — effort. One time the Bodhisatta was on a ship in the middle of the ocean that sank and he simply resolved to swim to shore. An angel in the ocean asked him, "What are you doing? You're never going to make it to the end of the ocean. You're in the middle of the ocean." And the Bodhisatta merely replied, "If I don't try, then I'm lost." As the Buddha once said, "Tell me what can't be achieved by striving." The angel was so impressed by his dedication that she picked him up and took him to the edge of the ocean. The Buddha never gave up. That's a good way of summing it up. What does effort mean? He never gave up. That's an example for our effort in meditation. It's not that you have to work really hard; it's that when you fail, when you feel like you just can't do it, you try again. And if you have that capacity to try again when you feel like you just can't do it anymore, that's you perfecting the quality of effort.
6. *Khanti pāramī* — patience. We learn all about patience in meditation. The Buddha had perfect patience — in one life he had his ears, nose, and hands cut off and remained completely unshaken. A king was very angry and jealous, and thought he was stealing the women of his royal harem so he cut off all his limbs, and the Bodhisatta said, "Do

you think my patience is in my limbs, my ears? My patience is deeper than that.” And he died patient in that life and many others.

7. *Sacca pāramī* — the Buddha had great *sacca*. *Sacca* means being true to yourself — being true to a vision or intention. When Māra came and the Buddha was seated under the Bodhi tree, Māra said, “You don’t deserve to be here.” The Buddha said, “I do deserve to be here and the Earth is my witness.” He touched the Earth and Māra was swept away by the power of *sacca*. The Buddha was saying, “You can say I don’t deserve it all you want, but I do deserve to sit here.” It was a very powerful statement of truth. There’s many examples of monks and laypeople using truth with profound effect; Aṅgulimāla is one example.
8. *Adhiṭṭhāna pāramī* — determination. When the Buddha made a determination to become a buddha, he never wavered. When he made a determination for his bowl to float upstream — which can’t usually happen because, you know, bowls don’t float upstream — he made a determination that it should, and it did.
9. *Mettā pāramī* — the Buddha’s friendliness. The Bodhisatta cultivated friendliness, even when people were angry at him.
10. *Upekkhā pāramī* — equanimity. He didn’t look at one person or another as greater or lesser. He cultivated the capacity to not be attached and partial.

These are the ten *pāramitās*. These are the things that the Buddha gave birth to.

Birth of Experience

On an ultimate level, birth refers to the birth of a moment of experience. Every time an emotion arises, that’s the birth of that emotion, and suffering arises. Of course, the Bodhisatta also gave birth to suffering, as we all do. Birth as a human is birth of suffering, and birth of things that can cause you suffering. Part of our practice is to be aware of birth when it occurs on a momentary level so that it doesn’t lead to future suffering. When an experience arises, it doesn’t need to cause suffering. It will only lead to suffering if you cling to it or get caught up in it. And so we’re very much concerned with birth. We’re also concerned with death, which is something we can talk about at the next place maybe. But we’re concerned about the birth of experiences, because we’re concerned with how we relate to them. It’s something that’s very important to us. When you feel pain, for example, something is born, and how you deal with it is very important. That pain could cause you a lot of suffering if you let it. When someone says something to you, it is merely the birth of sound, that sound was born. It is a very important birth, however, because that sound could cause you to react in many different ways. When you hear sound, smell scents, taste food, or feel bodily sensations, these all can cause you to respond positively or negatively. So birth of experience is a very important thing, and this is why as mediators we strive to observe our experiences with clarity and purity. We look at the world

as a continuous birthing of experiences, and this is a second type of birth. We should reflect on both types of birth when we think of the significance of this place.

Celebrating the Birth of the Buddha

Coming here is a good reason to talk about both types of birth, putting the conventional and experiential levels together. We come here to celebrate the Buddha's birth in the conventional sense, as a means of giving birth ourselves to wholesome qualities of reverence, respect, and appreciation. We come here to revere this monumentous event, where the Buddha was finally born in his last life, where he would become the Buddha and give birth to the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, and we would all be able to be here to have this precious Dhamma.

Enlightenment

Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya, India

February 7th, 2020

The Buddha's Enlightenment

At one time in the far distant past, there was an ascetic named Sumedha. He was one of the greatest ascetics in all of the world, renowned throughout India as a highly spiritually advanced individual, and he lived in the Himalaya mountains. One day he came down from the mountains and heard that a Buddha had arisen. He thought to himself, "Surely, if I listen to the Buddha's teaching, I will be able to free myself from suffering." At that time the people were clearing a path for the Buddha to walk, and he thought, "Well this would be a great act of merit," and so he joined them.

When he saw the Buddha coming, however, he realized that with his great spiritual attainments he could himself become a Buddha. Instead of listening to the Buddha's teachings, he could make a vow to one day be just like that, a Buddha. So, instead of waiting to listen to the Buddha's teaching, he lay himself down in the mud, and determined that his body should act as a bridge across the uneven muddy landscape. Even though he would probably die as a result of being trod on by the Buddha and all of the monks, he made a determination to sacrifice his life as a sign of his commitment to becoming a Buddha himself. Dīpaṅkara Buddha saw him lying there and confirmed to the monks, "You see that ascetic lying in the mud? One day he will become a Buddha."

And then for four *asaṅkheyyā* and 100,000 great aeons, this ascetic was born and died, born and died, spending countless lifetimes cultivating the perfections. The time that it took for Sumedha to become enlightened was four *asaṅkheyyā* and 100,000 great aeons. The word *asaṅkheyya* means uncountable, but to get an idea of what it's like, suppose you had a pit, 16 kilometers wide, 16 kilometers across, and 16 kilometers deep, and every hundred *deva*-years someone were to drop a grain of rice into the pit. A hundred years as a *deva* is about three and a half million human years. So every three and a half million years, if one were to drop a grain of rice into the pit, then eventually the pit would fill up with rice. Once it was full, suppose someone were to take a grain of rice out every three and a half million years. The pit would become full and empty again before an *asaṅkheyya* had passed; an *asaṅkheyya* is longer than that. Four *asaṅkheyyā* and 100,000 *mahākappā* is how long it took to reach the moment of the Buddha's enlightenment — a long time.

In his last birth, the Buddha-to-be was born as Siddhattha in Lumbini and grew up in Kapilavatthu. After twenty-nine years, he left home, practiced with two teachers and tortured himself for six years before coming to Bodh Gaya under the Bodhi tree and realizing that neither

torturing himself nor engaging in sensual pleasures was the way to find enlightenment. He found the Middle Way.

He spent all night under the Bodhi tree. In the first watch of the night, he remembered his past lives. He remembered he'd been many things; a human, an animal, a god, an angel.

In the second watch of the night, he started to think about what it means to be reborn. Not just the fact that we are born as many different things, but that there are reasons why we're born in different ways. He saw beings arising and passing away according to their karma, the state of their minds, the habits and the qualities of mind that they cultivated. He could see how these things affected people. He was able to understand how beings were reborn as they are.

In the third watch of the night, he understood cause and effect. Not just in terms of births and deaths, but also how it occurs from moment to moment. *Avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā* — people, because of their ignorance, because they don't understand what they're doing, sometimes do good things and sometimes do bad things, floating around aimlessly on an ocean of *saṃsāra*.

Then he saw more precisely, *saṅkhāra-paccayā viññāṇaṃ; viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ*, etc. Consciousness leads to experience, and experience leads to craving, which leads to clinging, which leads to becoming, which leads us to create and to be reborn. It was based on that understanding, in brief, that he was able to free himself from the causes of suffering, and therefore free himself from suffering, attaining enlightenment.

This is the place where, as the Buddha said, “*cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.*” — Vision arose, knowledge arose, wisdom arose, science arose, light arose. Kusinārā, the place of the Buddha's death, is maybe the most peaceful place on Earth; well, this place is like the brightest place on Earth. This is where the light of the Buddha arose — the light of enlightenment.

What Enlightenment Is Not

It's important to understand what enlightenment is not, as there are many different ideas, even within Buddhism itself, of what enlightenment means. For example, many types of Buddhism talk about putting aside one's own freedom from suffering, and putting aside one's own attainment as a means of enlightenment. The problem with this sort of view is that it is unable to bring about a meaningful goal. It rests on two assumptions: first, that you could ever come to an end of helping — that you could possibly help everyone, and second, that it actually helps someone for you to interact with them without being enlightened yourself. The latter assumption is that you, yourself, not being free from suffering, should free someone else from suffering, or that you, yourself, not being free from ignorance, should help someone else become free from ignorance. The reality of it is that your interactions with other unenlightened people are going to be mixed, both good and bad, depending on your own defilements, ignorance, etc. This is why without people doing the sort of thing that the Buddha did, you see

the world constantly going back and forth between good and evil. So, living dedicated to helping others is not, itself, enlightenment.

Another thing that is not enlightenment is the path and the practice that we do. We have to understand that our practice isn't enlightenment. There is often an idea that the benefit we get from mindfulness meditation, from seeing clearly, is somehow the goal of the practice. Sometimes mindfulness meditation is presented in such a way that it appears that the peace and clarity that come from being mindful is the goal, and that enlightenment is therefore somehow a gradual process. Not to say that our practice is disconnected from enlightenment, but enlightenment is not the practice itself. What we practice when we practice mindfulness is called the preliminary path. We're practicing all of the qualities of the Eightfold Noble Path, we're practicing in line with the Four Noble Truths, but all of it could disappear if we were to stop practicing. Furthermore, it's not powerful enough to categorically and completely change the nature of the mind. It is like rubbing together two pieces of wood when you want to light a fire. The heat from rubbing them together is leading to fire but until you have the ignition you can't say that you've lit the fire. And as soon as you stop rubbing the wood together, the heat begins to disappear.

What Enlightenment Is

Enlightenment is the clearest possible experience of reality, so it is very much related to our experience of mundane reality. It's not something esoteric or remote or mysterious. When our clarity of mind becomes perfect, then the mind has the power to free us from suffering. It has the power to give rise to a moment of insight where we are perfectly in tune with the Four Noble Truths.

Our practice of fully understanding suffering, of abandoning the origin of suffering, of becoming free from suffering as a result, and of cultivating the path — all of these things build gradually and eventually lead to us seeing that everything that arises is *dukkha*. We see that nothing is worth clinging to, that there is nothing that can satisfy us. There's nothing that we can attain or obtain that will bring us true happiness. The objects of our experience are not worth engaging in and not worth giving rise to craving for. We see clearly how craving leads to suffering.

As a result of seeing the truth of how craving leads to suffering, we have a moment where our minds cease all craving and release us from the incessant arising of experience — seeing and hearing and smelling and tasting and feeling and thinking. We have a moment where we're perfectly in line with the Eightfold Noble Path; where our way of looking at the world is perfect — right view, right thought and so on; where there are no imperfections to our perception. This moment is the moment of enlightenment.

More About The Buddha's Enlightenment

When we talk about the Buddha's enlightenment, we mean two things: the ability that the Buddha had to present or teach the four noble truths, and the actual realization of them for himself. When the Buddha realized enlightenment, he became free from suffering. But he also understood what it was that he had attained. That is why we talk about the difference between someone who follows the Buddha and someone who becomes a Buddha. For all of us, we have followed after the Buddha. We have undertaken the practice according to his teaching. He has set forth the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path, and we follow accordingly. But we ourselves don't necessarily have the ability to explain and describe the practice to others. Our practice doesn't allow us to explain or understand clearly what the Four Noble Truths are. There is often confusion about the difference between becoming a Buddha and the follower of the Buddha. We have to understand that the experience of freedom from suffering is the same. The Buddha quite clearly explained that there's no difference between his freedom from suffering and our freedom from suffering. There's no difference between his freedom from defilements and our freedom from defilements. But he also had the clarity and the depth of mind to be able to teach, to understand, and to pass it on. That's the difference.

Enlightenment and Practice

And so, enlightenment is not a hard thing to understand. It's the culmination of practice. It's good for us to occasionally think about this concept of enlightenment that so many people are wishing for, striving for, and making vows to attain. But it's important in terms of our practice to focus on the cause. The cause is what we call the preliminary path — the practice. Enlightenment is never the practice; enlightenment is never the focus of practice — it's simply the perfection of practice. As they say, "Practice makes perfect." That's a good summary of the Buddhist path.

For someone who is content with simply being mindful without putting out effort until they realize enlightenment — that's not enough, and for someone who puts aside enlightenment to stay in the world to help others — that's ignoring the fact that to free someone from suffering, you have to be free. You have to be able to engage with them in a way that is free from the causes of suffering, and most importantly you have to understand that enlightenment is something that comes from within you. You can't enlighten someone else. You can't share your enlightenment, and ultimately your enlightenment is not going to allow you to help everyone.

We put enlightenment up as an ideal of perfection that we're working towards. We should understand suffering and not suffer from it. We should understand the things that cause suffering and not let them cause us suffering. We should see how our clinging to things — liking them, disliking them, trying to fix them, and all of the defilements in our mind are only causing us suffering. We should let go and let our minds become free from suffering. We should cultivate

further and further the qualities that allow us to become free from suffering — the wholesome qualities of right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Stages of Enlightenment

Regarding our practice, we have what we call the four stages of enlightenment.

For a person who hasn't practiced to the extent that they attain this experience of letting go, their old habits of mind are merely repressed and can always come back. We can change for the better by practicing meditation, but we can also change back to our old selves if we stop meditating in this life or the next.

But a person who attains enlightenment, that one moment where their experience of reality is perfect, that person changes their foundation of experience and existence. It is called *gotrabhū*, which means changing your lineage, family, or bloodline. You're no longer part of the old family of ordinary individuals. You're a different kind of person.

1. The first type of enlightened person we call a ***sotāpanna***, “one who has attained the stream”. Simply having an experience of enlightenment once means you've entered the stream to enlightenment. The Buddha said such a person will only be born a maximum of seven more lifetimes. They've given up wrong view because they've seen what is right. They've seen something about reality that has no limit — meaning it applies to the entire universe. Everything ceases. When you have this experience of cessation there is nothing that is left out, nothing that does not cease, or is not subject to cessation. Everything that arises is subject to cessation. A person who has realized this has no doubts. They have no doubt about this because they've seen it for themselves and have no confusion about what is right practice and what is wrong practice. They have no belief that there are other rituals, prayers, austerities, or anything else that might be a part of the path, or a precursor to enlightenment. They've practiced seeing clearly, and they've come to understand that enlightenment simply means a moment of clear experience where the mind lets go, making no connection with anything at all; a moment where there is no contact with seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling or even cognizing; a moment where there is no mental or physical arising and no memory of it. Such an experience is beyond memory. You don't even remember it happening, but you know it happened after the fact. You know it happened, but you don't know what it was, because there was no memory, no perception, and no apperception.
2. ***Sakadāgāmi***, “once-returner” is the second stage of enlightenment. Such a person will only be born one more time at most, because they've experienced cessation repeatedly to the extent that clinging has been reduced almost to eradication. They

have not eradicated it, but they've reduced it so much that you could say such a person only has one more lifetime's worth of it.

3. The third stage of enlightenment is ***anāgāmi***, "non-returner". An *anāgāmi* has eradicated aversion and sensual desire. By further clarity and further experience of cessation, they have come to the point where there's no more potential for anger or craving for sensuality. They have eradicated both through understanding. *Anāgāmi* means they won't come back. They will be reborn in the higher *Brahmā* realms but never again as a human or angel.
4. And the fourth stage of enlightenment we call ***arahant***. *Arahant* simply means one who is worthy. When an *arahant* passes away, there is no returning. There is no coming back. There is no further arising of mental or physical experience. Such a person has done away with ignorance. They've done away with conceit. They've done away with any kind of mental clutter or chatter. They've done away with any desire for even intellectual or spiritual pursuits. They've attained the same freedom from suffering as the Buddha. They still live and continue their current life, they still teach, they still help others, but like the Buddha, when their physical body dies, there is no more arising for them.

Without the Buddha's enlightenment there would be no *arahants*. Without the *arahants* there would be no practice of mindfulness to this day. There wouldn't even be people thinking of putting aside enlightenment if there hadn't been a Buddha who had gained enlightenment for himself. So remembering the Buddha's enlightenment and what it means is an important part of our pilgrimage. Buddha means one who is enlightened or one who is awakened. It's an apt name because that is the focus in Buddhism. It's not on worship, ritual, or moral precepts. The focus in Buddhism is on wisdom, understanding, and enlightenment.

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

Dhamekh Stupa, Sarnath, India

January 29th, 2020

The Buddha's First Discourse

When the Buddha arrived at Isipatana and met the five ascetics, they were skeptical of his enlightenment. They said among themselves, "Here comes Gotama, who gave up the holy life. Look at him, he's fat and healthy again." They agreed among themselves that they wouldn't pay respect to him, but once he came close they couldn't help themselves and waited on him as they had previously. They were still rude, however, until the Buddha asked them, "Have I ever spoken this way before? Have I ever claimed omniscience and perfect enlightenment before?" And they replied, "No indeed, venerable sir," using the respectful address *bhante*. Then the Buddha said, "Listen, I have something to tell you." Then he taught the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. *Pavattana* means turning, *cakka* is a wheel, and *dhamma* is the Dhamma. So the discourse is called "Turning of the Dhamma Wheel". It was given that name afterwards of course. It doesn't relate to the actual teaching in the sutta, it relates to the significance of it — this was the first moment of the Buddha's life where a teaching caused another human being to become a *sotāpanna*, experiencing a release from suffering for the first time.

Self-Mortification

The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta is separated into two parts: the Middle Way and the actual turning of the wheel of Dhamma. The Buddha did this because his audience, the five ascetics, were intent on the practice of self-mortification. It is true that the practice of self-mortification was in line with the accepted wisdom on the spiritual life at that time, so it may not have been just for the benefit of the five ascetics, but it definitely was for their benefit. The Middle Way has come to gain a lot of significance in Buddhism, but here it is directed particularly at this specific wrong view that, because engaging in sensuality is wrong, then the opposite practice of seeking out pain would have to be right. It's understandable why one might think that, especially if they're ignorant and unenlightened, which is really the problem.

It is of course wrong to think that if indulgence is bad, then the opposite should be the way to live. You can see examples of this wrong view even in the world, secular people devoting themselves to work, devoting themselves to some secular ambition as a means of directing their energies, and ending up very stressed, but having a sense that it is the right way to live. Business people often do this, believing they are successful. There are a lot of other reasons why ambition in business is wrong, but to some extent it is a form of self-torture, where you think to yourself, "I know being lazy and indulgent is wrong, and all these other people who just live for sensuality — I know they've got it wrong, but I've got it right, because I'm not lazy and

indulgent like them.” At the time of the Buddha, the religious form of this view was actual explicit torture. You can see this in the movie *The Little Buddha*, where they actually show some examples of religious self-torture. But it’s in the original Buddhist texts as well.

In the original texts they talk about lying on a bed of nails — that was a common practice, standing on one leg, or not eating. The Buddha tried all of these things. He practiced them for six years, and he eventually came to understand that he couldn’t go any further without killing himself. He pushed himself to such an extreme that he said, “If I were to continue, not even push harder, but just continue to do what I’m doing, then I will die.” That, in and of itself, wasn’t the final thought that made him abandon those practices. What truly caused him to understand their futility was when he realized that he had gained no wisdom whatsoever from any of his extreme practice. He had gone not one step closer to understanding reality, finding the deathless, or getting beyond old age, sickness, and death. That’s the real point. We can see how many religious practices are like that, even so-called Buddhist practices.

Rituals

In our tradition we are often critical of people who dedicate themselves to the practice of *samatha* meditation. And I think, to some extent, it’s fair to criticize those who practice only *samatha* meditation for a long time. *Samatha* meditation is quite comfortable and pleasant, but doesn’t ever go further than that; no wisdom comes from it. Such pleasant but useless practice is more common in other religions that value faith or ritual. This was certainly the case in the time of the Buddha, when many religious practitioners valued their rituals and trance practices but didn’t gain anything from them. For example, since before the time of the Buddha, people have believed in the purification of bathing in the Ganga River, with some travelling all the way up to the river’s source, thinking that it would lead to their purification. The reality is that someone who bathes in the Ganga river is no less angry, no less greedy, and no less deluded than before they bathed in the river Ganga.

In the Jātaka, there is a story where Sakka, the Buddhist equivalent of a heavenly god or archangel, comes down from heaven and approaches the Bodhisatta. The story is called the Kaṇha Jātaka, the Black Jātaka, because the Bodhisatta is dark-skinned. Sakka sees that the Bodhisatta practicing meditation quite intently and tries to shake him by insulting him for his black color. The Bodhisatta replies calmly that black isn’t in skin color, it’s in the nature of deeds. Appreciating his wisdom, Sakka praises him and offers him one wish. The Bodhisatta says, “I wish that no one should be harmed by me. I wish that I should have no hatred for any being.” In many religions, the focus is on getting something from an external source. As the Bodhisatta makes clear, the important things in life cannot be bestowed by an external source. You can ask God for anything but the question is, can God make you so you have no anger? Other religions might say that, yes, with faith it is possible. As Buddhists, however, we know that such faith is very superficial—a useful but temporary repression of your hatred and delusion. To really free yourself from mental defilements, you have to cultivate higher states of wisdom and understanding. Certainly you can’t just say, “Please God, let me not be angry, let me not be

lustful.” If that were the case then all those terrible child-molesting priests, many of whom probably tried to pray away their pedophilia, would be free from the states of mind that drove them to such terrible acts. Even though we rightfully say these are evil people, many of them likely do feel guilty—it’s very hard to be an evil person and not feel some guilt. Some of them probably don’t; they’re too far gone, but either way, the point is that prayers don’t work. We see this also in Buddhist circles, with praying to the Buddha and chanting. Prayers and chantings are insufficient to free oneself from suffering. Although they are helpful and supportive, they are too superficial to have the transformative power necessary to eradicate defilement.

The Middle Way

So, in his first discourse, the Buddha pointed out this prevalent dichotomy in religious thought. Many people were engaged in base, useless practices of indulgence and sensuality, and the Buddha called that wrong. He called it, “*Hīno gammo pothujjaniko*,” where *hīno* means inferior, *gammo* means the way of secular society, and *pothujjaniko* means it is for someone full of defilements, known sometimes as a worldling. You might not say that sensuality is “evil”, but as the Buddha was talking to ascetics, this was something they could agree wasn’t the correct way to free oneself from suffering. Then he said there’s this other way, the way of torturing oneself: *attakilamathānuyoga*, meaning dedicating oneself to suffering, or making oneself suffer. Of this he said, “*dukkho anariyo anattasamphito*,” which means suffering in this way is not the way of a noble one; it is useless and not connected with any benefit. He said that these two extremes, for someone who has gone forth, are not to be engaged in — “*Dveme, bhikkhave, antā pabbajitena na sevitaḥḥā*.” A point that has been made explicit here is that they should not be partaken of, at all. Sometimes the Middle Way is misunderstood as describing moderation. In this instance, and really in most instance where the Buddha talked about *majjhimā paṭipadā*, the Middle Way, it didn’t mean anything like moderation. It meant absolutely not engaging in either of the extremes. The Middle Way is like a razor’s edge in that sense. Or, it’s like the default. The problem isn’t what we aren’t inclined towards, it is what we *are* inclined towards. We’re inclined in both the direction of both extremes and once you give up both inclinations entirely, what is left is something very pure, very simple, and very peaceful. Having given up these two, the Buddha found the Middle Way — *majjhimā paṭipadā tathāgatena abhisambuddhā*. It led to light; it led to wisdom. This is the first part of the sutta.

The Four Noble Truths

Next, the Buddha asks, “What is that Middle Way of the Eightfold Noble Path?” This is the point where he begins to turn the Wheel of Dhamma, which means teaching the Four Noble Truths. As the Middle Way is the Fourth Noble Truth, he is repeating himself, but here he is framing his teachings around the Four Noble Truths as the framework. That’s important because it is the essence of Buddhism, the core teaching.

A problem often lies in how the Four Noble Truths are understood. For example, it is often said that for the First Truth the Buddha taught that life is suffering, and of course that's not what the First Noble Truth is. The Buddha starts by saying simply, "*idaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ'ti me bhikkhave*" — there is this Noble Truth of suffering. He simply lists the Four Noble Truths as they are. For the First Noble Truth, *jātipi dukkhā*, birth is suffering, old age is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, and despair are suffering. He outlines the simple truth of the many ways in which we suffer. What's profound here is that he's making that the essence of his religion and that's why people, and even the Buddha himself, refer to him as a physician. It is a very clinical approach to religion. Not to say that other religions don't talk about relieving suffering and finding happiness. Of course to some extent they do, but this is the core of Buddhism; not God, not faith, not ritual or anything else, just suffering. The last thing he says about the first noble truth is also very profound and something that we should always remember. He says that on an ultimate level, it is the five aggregates of clinging that are suffering. This is important because it relates to the Second Noble Truth, the cause of suffering.

The Second Noble Truth says that the cause of suffering is *taṇhā*, craving — "*Āyaṃ taṇhā ponobbhavikā*," which means craving leads to further becoming. Becoming means both coming into being through rebirth and bringing into being new experiences in this life. Craving leads us to take out a loan to start a business, or to buy a new car, to get married, have children, etc. Due to craving we create things in the world and become entangled in them, which in turn leads to our suffering as we try to protect and maintain our creations, including our own life and livelihood.

The Third Noble Truth is the cessation of suffering. With the cessation of craving comes the cessation of suffering. It is important to notice that this is different from saying certain things are suffering and if you can just avoid all those things then you will not suffer. The truth is that all of the things the Buddha called suffering are suffering because of craving for obtaining or avoiding them, craving for things to be a certain way or not to be a certain way.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the Path. It answers the question of how you arrive at this state of being free from suffering. It is of course simply the Eightfold Noble Path.

A Twelfefold Teaching

The first important thing that the Buddha realized is that there is suffering, that there is a problem to be solved. But, and this applies to all four of the noble truths, he realized two more things about the truth of suffering, and so actually the dhamm wheel is a twelfefold teaching. First he says that realization of this truth was an essential part of his enlightenment. The realization of the truth is called *sacca*, simply "truth".

The second realization is called *kicca*. *Kicca* means "something to be done." It comes from the root *kar* which relates to *kamma*, which means action. So *kicca* is action that should be done. What should you do in regards to suffering? The answer is something that must be

well-understood. What is to be done has nothing to do with running away from or escaping suffering. What is to be done is to understand suffering completely—*pariññeyya*. *Pari* means all around and *ñeyya* means should be known. So suffering should be understood thoroughly and fully from all angles.

The third realization is the state of having done the *kicca*—called *kata*. *Kata* means having done the *kicca*. Once one has come to well and fully understand suffering, then it's *pariññāta*—thoroughly known, or well understood. Once the Buddha knew that he had understood suffering completely, then he had done what needs to be done in regards to the first noble truth.

Each of the Four Noble Truths is set out in this way. There's the truth itself, the *kicca*, and the *kata*. We can say there are just two things: the truth and what you have to do about it. But knowing those two things of course is not enough because one has to have actually done it. This is important. Being content with knowledge from studying, therefore claiming to understand the Four Noble Truths has to be criticized. Unless you're an *arahant*, you don't really know the Four Noble Truths, and that's an important point to make. So, the third realization, *kata*, is perhaps the most important; you have to actually have done the work.

In regards to suffering, it can't be stressed enough how important it is to understand that the thing to be done (*kicca*) is to know it completely. That is what we do with suffering, and that is why mindfulness is so essential. What is the function of mindfulness? It is to confront — not to run away, not to try and fix, not to get caught up in — to confront. “*Visayābhimukhabhāva*” — the manifestation of mindfulness is to confront our experiences.

For the Second Noble Truth, the *kicca*, what is to be done, is to abandon the craving. This of course is effected by the *kicca* of the first noble truth, the facing and understanding. Once you confront experiences without reacting to them and understand them fully, craving can have no hold over you; it simply cannot take root because of the pure state of consciousness. This is why our focus is on purity and a pure state of mind. For example, right now you can have a pure awareness of the feeling of the air around you, the surface you are sitting on, the sounds, the sights, the smells, and so on. We try to cultivate such purity every moment. By doing so, the mind becomes strong and inclines in the right direction, and eventually is able to fall in the right direction, away from suffering.

For the Third Noble Truth, the cessation of suffering, the *kicca* is to see it for ourselves — *sacchikātabbā*. *Kātabbā* is again relating to *kamma*, and *sacchi* literally means with your own eyes. This relates as well to the practice of *vipassanā*. The seeing is metaphorical, not with your eyes, of course. The idea is to see something instead of just believing it, emphasizing the fact that you have to experience it for yourself. It drives home the point that there's a difference between knowing intellectually, “Yeah, I know the Four Noble Truths, so I've realized the Four Noble Truths”, and knowing because you have seen the truth of them from experience. The Third Noble Truth is to be realized for oneself, not just known intellectually.

As to the Fourth Noble Truth, the truth of the path, the *kicca* is *bhāvetabba* — it should be developed. So we develop the Eightfold Noble Path. The path is of course another core part of the Buddhist teaching. The Eightfold Noble Path is a good description of what Buddhism as a practical religion is all about. It covers all aspects of personal development. Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. If you put all of those together, once they become all perfectly developed they will work together for you to free yourself from suffering.

The Buddha ends his discourse by stating that until he realized the Four Noble Truths with these three divisions, making a twelvefold framework (*dvādasākāraṃ*), he didn't claim to be a buddha. Only once he realized these Four Noble Truths, each with their three parts—once he had done what needed to be done in regards to all four of them, then he said, “Among all beings in the world I am a Buddha.”

The rest of the text describes how all the angels in the various heavenly realms responded to the discourse by declaring that the Buddha had turned the Wheel of the Dhamma that will never be unturned, not by any *deva*, *brahmā*, or *māra*. That's an important part of the symbolism of the turning the Wheel because it's an inexorable turning; it's something so powerful that it cannot ever be turned back (*appaṭivattiyaṃ*). When the Buddha had taught the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, apparently the sky opened up, and you could see hell and you could see heaven, and all beings were declaring, “The Buddha has turned the Wheel of the Dhamma!”

Koṇḍañña and the Eye of Dhamma

In regards to the human audience, one of the five ascetics was the brahman Koṇḍañña. Some of you may recall that he was the only one who, at the birth of the bodhisatta, said that this prince would definitely become a buddha, whereas others whose prophecy was requested had said that he might either be a great king or a buddha. It is said that Koṇḍañña was a brother of Subhadda, the last person to become enlightened under the Buddha's actual direct guidance. Just before the Buddha passed into *parinibbāna* he taught Subhadda, whereas Koṇḍañña was the first person to become enlightened under the Buddha's guidance. The story is that when they were brothers in a past life, they decided to give a gift to a Buddha who had arisen in their time. Koṇḍañña said, “Let's give the first rice that we harvest, young rice.” Subhadda, his older brother, said, “What are you crazy? Nobody gives unripe rice. You have to wait until the rice is fully developed before you give it as a gift.” But Koṇḍañña wanted to give right away, so he said, “Well then we'll cut the field in half, and you give whatever you want from yours.” And so Koṇḍañña gave the young rice to the Buddha, and Subhadda waited until it was very well developed, and then he gave the dry rice. As a result of those two *kammās*, one of them was the first person to fully understand the Buddhist teaching, and one of them was the last. That's the story of why Koṇḍañña happened to be the Buddha's first disciple.

In the sutta it says that while the Buddha was teaching there arose in Koṇḍañña the *dhammacakkhu*, the Eye of Dhamma, which is described as the realization “*Yaṃ kiñci samudaya dhammaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ nirōdha dhammam*”, which means whatever has a nature to arise, all of that is of a nature to cease. This is in fact a description of the realization of *nibbāna*. In *nibbāna* there is complete and utter cessation of suffering. The experience of *nibbāna* is so profound, it's considered to be the sole difference between a *puthujjana* and an *ariya*. So at that moment Koṇḍañña became a *sotāpanna*. And the Buddha looked at him and said, “*aññāsi vata bho, koṇḍañño, aññāsi vata bho, koṇḍañño*,” meaning, “Oh Koṇḍañña, you have come to know,” and so from that point he was known as Añña-koṇḍañña, which means, “Koṇḍañña who knows.”

So, Koṇḍañña became a *sotāpanna*, and each day after that he and the Buddha went out for alms, while the other four stayed at the monastery and practiced meditation in solitude. The Buddha and Koṇḍañña brought food back for all of them, and the Buddha taught the others every day until all five of them, five days later, became *sotāpannā*. Once they were all *sotāpannā* he taught what is called the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*, the discourse on non-self. In that discourse he taught them see that nothing has a core, that our way of looking at things as being entities is conceptual, and that a much more real way of looking at things, and the deeper reality, is that there is no self and no soul in anything, and that reality doesn't admit of such concepts. Reality is based on experience and it is this sort of change in perception, in worldview, in your paradigm, where you begin to see things just as being experientially based.

Life

Vulture Peak, Rajgir, India

February 5th, 2020

So here we are at Gijjhakuta near Rājagaha, the ancient city in the mountains. Gijjhakuta means "Vulture Peak," because supposedly these rocks behind us, 2600 years ago, looked like a vulture. They still kind of do.

We've come to many places outside of the four holy sites — the four places recommended by the Buddha, or that the Buddha said were beneficial for one to visit on a pilgrimage. We have seen the place of the Bodhisatta's birth. We're seeing the place where the Bodhisatta became enlightened — that we'll be seeing next, the place where he first taught, and the place where he passed away. Those are the four main sites. But there are many other sites worth seeing that represent highlights of the Buddha's life, and Gijjhakuta is one of those places.

You could say that our visits to these sites are a celebration of the Buddha's life. It's the one thing that's missing from the four sites, right? We don't have anything that celebrates the Buddha's life, and all the rest of these places do that. Gijjhakuta is a special place in that regard because it's the first place the Buddha chose as a dwelling place. Before coming here, he chose places based on a reason for being there. Bodhi Gaya is where he became enlightened and Isipatana is where he first taught. But as soon as he finished teaching, his choice of places to come was Vulture Peak. Somewhere in the hills, he taught Uruvela Kassapa, Nadi Kassapa, and Gayā Kassapa. But once he had taught, this was the place where he chose to live in Rājagaha, before Veḷuvana was given as a monastery. Many places like Jetavana, which we've seen already, were given as monasteries and the Buddha acquiesced to live there. But this place is the sort of place the Buddha himself would choose on his own.

Dukkha

Celebrating the Buddha's life, and celebrating life, seems a little odd. I mentioned earlier that some Buddhists say that life is suffering, that the First Noble Truth is that life is suffering. The Buddha actually makes a note of this. He says that a lot of people say this, but that's not what the First Noble Truth is. And I've brought that up before, and had people comment on it saying, "Well, isn't that just semantics if you say that not all life is suffering? What about the Buddha saying the five aggregates are suffering?" And so I think we should clear up this point, because suffering is such an important Buddhist teaching. We should be clear on what is actually meant by the word *dukkha*. Some people hesitate to translate it as suffering. I'm not so concerned about that, but if you do translate it as suffering, you have to explain what that means. We should also explain what we mean by the five aggregates, as it's also such a very important teaching of the Buddha.

The five aggregates are *rūpa*, physical form; *vēdanā*, feelings; *saññā*, memory or recognition; *saṅkhāra*, thoughts, formations, what you think of something, and how you react to it and extrapolate on it; and *viññāṇa*, consciousness. These are often taken to be thought of as what's here in this body. If you look at this body you say, "This body is made up of five aggregates." The ultimate reality isn't actually like that, because of course the body is just a concept. You look and you see the body. You get a conception in your mind, "I'm my body." You look at the hand and you get a conception that it's a hand. In reality there are only moments of experience: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking. It is these six types of experience that are made up of the five aggregates, and that is what constitutes life from a Buddhist perspective.

So, one could say, "Well if those things are suffering, then that means all of life is suffering, right?" That is an easy conclusion to come to, but it is overly simplistic. The word *dukkha* can be used generally in two different ways. It can mean something that is painful, or it can mean the pain itself, physical or mental. If you're sad, that's suffering. If you're in pain, that's suffering. But as a philosophy, it's like something being hot — fire being hot. Fire is a really good example or analogy. Fire isn't really hot. But we say it's hot because when we touch it, when we grasp it, it burns us. We feel the heat. We feel hot, but that's because we're conscious. So the heat comes from our experience of it. And if we leave it alone, if we don't grasp at it, it's not hot. Now with experience, it's the same. The Buddha didn't actually say the five aggregates are suffering. He said the five aggregates of clinging, or the five aggregates when clung to is suffering. And so that's where the analogy of grasping the fire comes from. Experience is something like fire. If you see a fire in front of you, it's not hot. There's no heat that comes from it until you get close, and even then it's not painful until you put your hand in the fire. We know all of life is not suffering because, of course, an enlightened being has a life. We know this because of the Buddha's own life. It's a very clear aspect of Buddhism. The Buddha didn't immediately disappear from *saṃsāra* and didn't immediately stop having experiences when he became free from suffering.

We can say, in some sense, he was free from suffering but he wasn't free from *dukkha*. What that means is he wasn't free from things that were unsatisfying. He didn't have to be free from them, because they weren't a problem; he wasn't putting his hand in them. That's why mindfulness is so powerful. It's not about escaping suffering. The practice is not about escaping suffering — even though you could say that is a goal — it's about understanding it. And understanding removes the problem, without having to remove the thing that you thought was problematic. It turns out that our experiences aren't problems. It's our reactions to them, the clinging to them — good or bad, me, mine, that are problems.

Celebrating Life

Celebrating life can have a place in Buddhist practice; life can be perfectly wonderful and worth celebrating. The key is in living a life worth celebrating. Ordinarily we talk about celebrating life by living life to its fullest, which can be an important part of Buddhist practice.

For some, celebrating life means seeing life as a blessing to be celebrated and enjoyed. This sort of celebration is very much tied up with sensuality and addiction. Living a life worth celebrating is following the example of the Buddha, who lived a life truly worth celebrating. And so our practice is not about celebrating life by enjoying the pleasures of the senses. It's about cultivating qualities of mind and a state of being that is worth celebrating and rejoicing over.

There are many kinds of life a being might be born into. Life in hell is probably not worth celebrating. The whole point of it being hell is that it's caused by unwholesomeness, by anger. It's not worth celebrating anger or the result of anger. Anger only causes great, great suffering in those people who are born into life in hell as a result.

The animal realm is not really worth rejoicing in. For example, celebrating life as a monkey, who bite each other's eyeballs off, according to what someone said this morning. I've never seen such a thing, but I have heard that they will bite each other's faces off. Life as an animal is rarely a cause for rejoicing as there is much unwholesomeness involved much of the time.

Life as a ghost is not worth celebrating. There are countless ghosts in the world around us, we are told. We have a story, for example, of a ghost who was a backbiter. Backbiting is an English idiom that means speaking behind people's backs—being nice to their faces, but biting them by talking bad about them when they are not looking, turning others against them by spreading a bad report about them or betraying their confidence, etc. And this ghost who did such things, when he was reborn, he literally had long nails, and gouged flesh out of his back every night. He was born with such a crazed state of mind that he was compelled to act so horrifically.

Life as a human is sometimes worth celebrating, and sometimes not. For some humans, their lives are objectively not worth celebrating. This is not to judge or hate those people. It's just the unfortunate truth that they're wasting their lives. Most of us waste at least some of our life in vain and unwholesome pursuits. In Buddhism, we strive to stop wasting our lives. We take people like the Buddha as an example of someone who stopped wasting his life completely. He wasted 29 years of his life engaged in sensual pleasures and royal life, and then another six more he wasted torturing himself. But when he turned 35 years old, he stopped wasting his life.

So we remember the qualities of the Buddha. We remember his greatness, and the forty-five years he spent tirelessly teaching those beings who could understand, as a celebration of his life. When we strive to live a life worth celebrating, we think of the Buddha's life as an example.

The problem with celebrating life, from a Buddhist perspective, is that it is often focussed on enjoyment rather than appreciation. Whether it be celebrating the short time you have in life—*carpe diem*, you only live once, that sort of thing—by indulging in as much sensuality as you can cram into this life; or the Hindu idea of just enjoying the game that you're playing from life to life because it's just an illusion, a game; or the Christian or Muslim idea of eternal heaven;

all of these views focus on results and the enjoyment of happiness. And beings, whether they be humans or even angels, when they get caught up in enjoying happiness, they lose track of what it is that allows them to be happy in the first place.

Why is it that we're even born humans? Why are we surrounded by good people? Why are our relationships beautiful and harmonious? And conversely, why are they not? When we take up this philosophy of celebrating and enjoying life, or even the idea of an eternal heaven, an eternal life of enjoyment and pleasure, we don't realize what the consequences of such sensual enjoyment are. We don't realize that the people who engage in those sorts of hedonism are the first to fight with each other, manipulate each other, be jealous, and become frustrated, angry, and irritated when they don't get their way. We don't realize how such negative qualities of mind arise in proportion to our fixation on happiness and pleasure. It becomes more clear as you cultivate mindfulness that your happiness, actual and true happiness, is in proportion to the causes of happiness that you build and grow. You plant and you cultivate the cause and happiness follows as a result.

Living a Life Worth Celebrating

So in Buddhism that's why "living a life worth celebrating" is a much better perspective on life, because the beautiful, wholesome, and good qualities that you develop are the cause of all happiness. Harmony comes for someone who is generous, kind, caring, thoughtful, mindful, and wise. Their interactions and the relationship with their surroundings are peaceful. We see how peaceful we are on this pilgrimage, even though we might be surrounded by the craziness, chaos, and unpredictability of India, a foreign, developing country. Even though this country might feel very foreign to you, you can see how mindfulness helps you to stay calm and peaceful.

Being here also lets you see that not everyone lives in such luxury as we might have grown up with. We can see that we seem to have simply been lucky in our ability to indulge in sensual pleasure. In Buddhism we would say it's because of our past karma, but regardless, it's certainly not everyone who has the potential to enjoy life the way we might. This is one of the things that the Buddha saw. He saw that even as a king he couldn't escape this potential that he saw in other people — old people, sick people, dead people. He realized that it's not a tenable philosophy to just enjoy life. Celebrating life becomes problematic unless it means living a life worth celebrating, which is, of course, much better.

So how do we live a life worth celebrating? From the Buddha's words in one of the Dhammapada verses, he says,

*Appamādo amatapadam, pamādo maccuno padam.
appamattā na mīyanti, ye pamattā yathā matā.*

appamādo — *māda* means intoxication. *Pamāda* is also intoxication, but here it means a sort of figurative intoxication — being intoxicated by things like sensuality, youth,

strength, life, and health. “Being negligent” is how we often translate it, but “intoxicated” is really the literal meaning. So, *appamāda* means being not intoxicated; having a clear mind, having a sober mind. “Sober” is fairly literal. Sobriety means your mind is clear, unaffected, not inebriated, and not intoxicated.

amatapadaṃ — it's the path. *Pada* means “path”. *Amata* means “not dying”. So it is the path to not dying. The Buddha never talked about eternal life; that would be somewhat misleading. Instead he talked about not dying. You don't have to die.

pamādo maccuno padaṃ — intoxication is the path of death.

appamattā na mīyanti — those who are unintoxicated don't die.

ye pamattā yathā matā — *ye pamattā* means “those who are intoxicated.” *yathā* here means “like those.” *matā* here means “who are dead.” Someone who is intoxicated is like those who are already dead.

*Unintoxication is the path to not dying. Intoxication is the path to death.
Those who are unintoxicated don't die. Those who are intoxicated are already dead.*

Mindfulness

One of the problems people often have with Buddhism is that they see it as is directed towards letting go and leaving *saṃsāra*, freeing yourself from the rounds of rebirth. In practice, however, Buddhism is really about cultivating and attaining a state of life that is worth living, worth celebrating, and conducive of peace and happiness. With all the lives that you might be born into again and again, even though you might enjoy some of them or some parts of them, without mindfulness and clarity of mind, you're not really alive. There's so much stress, suffering, and so much blindness that we are like zombies. People talk about us who practice meditation and say, “Oh, you look like zombies. You must just be like zombies.” Actually it's the opposite. Before we practiced mindfulness we were like zombies, not truly alive.

“Satiyā avippavāso appamādo ti vuccati.” — “Heedfulness is to be called ‘never being without mindfulness.’”

What do we call *appamāda*? *Appamāda* means never being without mindfulness. What we call mindfulness actually means remembering. Mindfulness means the state of having a clear mind that is completely present with the experience. It means you remember the present moment for what it is, not slipping away from the experience into reaction, extrapolation, or identification. It means seeing everything as the five aggregates that make up each experience. These aggregates are our life; they are our reality; they are our experience; and so they are our object of mindfulness and meditation—when we see, when we hear, when we smell, when we

taste, when we feel, and when we think. Mindfulness is the quality of mind that is clearly aware without judgment, identification, or attachment of any sort. It is without anything else besides simple remembrance. When the mind knows seeing is just seeing — *diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ. Sute sutamattaṃ* — hearing is just hearing. When we attain that, it means we're truly living life to its fullest.

Living Life to the Fullest

Living life to its fullest from a Buddhist perspective means when you walk, you are there walking. When you go somewhere, you are there with the act of going. When you talk to someone, you are there talking. The act of talking is the reality. Reality is not, "Oh, I hate this person. I should stop talking to them" or, "Oh, I really like this person. How can I manipulate them to like me?", "Oh, I'm worried. Am I going to say the right thing or the wrong thing?" Instead, talking is your reality. Walking is your reality. Eating and drinking are your reality. When you eat, you eat; you don't talk, think, crave, or like. And thus you are present. You are here and now.

It might seem that you lose a lot of what life has to offer as a result of this practice; you may say, "You can't like or dislike things? That's not truly living." We see, however, that this practice of clarity and objectivity is truly invigorating, as well as peaceful and comfortable at all times. The truth of it is that giving up liking and disliking means letting go. We let go of all our baggage; our attachments, partialities, and judgments are just extra baggage that carries for us nothing but stress and suffering.

People come to meditation practice usually because they wonder, "Why do I suffer so much? Why is there stress in my mind?" People who have mental illnesses come wondering, "Why am I so depressed and anxious? How can I free myself from these things? Please, let me find any way to free myself from these things." Through the practice of mindfulness we realize that it is simply our inability to be present that causes us stress and suffering. By giving up everything but the reality of our experience, we find great peace, happiness, and freedom from suffering. We find life in the present moment.

Death

Parinirvana Stupa, Kushinagar, India

February 4th, 2020

Here we are at the Mahāparinibbāna stupa. This is the place where the Buddha passed into *parinibbāna* or *anupādisesa nibbāna*. We might colloquially say that he died here, so today we'll talk a little bit about death. Again, like the Buddha's birth, the Buddha's death might seem like less of a cause for celebration than his enlightenment. Indeed, when the Buddha passed away, there was great sadness. Those monks who had not yet gained insight into impermanence were quite sad—crying, moaning, and suffering because of the loss of the Buddha. When we come here now, however, we can feel a sense of peace. When I first came here, that peaceful feeling made me realize that there is something very significant about the Buddha's *parinibbāna* that we don't often catch. Coming here for the first time was a real eye opener, or mind opener, to how important the Buddha's passing really was, due to the profound sense of peace we still feel when we think of his final resting place. In many ways, you could say this is where peace exists. This is where you find the greatest peace on earth.

Three Types of Death

In Buddhism, there are three kinds of death and each of them plays an important role in the teaching. The first kind of death is called *samutti maraṇa*—conceptual death. This is the death we're familiar with. When we use the word “death,” we're most often talking about conceptual death. We don't use the word “conceptual” and don't even think of it as conceptual. When a person dies, we call that death. We know, however, that our conception of someone's death is merely an external observation. We see that the person died, but their experience of it is categorically different. The death that we think occurred didn't occur as such for the individual. The death that occurred was only the death of the body, which is only a concept as well.

The conceptual death of a being is important, nonetheless, regardless of what you believe about reincarnation, rebirth, the continuation of the mind after death, or the arising of future minds based on the last mind in the last life. Think of all the changes that you've had to endure, and all the tests you've had to pass, fail, or muddle through; there may be events in your life that are more challenging and trying than death, but there is nothing so significant as death. There is nothing that so radically curtails or limits our plans and ambitions.

Ambition, growth, success, pleasure, possession, relationship, everything we strive for in the world, everything we build, the connections we make with other people, places and things we build relationships with — we lose all of them. We give them all up. We know this because no matter how well you guard from other kinds of loss, the loss of life is inevitable. It is ultimate and unavoidable. It was this understanding of death, along with old age and sickness, that caused the Bodhisatta to leave home. Death was the catalyst for his great renunciation. We saw

the gate yesterday where the Bodhisatta left home. Why did he leave the palace where he had riches, pleasure, and everything he could have asked for in the world? They say he left a future where he could have been king of the world; why did he give it up? Death. He realized that all of it was subject to death. He said, "Myself being subject to death, I strove after things that were also subject to death, and then I thought, 'What if I try and find something that is beyond death?'"

I think all of us struggle with this in our lives as we're growing up. We realize that our parents are going to die and everyone around us is going to pass away. The realization that we are going to die limits everything — our ambitions, and so on. The Buddha pointed this understanding as the sort of defining factor in whether you could call someone developed or undeveloped. He said for some people, and he himself was in that category, all they have to do is hear and learn about death—it doesn't have to be someone they know, a relative, or even themselves in danger of death. Just the realization that it's a fact of life immediately gives rise to the impulsion to find a way out, and to do something to prepare themselves for death.

At the very least, if you can't attain that which frees you from death, be ready for it, as ready as you can. Most of us go through lives forgetting about the fact that we are going to die, or not preparing ourselves. Most of our time is not spent preparing. You might think that to always be preparing for death is a pretty dreary way to go through life, but ordinarily we do something much worse; we build up potential problems for when we die. We don't realize that when we die, we will face the consequences of all of our life's activities. When we die our life flashes before our eyes and as the body breaks apart we are forced to confront the raw state of our mind. Could you imagine being left alone with your own mind and that is all you have as your refuge? If most people knew the true nature of their minds, they would be shocked to have to be faced with it. For some, they will need to see someone they know, a relative, or a friend die for death to become real for them. For some people it takes until they themselves are dying. And some are never stirred by those truly stirring things of old age, sickness, and death. They never take time to prepare, and so they are not prepared. Many do not even have any concept of preparation, so they are tossed about in the oceans of *samsāra* from life to life.

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Momentary Death

There is another more profound, more real type of death that gives rise to the impression of conceptual death; that is momentary death — the reality of experience. Every experience is born and dies; given that experience is the basis of reality, we are born and die every moment. It is not even really a "we"; it is an experience. The sound of my voice, for example, and the hearing of the sound of my voice arise together and they cease together—there is no being or entity involved.

When we die, this arising and ceasing continues on. The conceptual identities of body and mind fall apart, and come and go, but the physical and mental experiences continue in various forms. This process constitutes the basis of our meditation practice; it is the objective field within which we practice and the fertile soil in which wisdom can grow. Wisdom grows out of experience, starting with *nāmarūpa pariccheda ñāṇa*, where we begin to see the world from an experiential point of view, and that concepts of body, mind, me, and I are only a product of physical and mental experiences. In the end there is only the physical and mental aspects of experience that arise and cease moment by moment.

Having seen the truth of physical and mental experience, we next begin to see cause and effect, how body and mind work together to build us up in this life, creating *abhisāṅkhārā*—good and bad karma. We understand how our karmic habits of mind go with us through life and lead us to future birth after we die. Then, through further meditation practice we see the chaos, the impermanence, suffering, and non-self of this process. We come to see that the idea of permanence is a silly, foolish one. The idea that something could be born and not die has no basis in reality and so we see that our striving for stability and permanence is futile and wrongheaded. We see suffering. We see our desire to be satisfied. Suffering just means we can't be satisfied. We can't find happiness in anything because happiness is not a thing you find in something else; it's a quality of mind. It comes from contentment. It comes from having everything you could ever want, which means either you get what you want all the time, or you stop wanting—and we know which one of those is unattainable. So we learn to find real happiness by letting go. We see non-self and that our way of looking at things as me, mine, and entities is conceptual in the mind. The body is conceptual. The self that we think of is just conceptual. Reality is moments of experience. We see that. We see arising and ceasing. We see cessation.

Cessation

Cessation becomes the focus of our practice. Everything passes away. Nothing is worth clinging to because in a moment it's gone. This is what allows us to become disenchanted and turn away from *saṃsāra*. As we turn away, we seek out the deathless. We seek out something that is not subject to death. Simply seeing again and again the nature of all of the things that we might cling to as subject to death brings us to the point of equanimity. Finally we look upon everything as the same. Nothing is greater or lesser than anything else. No thing is of any consequence. No thing can make us happy or satisfy us. No thing can possibly be the goal or the solution to our suffering. Everything comes and everything goes. Deeper and deeper we begin to realize this to be the truth with increasing clarity. “*Yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ sabbantaṃ nirodhadhammaṃ*”—what Koṇḍañña saw in the Isipatana Deer Park, that everything that is of a nature to arise is also of a nature to cease. That is the significance of momentary death. That is the most significant understanding of our meditation practice.

Death By Cutting Off

The third type of death is even more significant than the previous two. Our practice would not be complete without the third type of death called *samuccheda maraṇa*, which literally means “death by cutting off.” *Samuccheda maraṇa* means the cutting off and death of defilement and evil, that which causes suffering, clinging, craving, and ignorance. This is the death that we seek in Buddhism. In fact, it's the most uplifting of all teachings really. Some people say Buddhism is pessimistic. Someone came to the Buddha and said, “Do you teach nihilism?” He said, “Yes, there's a way you could say that. What is the way? I teach the annihilation of evil.” People might talk about us as being negative, obsessed with death, and so on. So yes, the death of evil is our most essential focus.

That is what we have here at the Mahāparinibbāna stupa. It is what is so profound and important about the *parinibbāna*. Here we have an example of the cessation of defilement and suffering. When someone who still has defilements dies, they are inevitably reborn again. The significance of what the Buddha attained in Bodh Gaya under the Bodhi tree is that he freed himself from rebirth, death, and the causes of suffering. He didn't seek out heaven, riches, wealth, or power. He sought out purity and a state of mind that was free from, had destroyed, cut off, killed, and brought about the death of all states that one might ever call evil. That is our goal. That is the path of Buddhism. That is what our practice is all about — *samuccheda maraṇa*. A person who sees the reality that everything which arises ceases cuts off their defilements. That is the whole point and purpose of our practice and of that realization. Our clinging and craving comes from holding on to some hope, belief, or idea that we can find something to satisfy us, that some thing is going to make us happy. This experience of letting go and the profound observation or experience of cessation that comes from meditation tells you that there isn't any such thing; there is no underlying, continuous, permanent thing that doesn't die, that can make us happy or satisfy us. There is no reason to get angry, to crave, to cling. There is no benefit that comes from these things. From the realization of these things, there comes a clarity and a purity of mind. The mind of the enlightened one sees things arising and ceasing as they are with perfect clarity and is thus freed from any attachment to any thing in the universe.

As we all think of ourselves as living our lives, why aren't we always happy and at peace? We think it is because we don't have what we want, or because we have what we don't want. Through our Buddhist practice we come to realize that our lack of peace is not because of any of that; our stress and conflict are because of the wanting and the not wanting and through our practice we cut both of these things off. We cut off our prejudices, our reactivity, and our biases and partialities. We see that everything arises and ceases, and so the delusions inside of us that cause us to suffer die off. That is *samuccheda maraṇa*. That is what the Buddha accomplished, what he found under the Bodhi tree; all of the 45 years after that was simply the remainder of the results of the karma that he had performed in his past, like a victory lap, where he spent his time teaching tirelessly and without any selfish interest. What we have here in Kusinārā, then, is the fruition, proof, ultimate victory, and ultimate freedom where the Buddha

gave this final teaching to all of us. He demonstrated this truth of the final cessation of suffering. What we have here is the final death where the Buddha reached the end of *saṃsāra*. The Buddha once said, “*catunnaṃ ariyasaccānaṃ, yathābhūtaṃ adassanā*.” Without seeing the Four Noble Truths as they actually are, we have wandered aimlessly from life to life; the Buddha was born so many things—he was an animal, he was a human, he was a *deva*, he was a *brahmā*. He went through it all seeking freedom from death, the deathless.

Peace

This place is where he finally came to the deathless, in Kusinārā. Here is the ultimate ending of the Buddha’s path and quest—where he found victory and peace. Of all places in the world, this is the place most associated with peace. Here we come in indirect contact with a peace that most people cannot fathom, a peace that is very difficult for us to conceive of. Until we realize it for ourselves, we should understand it as purity. We can all understand the qualities of mind that continue to cause suffering for ourselves and others. This place is where the Buddha finally found the peace that comes from freeing oneself from all of those things. 45 years earlier in Bodh Gaya he freed himself from the cause of suffering, and therefore that place has great importance. His enlightenment wouldn’t mean anything without this place, however, and without what happened here. And so, we can understand this place as the place of complete and perfect peace.

Glossary

abhisaiikhāra - preparation, store, accumulation of kamma

amatapadaṃ - the path to the deathless. *Pada* means path. *Amata* means not dying. Therefore, it is the path to not dying.

anattā - non-self

anāgāmi - a being who has attained the third stage of enlightenment and eradicated aversion and sensual desire.

anupadisesa nibbāna (parinibbāna) - refers to the ultimate state of *nibbāna* entered by an enlightened being or "*arahant*" at the moment of physical death; release from *saṃsāra*, the endless rounds of birth, aging, sickness, and death.

appamāda - never without mindfulness, not intoxicated, having a sober mind

appamattā na mīyanti - those who are unintoxicated don't die

appaṭivattiyaṃ - could never be turned back

arahant - a being who has attained the fourth stage of enlightenment; a worthy one, has eliminated all defilements and is fully liberated.

asaṅkheyya - an incalculable amount of time, literally means "uncountable"

attakilamathānuyogo - dedicating oneself to suffering, or making oneself suffer

avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā - ignorance as a root cause for karmic actions and thoughts

Aṅgulimāla - a monk who was a serial killer earlier in his life, and later became an arahant

āyaṃ taṇhā ponobbhavikā - it is that craving, that thirst, that leads to further becoming

bhāvetabba - should be developed

Bodh Gaya - town, southwestern Bihar state, northeastern India. The site where the Buddha attained enlightenment beneath the sacred Bodhi Tree.

Bodhi Tree - the tree under which the Buddha sat when he attained enlightenment

bodhisatta - a being who has dedicated him or herself to becoming a buddha. It is the term the Buddha uses to refer to himself in the period prior to his enlightenment, both in past lives and in his last life.

bojjhaṅgā - the seven factors of enlightenment: mindfulness, investigation, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, equanimity

brahmā - a being born in the higher realms, the closest Buddhist equivalent to an Abrahamic God

buddha - a perfectly enlightened being

carpe diem - Latin phrase, which literally means "pluck the day," coined by the Roman poet Horace to express the idea that we should enjoy life while we can.

conventional birth (six types) - birth in hell, birth as a ghost, birth in the animal realm, birth as a human, birth as a *deva*, and birth as a *brahma*

the deathless - where there is no death, because there is also no birth, no coming into existence, nothing made by conditioning, and therefore no time.

defilements - the darkness of the ordinary mind: greed, anger, and delusion

deva - a heavenly being, angel

dhamma - a reality, can also refer to the teachings expounded by the Buddha

dhammacakkapavattana - the turning of the Dhamma Wheel

dhammakāya - the birth of the Dhamma, the actual Buddha-ness of the Buddha

dhammacakkhu - the Eye of Dhamma

Dhammapada - The Dhammapada is a collection of 423 verses spoken by the Buddha and is one of the most studied and well known Buddhist scriptures.

dhammavicaya - discernment, or investigation of dhamma

Dīpaṅkara Buddha - a Buddha of the past who foretold that the ascetic Sumedha would become Gotama Buddha.

diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ - when the mind knows seeing, it is just seeing

dukkha - commonly translated as suffering, anxiety, stress, or unsatisfactoriness. It is the first of the Four Noble Truths and one of the three marks of existence.

dukkho anariyo anattasaṃhito - suffering is not the way of a noble one

dvādasākāraṃ - making into twelvefold

Eightfold Noble Path - Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

enlightenment - the clearest possible experience of reality, a moment of insight where one is perfectly in tune with the Four Noble Truths.

five aggregates - *rūpa*, which is physical form; *vēdanā*, which is feelings; *saññā* meaning memory or recognition; *saṅkhāra* meaning thoughts, formations, what you think of something, and how you react to it and extrapolate on it; and *viññāṇa* meaning consciousness.

five precepts - the guidelines, or basic code of ethics, taken by lay followers of Buddhism. The precepts are commitments to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication.

Four Noble Truths - the essence of Buddhism, the core teaching

Gijjhakuta - one of the five hills circling the city of Rājagaha (modern-day Rajgir), and referred to as Vulture's Peak or Holy Eagle Peak. The site is a significant memorial of the Buddha's life as he chose it to be the first dwelling place for the *saṅgha* and gave many discourses there.

gotrabhū - a person, through perceiving *nibbāna*, is no longer considered an ordinary being and enters into the lineage of the Noble Ones.

hīno gammo pothujjaniko - *hīno* means inferior, *gammo* means it's the way of the villagers, and *pothujjaniko* relates to someone full of defilements, known sometimes as a worldlyling.

Jātaka - a story of a former life of the Buddha

jātipi dukkhā - birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, and despair are suffering

Kapilavatthu (Kapilavastu) - a city near the Himalayas, capital of the Sākyaans. It was founded by the sons of Okkāka. Nearby is Lumbinī, the site where the Buddha was born.

kappa - the period of time between the creation and recreation of a world or universe

karma - volitional action, considered particularly as a moral force capable of producing results that correspond to the ethical quality of the action; thus good karma (Pali: *kamma*) produces happiness, and bad karma produces suffering for the being taking action.

Kassapa brothers - Uruvela Kassapa, Nadi Kassapa, and Gayā Kassapa; the three royal brothers living on the banks of Neranjara with a thousand followers who then became devotees of the Buddha's Dhamma.

kata - an action that has been performed or done

kicca - something you have to do, some action that should be done

Koṇḍañña - he was the only one who, at the birth of the prince, said that this prince would definitely become a Buddha, whereas others had said that he would either be a great king, or a Buddha. Koṇḍañña was the first person to become enlightened under the Buddha's guidance.

Kusinārā - the Pāli name for the town Kushinagar, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India, where the Buddha entered *parinibbāna*.

Lumbini - city in Nepal near the border of modern-day India, the Buddha's birthplace

mahā-kusala - goodness; dāna (giving), sīla (morality), and bhāvanā (cultivation)

majjhimā paṭipadā - the Middle Way, not engaging in either of the extremes

manussa nerayiko - someone who is a human, but hellish, like a hell being

manussa peto - a human who is like a ghost, hungry, never satisfied

māra - the Evil One, tempter, demon, defilements, darkness, death

mettā - loving kindness, friendliness, good will

nibbāna - liberation; literally, the "unbinding" of the mind from the mental effluents, defilements, and the round of rebirth; complete and utter cessation of suffering

nihilism - philosophy that denies the existence of genuine moral truths and asserts the ultimate meaninglessness of life or the universe.

nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa - knowledge of mental and physical states, knowledge of body and mind

pamādo maccuno padaṃ - intoxication is the path of death

parinibbāna (anupadisesa nibbāna) - refers to the ultimate state of *nibbāna* entered by an enlightened being or "*arahant*" at the moment of physical death; release from *saṃsāra*, the endless rounds of birth, aging, sickness, and death.

pariññāta - thoroughly known or well understood

pariññeyya - should be known in full; *pari* means from all angles and *ñeyya* means should be known

passaddhi - calmness, tranquility, repose, and serenity

pāramī, pāramitā - perfection; a *bodhisatta* develops these before becoming a buddha; there are ten: *dāna pāramī*, the perfection of charity; *sīla pāramī*, the perfection of morality, ethics; *nekkhamma pāramī*, the perfection of renunciation; *pañña pāramī*, the perfection of wisdom; *virīya pāramī*, the perfection of effort; *khanti pāramī*, the perfection of patience; *sacca pāramī*,

the perfection of truth, and being true to yourself; *adhiṭṭhāna pāramī*, the perfection of determination; *mettā pāramī*, the perfection of friendliness; *upekkhā pāramī*, the perfection of equanimity

pīti - rapture, zest, getting caught up in something

rūpa - form

rūpakāya - the Buddha's physical manifestation or physical form

sacchikātabbā - realization of nibbana; *sacci* literally means with your own eyes, *kātabbā* is relating to *kamma*

sakadāgāmī - a being who has attained the second stage of enlightenment. Such a being will only be born one more time, at most, because they've experienced cessation repeatedly to the point where they have reduced clinging almost to the point of eradication.

Sakka - ruler of the *devas*

samasīsī - attaining two ends simultaneously

samatha - tranquility of the mind to be achieved by practicing single-pointed meditation

samatha jhāna - states of absorption that are one-pointed, and are outside of any sensuality.

sammāsambuddha - self-enlightened buddha who is also able to teach and proclaim the Dhamma.

samuccheda maraṇa - cutting off of the defilements, cessation of suffering

samutti maraṇa - conventional death

samādhi - concentration

Sarnath - a place outside of Varanasi, India, also known as Isipatana, where the Deer Park is, and where the Buddha gave his first discourse after enlightenment.

sati - mindfulness, remembrance

satipaṭṭhānā - categories of the establishment, or arousing, of mindfulness: mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings or sensations, mindfulness of mind or consciousness, and mindfulness of *dhammā* or realities.

satiyā avippavāso appamādo ti vuccati - heedfulness is to be called "never being without mindfulness"

saññā - memory or recognition

saṃsāra - the “wandering;” the round of rebirths without discoverable beginning, sustained by ignorance and craving

saṅgha - the assembly, order, or community of monastics practicing for the realization of freedom from suffering, dependent on lay people for sustenance

saṅkhāra - thoughts, mental formations, what you think of something, and how you react to it and extrapolate on it

saṅkhāra-paccayā viññāṇaṃ; viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ - *saṅkhāra* leads to consciousness, consciousness leads to mentality and physicality

Siddhattha - the personal name of Gotama Buddha

sotāpanna - the first type of enlightened being; simply having an experience of *nibbāna* once means you've irreversibly entered the “stream” leading to full liberation. The Buddha said such a person will only be born a maximum of seven more lifetimes.

stupa - a memorial monument housing sacred relics associated with the Buddha or other significant beings. The rounded form of the stupa reflects the construction of pre-Buddhist burial mounds in India.

Sumedha - a past life of Gotama Buddha who lived as one of the greatest ascetics in the world in the time of Dīpaṅkara Buddha.

sute sutamattaṃ - when the mind knows hearing, it is just hearing

sutta - discourse

upekkhā - the Buddhist concept of equanimity. As one of the *Brahma Vihara* (meditative states), it is a pure mental state cultivated on the Buddhist path to *nibbāna*.

vassa - a time period from July to October, corresponding roughly to the rainy season in Northern India & throughout Southeastern Asia, in which each monk is required to live settled in one place and not wander freely about.

vipassanā - insight into the true nature of reality

virīya - energy, diligence, enthusiasm, or effort

visayābhimukhabhāva - the manifestation of mindfulness is to confront our experiences

viññāṇa - consciousness

vēdanā - feeling, sensation

Veḷuvana - literally means Bamboo Grove. It was the first plot of land offered to the Buddha, given by King Bimbisāra. It is outside of Rājagaha. While staying there, Venerable Sāriputta and Mogallāna joined the monastic order.

yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ sabbantaṃ nirodhadhammaṃ - everything that arises ceases; what Koṇḍañña saw in the Isipatana Deer Park after the Buddha's first discourse.

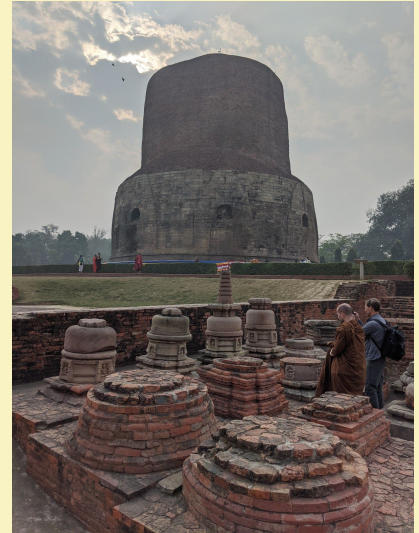
ye pamattā yathā matā - *ye pamattā* means "those who are intoxicated," *yathā* here means "are like those," *matā* here means "who are dead." Someone who is intoxicated is already dead.

Pilgrimage Narrative

Sarnath, Varanasi

The Deer Park

We started our pilgrimage in Varanasi. After everyone had arrived in India from different parts of the world, and had some rest from their long travels, we got into our mini bus and headed to our first location — the Deer Park in Sarnath. This is the place where the Buddha taught the Dhamma for the first time and where the Saṅgha was born when Koṇḍañña became enlightened.



After Bhante gave the first talk of the trip on the Buddha's Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, we did some walking meditation around the main stupa, and sitting meditation near it.

This picture is of the Deer Park relics and the main stupa, the Dhamekh Stupa, seen in the background.

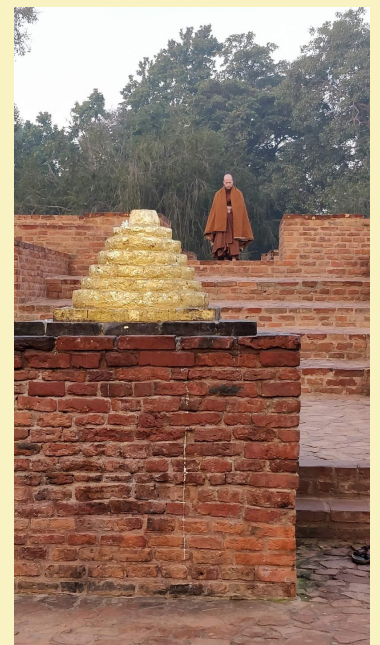


We also visited some of the monasteries and temples in the area before heading back to our hotel. The group picture was taken in front of the Standing Buddha statue in Sarnath.



Jetavana, Sāvattihī

The next day we headed to Sāvattihī. Here we visited Jetavana, one of the most famous monasteries, or *viḥāras*, in India. It was the second *viḥāra* donated to the Buddha, after Veluvana in Rajgir. The monastery was given to him by his chief male lay disciple, Anāthapiṇḍika. Anāthapiṇḍika was the richest man in Sāvattihī in the 6th century BC. Jetavana is located just outside the old city of Sāvattihī, where the Buddha spent a large part of his life, 25 vassas.





While in the area, we also visited the Aṅgulimāla Stupa and Kachchi Kuti in Mahet. The latter may have been the structure where Anāthapiṇḍika's gold was stored and later used for purchasing the land in Jetavana, the greatest land offering made to the Buddha. Anāthapiṇḍika offered all of his wealth to others and became poor by the end of his life.

Pūrvārāma

Then we headed to Lumbinī which is across the Indian border in Nepal — it's about 200 km (124 mi) and 6 hrs to drive there from Sāvattthī, Uttar Pradesh. On the way, we stopped at Pūrvārāma where a monastery was built by Visākhā, a female lay disciple of the Buddha. It is said to have been one of the first monasteries offered.



The photo above was taken at Pūrvārāma with Bhante Vimal Tiss, the monk responsible for re-establishing a monastery there now.



Lumbinī, Nepal

We crossed the border and reached Lumbinī, Nepal at night. The next day we headed to the place where the Buddha was born and saw the monument at the birthplace of the Buddha.



The large white building seen here has been recorded as the exact place of his birth. Next to it you can see the Ashokan pillar, like the other pillars that can be found at the major sites commemorating different stages of the Buddha's life. Behind this building there is the pond where his mother, Māyā, bathed after she gave birth.

It was a very uplifting experience to see and hear many monks chanting Pāli verses on the bank. Here, Bhante gave his talk on birth.





Kapilavastu, Nepal

We also visited the ancient city of Kapilavastu. Archaeological work has uncovered the palace of Prince Siddhattha and identified the location of the gate he left through to become homeless to begin his search for enlightenment. The gate pictured here marks the place where the ancient gate once stood.

Rāhula Stupa, Kapilavastu

This is the place where Rāhula, son of the Buddha, asked for his inheritance and was ordained at the age of 8 by the Venerable Sāriputta, one of the chief disciples of the Buddha.



Pillar of Ashoka, Vaishali

We visited other places of prominence like the museum at Vaishali, and monuments built by King Ashoka, before heading to Rajgir — 280 km (174 mi), an eight hour drive.

The Pillar of Ashoka is a single block of polished sandstone over 10 m (32 ft) high. At the top of the pillar, a statue of a lion can be seen, supported by Brahmi geese.

The lion figure now has a broken jaw, and the column is dislodged from years of weathering. Additionally, there is evidence of vandalism from the years of the site being open to visitors. The Edicts of Ashoka inscribed on the pillar, however, are still clearly visible.

Kushinagar, India

Kushinagar is where the Buddha attained *mahāparinibbāna* and was cremated. After we visited the Parinirvāṇa Stupa with the huge reclining Buddha statue, Bhante gave the third Dhamma talk on death.



From here, we went to the Ramabhar Stupa where the Buddha's cremation took place.





Vulture Peak, Rājagaha

In Rajgir (Rājagaha), we went to the Vulture Peak (Pāli: Gijjhakuta). It was the Buddha's preferred dwelling place in Rājagaha, and where he gave many teachings. Here, Bhante gave his fourth Dhamma talk, on life.



Later on that day, part of the group went on a hike and visited the Saptaparni Cave, which literally means Seven Leaves Cave. It is a well known Buddhist cave site embedded into the hillside about 2 km (1.2 mi) from Rajgir. It is said to be one of the places the Buddha dwelled before his death, and where the First Buddhist Council took place after he died.



The Bamboo Grove, near Rājagaha

The Bamboo Grove (Veḷuvana) is a site near Rājagaha where the Buddha gave many teachings. King Bimbisāra donated the park to the Buddha out of gratitude for hearing the Dhamma. The king chose the park as his gift because it was conducive to meditation and not too far from town. The Buddha lived there for some vassas.



Nalanda

We then headed to Nalanda about 12 km (7.5 mi) from Rajgir. Nalanda was one of the world's oldest universities and centers for Buddhist studies in the ancient kingdom of Magadha. It was an important center of learning from the fifth century CE to about 1200 CE. There were many monasteries and temples on this huge campus, and more ruins are still being excavated.



Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhgaya

Bodhgaya — the place where the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and the last place we visited on our pilgrimage. Photography was not allowed at the Mahabodhi Temple. Here, Bhante gave a fifth Dhamma talk on enlightenment, and fortunately, we could record it after getting special permission to do so.

This marked the end of an exceptionally beneficial trip. We are deeply grateful to Bhante Yuttadhammo for all the support he gave.

-Sirimangalo Volunteers

