

THE INSTRUCTIVE LEGEND OF THE BUDDHA'S LIFE

1. His Miraculous Birth

There lived once upon a time a king of the Shakyas, a scion of the solar race, whose name was Shuddhodana. . . . He had a wife . . . who was called Great Maya. These two tasted of love's delights, and one day she conceived the fruit of her womb, but without any defilement. . . . Just before her conception she had a dream. A white elephant seemed to enter her body, but without causing her any pain. . . .

She set her heart on going to Lumbini, a delightful grove. [The newborn babe] came out of his mother's side, without causing her pain or injury. . . . And since he had for many aeons been engaged in the practice of meditation, he now was born in full awareness, and not thoughtless and bewildered as other people are. [He] spoke these words full of meaning for the future: "For enlightenment I was born, for the good of all that lives. This is the last time that I have been born into this world of becoming."

2. The Visit of the Wise Man

Then Asita, the great seer, came to the palace. . . . He knew of the birth of [the Buddha]. . . for in his trance he had perceived the miraculous signs which had attended it. With tears flickering on his eyelashes the seer . . . explained his agitation to the king in these words: "It is not for him that I am perturbed, but I am . . . disappointed for myself. For the time has come when I must pass away; just when he is born who shall discover the extinction of birth, which is so hard to win. Uninterested in worldly affairs he will give up his kingdom. By strenuous efforts he will win that which is truly real. . . . To those who are tormented with pains and hemmed in by their worldly concerns, who are lost in the desert tracks of Samsara, he shall proclaim the path which leads to salvation, as to travellers who have lost their way. Creatures are scorched by the fire of greed. . . . He will refresh them with the

rain of the Dharma, which is copious like the rain from a mighty cloud when the summer's burning heat is over."

3. The Prisoner of Pleasure

Since the king . . . had . . . heard from Asita that the supreme beatitude would be the prince's future goal, he tried to tie him down by sensual pleasures, so that he might not go away into the forest. He selected for him . . . a maiden, Yasodhara by name, chaste and outstanding for her beauty. . . .

The monarch decided that his son must never see anything that could perturb his mind, and he arranged for him to live in the upper storeys of the palace, which was . . . brilliantly white. . . . It contained rooms suited to each season, and the melodious music of the female attendants could be heard in them. . . . Soft music came from gold-edged tambourines which the women tapped with their finger-tips, and they danced as beautifully as the choicest heavenly nymphs. They entertained him with soft words, wanton swayings, sweet laughter, butterfly kisses, and seductive glances. Thus he became a captive of these women who were well versed in the subject of sensuous enjoyment and indefatigable in sexual pleasure. And it did not occur to him to come down. . . .

Yasodhara bore . . . a son, who was named Rahula. . . .

4. The First Three Passing Sights: *Old Age, Disease, and Death*

a. The Prince Ventures Out

In the course of time, . . . feeling like an elephant locked up inside a house, [Siddhartha] set his heart on making a journey outside the palace. The king heard of his plans and arranged a pleasure excursion. . . . He gave orders that all the common folk with any kind of affliction should be kept away from the royal road, because he

feared that they might agitate the prince's sensitive mind. Very gently all cripples were driven away, and all those who were crazy, aged, ailing, and the like, and also all wretched beggars. So the royal highway was supremely magnificent.

b. He Confronts the Inevitability of Decay

But as fate would have it, a bent, toothless, and haggard old man appears on the roadside. Stunned by the sight, Prince Siddhartha asks his charioteer to explain this oddity. The charioteer responds:

"Sweet Prince!

This is no other than an aged man.

Some fourscore years ago his back was straight,

His eye bright, and his body goodly: now

The thievish years have sucked his sap away,

Pillaged his strength and filched his will and wit;

His lamp has lost its oil, the wick burns black;

What life he keeps is one poor lingering spark

Which flickers for the finish: such is age."

... Then spake the Prince—

"But shall this come to others, or to all,

Or is it rare that one should be as he?"

"Most noble," answered Channa, "even as he,

Will all these grow if they shall live so long."

"But," quoth the Prince, "if I shall live as long

Shall I be thus; and if Yasodhara

Live fourscore years, is this old age for her. . . ?"

... "Yea, great Sir!"

The charioteer replied.

c. The Prince Responds

[The prince:] "So that is how old age destroys indiscriminately the memory, beauty and strength of all! And yet with such a sight before it the world goes on quite unperturbed. Turn round the horses and travel back quickly to our palace! How can I delight to walk about in parks when my heart is full of fear of ageing?" ... And the prince went back into his palace which now seemed empty to him. . . .

On a second pleasure excursion [he saw] *a man with a diseased body*. When this fact was explained to him, [he] was dismayed and in his compassion he uttered these words in a low voice: "This then is the calamity of disease, which afflicts people! . . . Since I have learnt of the danger of illness, my heart is repelled by pleasures and seems to shrink into itself."

On a third excursion [he saw] *a corpse*. . . . Leaning his shoulder against the top of the chariot rail, he spoke these words in a forceful voice: "This is the end which has been fixed for all, and yet the world forgets its fears and takes no heed! The hearts of men are surely hardened to fears, for they feel quite at ease even while travelling along the road to the next life. Turn back the chariot! This is no time or place for pleasure excursions. . . ."

5. A World on Fire

From then onwards the prince withdrew from contact with the women in the palace, and in answer to the reproaches of Udayin, the king's counsellor, he explained his new attitude in the following words: "It is not that I despise the objects of sense, and I know full well that they make up what we call the 'world,' but when I consider the impermanence of everything in this world, then I can find no delight in it. Yes, if this triad of old age, illness, and death did not exist, then all this loveliness would surely give me great pleasure. [But] the world looks to me as if ablaze with an all-consuming fire. . . ."

6. The Discovery of Meditative Insight

In the hope that a visit to the forest might bring him some peace, he left his palace with the king's consent. . . . His longing . . . carried him deep into the countryside. There he saw soil being plowed. The plows had torn up the sprouting grass . . . and the land was littered with tiny creatures who had been killed. . . . The sight of all this grieved the prince. . . . He observed the plowmen, saw how they suffered from the wind, sun, and dust and how the oxen were worn down by the labour of drawing. . . . He reflected

on the generation and the passing of all living things, and in his distress he said to himself: "How pitiful all this!"

His mind longed for solitude. He withdrew . . . to a solitary spot at the foot of a rose-apple tree. . . . There he sat down, reflected on the origination and passing away of all that lives, and then he worked on his mind in such a way . . . that it became stable and concentrated. When he had won through to mental stability, he was suddenly freed from all desire for sense-objects and from cares of any kind. He had reached the first stage of [absorption], which is calm amidst applied and discursive thinking. . . .

When he thus gained insight . . . he lost at the same moment all self-intoxication, which normally arises from pride in one's own strength, youth, and vitality. He now was neither glad nor grieved; all doubt, lassitude, and sleepiness disappeared; sensuous excitements could no longer influence him; and hatred and contempt for others were far from his mind.

7. The Fourth Passing Sight: *The Religious Mendicant*

. . . He saw . . . a *religious mendicant* [and] asked him: "Tell me who you are," and the answer was: "I am a recluse who has adopted a homeless life to win salvation. . . . I search for that most blessed state in which extinction is unknown. Possessions I have none, no expectations either. Intent on the supreme goal I wander about, accepting alms I may receive."

8. The Great Going Forth

There and then [Siddhartha] made plans to leave his palace for the homeless life. . . . He decided to escape during the night. . . . He descended from the upper part of the palace, looked . . . upon the women lying about in all kinds of disorderly positions, and unhesitatingly went to the stables in the outermost courtyard. He roused Chandaka, the groom, and ordered him to bring the horse Kanthaka.

They rode off, till they came to a hermitage, where the prince took off his jewels, gave them to Chandaka, and dismissed him

with this message to his father . . . : "So that my father's grief may be dispelled, tell him that I have gone to this penance grove for the purpose of putting an end to old age and death, and by no means because I yearn for Paradise, or because I feel no affection for him, or from moody resentment. . . . There is no reason why he should grieve for me. . . . My father will perhaps say that it was too early for me to leave for the forest. But . . . even if affection should prevent me from leaving my kinsfolk just now of my own accord, in due course death would tear us apart, and in that we would have no say. . . . Birds settle on a tree for a while, and then go their separate ways again. The meeting of all living beings must likewise inevitably end in their parting. This world passes away and disappears the hopes of everlasting attachment. It is therefore unwise to have a sense of ownership for people who are united with us as in a dream—for a short while only and not in fact."

Siddhartha now studies under two of the greatest yogis of the time, Alara Kalama and Uddalaka Ramaputta. But even after mastering the highest contemplative states that they teach, he finds that the spiritual liberation he senses is possible has not yet been attained. He then turns to bodily mortification.

9. The Rejection of Self-Torture as a Way to Liberation

He . . . embarked upon further austerities, and particularly on starvation. In his desire for quietude he emaciated his body for six years and carried out a number of strict methods of fasting. The bulk of his body was greatly reduced by this self-torture, but by way of compensation his psychic powers grew correspondingly more and more. . . .

After a time, however, it became clear to him that . . . self-torture merely wore out his body without any useful result. . . . He reasoned as follows: . . . That method which some time ago I found under the rose-apple tree,¹ that was more certain in its results. But

1. See selection no. 6, above.

those meditations cannot be carried out in this weakened condition; therefore I must take steps to increase again the strength of this body. . . .

Inward calm is needed for success! Inward calm cannot be maintained unless physical strength is constantly and intelligently replenished. Only if the body is reasonably nourished can undue strain on the mind be avoided.

10. The Vow Beneath the Tree

From a compassionate cowherd woman, Siddhartha receives a meal of rice-milk, much offending five companion ascetics who depart in disgust. But Siddhartha, now nourished, positions himself at the foot of a tree, which is soon to become the bodhi tree or tree of enlightenment.

He then adopted the cross-legged posture, which is the best of all because so immovable. . . . And he said to himself: "I shall not change this position so long as I have not done what I set out to do!"

11. The Defeat of Mara

Because the great Sage . . . had made his vow to win emancipation . . . Mara . . . shook with fright. [Mara is] the one who rules events connected with a life of passion . . . who hates the very thought of freedom. He had with him his three sons—Agitation, Mania, and Sullen Pride—and his three daughters—Discontent, Excitement, and Craving. These asked him why he was so disconcerted in his mind. And he replied to them in these words: "Look over there at that sage, clad in the armor of determination. He has sat down with the firm intention of conquering my realm. . . ."

Mara's sons and daughters invade Siddhartha's mind, attempting to move him to terror or lust, but he remains calm, unshaken by fear or desire.

Mara could achieve nothing against the Bodhisattva,² and he and his army were defeated, . . . their clation gone, their toil ren-

2. Literally, "wisdom-being," the term refers to one who is on the way to becoming a Buddha. See selection 39, below.

dered fruitless. . . . The great seer, free from the dust of passion, victorious over darkness' gloom, had vanquished him.

12. The Realization of Nibbana (Nirvana)

Nibbana is often considered the ultimate goal of Buddhist endeavor. Its attainment removes the mind's last traces of craving and aversion and frees it fully and finally from the round of rebirth. See selection 34, this chapter.

a. The Progress of Insight

Now that he had defeated Mara's violence by his firmness and calm, the Bodhisattva . . . put himself into trance, intent on discerning both the ultimate reality of things and the final goal of existence. . . .

In the *first match* of the night he recollected the successive series of his former births. "There was I so and so; that was my name; deceased from there I came here"—in this way he remembered thousands of births, as though living them over again. When he had recalled his own births and deaths . . . the Sage turned his compassionate mind towards other living beings, and he thought to himself: "Again and again they must leave the people they regard as their own, and must go elsewhere, and that without ever stopping. Surely this world is unprotected and helpless, and like a wheel it turns round and round."

. . . In the *second match* of the night . . . he looked upon the entire world as though reflected in a spotless mirror. He saw that the decease and rebirth of beings depend on whether they have done superior and inferior deeds. . . .

Then as the *third match* of that night drew on [he] turned his meditation to the real and essential nature of this world: "Alas, living beings wear themselves out in vain! Over and over again they are born, they age, die, pass on to a new life, and are reborn!" He then surveyed the twelve links of conditioned co-production.³

3. Or "dependent origination." See 29, below.

When the great seer had comprehended that where there is no ignorance whatever, there also the karma-formations are stopped—then he had achieved a correct knowledge of all there is to be known, and he stood out in the world as a Buddha. He passed through the eight stages of transic insight, and quickly reached their highest point. From the summit of the world downwards he could detect no self anywhere. Like the fire, when its fuel is burnt up, he became tranquil. He had reached perfection, and he thought to himself: "This is the authentic Way on which in the past so many great seers . . . have travelled on to ultimate and real truth. And now I have obtained it!"

At that moment, in the *fourth watch* of the night . . . pleasant breezes blew softly, rain fell from a cloudless sky, flowers and fruits dropped from the trees out of season—in an effort, as it were, to show reverence for him.

b. The Buddha Rejoices

It is said that at this moment the Buddha uttered the following paean of joy:

Through many a birth I wandered in this world,
Seeking in vain the builder of this house.
Unfulfilling it is to be born again and again.
O housemaker! Now I have seen you!
You shall build no more houses for me!
All your beams are broken,
Your ridgepole is shattered.
My mind is freed from all past conditionings,
And craves the future no longer.

c. In Praise of Liberty

I, Buddha, who wept with all my brother's tears,
Whose heart was broken by a whole world's woe,
Laugh and am glad, for there is Liberty!
Ho! ye who suffer! know
Ye suffer from yourselves. None else compels
None other holds you that ye live and die,

And whirl upon the wheel, and hug and kiss
Its spokes of agony.

13. After Hesitating, the Buddha Decides to Teach

a. The Hesitation

For seven days he dwelt there—his body gave him no trouble, his eyes never closed, and he looked into his own mind. He thought: "Here I have found freedom," and he knew that the longings of his heart had at last come to fulfillment. . . . He surveyed the world with his Buddha-eye, intent on giving it peace. When, however, he saw on the one side the world lost in low views and confused efforts, thickly covered with the dirt of passions, and saw on the other side the exceeding subtlety of the Dharma of emancipation, he felt inclined to take no action. But when he weighed up the significance of the pledge to enlighten all beings he had taken in the past, he became again more favorable to the idea of proclaiming the path to Peace.

b. The Buddha's Decision

[And he resolved:] Yet there are beings whose eyes are only a little covered with dust: they will understand the truth.

14. The Buddha's First Encounter

He had fulfilled his task, and now, calm and majestic, went on alone. . . . A mendicant . . . saw him on the road and in wonderment . . . said to him: "The senses of others are restless like horses, but yours have been tamed. Who then is your teacher?" . . . But he replied: "No teacher have I. . . . Quite by myself, you see, have I the Dharma won. . . . That is the reason I am a Buddha. . . . I am now on my way to Varanasi. . . . There shall I beat the deathless Dharma's drum, unmoved by pride, untempted by renown. Having myself crossed the ocean of suffering, I must help others to cross it. Freed myself, I must set others free. . . ."

Thus begun, the Buddha's teaching career spans the next forty-five years. The content of that teaching will be outlined below, under "Core Doctrines." We close this section with accounts of the Buddha's final hours and last words.

15. "My Death Is an Occasion for Joy"

He then went to Kushinagara, bathed in the river, and gave this order to Ānanda: "Arrange a couch for me between those twin Sal trees! In the course of the night the Tathāgata⁴ will enter [final] Nirvana!" . . . Go and tell the Mallas [a clan of that vicinity] about it. For they will regret it later on if they did not now witness the [final] Nirvana. . . ."

The Mallas, their faces covered with tears, came along to see the Sage. They paid homage to Him, and then, anguish in their mind, stood around Him. And the Sage spoke to them as follows: "In the hour of joy it is not proper to grieve. Your despair is quite inappropriate, and you should regain your composure! The goal, so hard to win . . . now at last is no longer far away. When that is won . . . how is there room for grief then in your minds? . . . At the time I won enlightenment, I got rid of the causes of becoming. . . . Now the hour comes near when I get rid also of this body, the dwelling place of the acts accumulated in the past. Now at last this body, which harbours so much ill, is on its way out. . . . Now that at last I emerge from the vast and endless suffering—is that the time for you to grieve?"

"It is indeed a fact that salvation cannot come from the mere sight of Me. It demands strenuous efforts in the practice of Yoga. . . . A man must take medicine to be cured; the mere sight of the physician is not enough. . . . Therefore be energetic, persevere, and try to control your minds! Do good deeds, and try to win mindfulness!"

. . . But still the tears continued to pour from their eyes. . . .

4. Another name for the Buddha, meaning "one who has thus gone."

16. The Buddha's Final Instructions

a. Nothing Held Back

The Venerable Ānanda went up to him, paid his respects, sat down to one side and spoke to the Lord thus: "[I am] a little comforted by the thought that the Lord would not pass away until he had left his instructions concerning the Order."

"What, Ānanda! Does the Order expect that of me? I have taught the truth without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrines; for with the Tathāgata there is no such thing as the closed fist of the teacher who keeps some things back."

b. Let My Teaching Be Your Refuge

You might think: "Gone is the doctrine of our master. We have Master no more." But thus you should not think; for the Law (*dhmma*) and the Discipline (*vinaya*) which I have taught you, will after my death be your master.

The Law be your isle,
The Law be your refuge
Look for no other refuge!

c. "Be Your Own Lamps"

So, Ānanda, you must be your own lamps, be your own refuges. . . . Hold firm to the truth as a lamp and a refuge and do not look for refuge to anything besides yourselves. A monk becomes his own lamp by continually looking on his body, feelings, perceptions, moods and ideas in such a manner that he conquers the cravings and depressions of ordinary persons and is always diligent, self-possessed and collected in mind. Whoever among my monks does this, either now or when I am dead, if he is anxious to learn, will reach the summit.

d. The Mission: For the Happiness of Many

Go your ways, oh monks, for the benefit of many, for the happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit and

happiness of gods and men. No two should go in the same direction. Teach the Dhamma which is beneficent in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end—both the spirit and the letter of it. Make known your own pure way of life.

17. The Last Words of the Buddha

Impermanent are all formations.
Observe this carefully, constantly.

THE REBEL SAINT: The Buddha's Attitude Toward Authority, Ritual, and Moot Points

The Buddha's pragmatic concern to relieve suffering and his psychological emphasis on self-transformation made him pointedly critical of certain common aspects of religion, including blind reliance on authority, belief in the efficacy of ritual, and windy debate about unanswerable questions.

18. It Is Proper to Doubt: *See for Yourself*

It is proper . . . to doubt, to be uncertain. . . . Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture; . . . nor upon the consideration, "The monk is our teacher." [Rather] when you yourselves know: "These things are bad; [when] undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill," abandon them. [Likewise] when you yourselves know: "These things are good; [when] undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness," enter on and abide in them.

19. Against Ritual

a. Dubious Efficacy

To seek to win peace through others, as priests or sacrificers, is the same as if a stone were thrown into deep water, and now people,

praying and imploring and folding their hands, came and knelt down all around saying: "Rise, O dear stone! Come to the surface, O dear stone!" But the stone remains at the bottom.

b. Right Action, Not Ritual, Ennobles

If this river . . . were full of water . . . and a man with business on the other side . . . standing on this bank, should invoke the further bank, and say, "Come hither, O further bank! come over to this side!"

Now what think you? Would the further bank . . . by reason of that man's invoking and praying and hoping and praising, come over to this side?

. . . In just the same way . . . do the Brahmins [priestly caste], omitting the practice of those qualities which really make a person [noble] and adopting the practice of those qualities which really make people [ignoble], say thus: "Indra we call upon . . . Brahma we call upon!" [The thought that] they, by reason of their invoking and praying and hoping and praising, would, after death . . . become united with Brahma—verily such a condition of things can in no wise be.

20. Against Wasting Precious Time on Ineluctably Moot Points

a. The Ten Unanswered Questions and the Parable of the Arrow

Now it happened to the venerable Malunkyaputta, being in seclusion and plunged in meditation, that a consideration presented itself to his mind, as follows: "These theories . . . the Blessed One has left unexplained, has set aside and rejected:

that the world is eternal or not
that the world is finite or not
that the soul is one thing and the body another, or not
that the person who has achieved Nirvana exists after death, or does not exist after death, or both, or neither.

... And the fact that the Blessed One does not explain them to me does not please me or suit me.

So Malunkyaputta takes himself to the Buddha and addresses these issues to him. The Buddha replies:

It is as if ... a man had been wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his relatives and kinsfolk, were to procure for him a physician ... and the sick man were to say, "I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the man who wounded me belonged to the warrior caste, or to the Brahmin caste, or to the agricultural caste or to the menial caste."

Or again he were to say, "I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt the name of the man who wounded me, and to what clan he belongs."

Or again he were to say, "I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the man who wounded me was tall, or short, or of the middle height."

Or again he were to say, "I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the man who wounded me was black, or dusky or of a yellow skin."

Or again he were to say, "I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the man who wounded me was from this or that village, or town, or city."

Many other possibilities are mentioned.

That man would die, Malunkyaputta, without ever having learned [all] this. ...

The religious life ... does not depend on [the answer to these questions].

Accordingly ... bear always in mind what it is that I have not explained and what it is that I have explained. I have not explained [any of the aforementioned issues].

And what ... have I explained? Misery have I explained; the origin of misery, the cessation of misery, and the path leading to the cessation of misery have I explained.

b. Other Unwise Considerations

And unwisely [an aspirant] considers thus: "Have I been in the past? Or, have I not been in the past? What have I been in the past? How have I been in the past? From what state into what state did I change in the past? —Shall I be in the future? Or shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? ..."

CORE DOCTRINES: The Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and Other Basic Buddhist Concepts

21. The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path

From the Buddha's first sermon, "Setting Rolling the Wheel of Truth."

a. The Four Truths

Suffering, as a noble truth, is this: Birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow and ... pain ... and despair are suffering, association with the loathed is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering—in short suffering is the five [groups] of clinging's objects.⁵

Thus *the origin of suffering*, as a noble truth, is this: It is the craving that produces renewal of being, accompanied by enjoyment and lust—in other words, craving for sensual desires, craving for being, craving for non-being.

Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is remainderless fading and ceasing, ... letting go and rejecting, of that same craving.

5. The five *skandhas*, or "groups of existence" that make up a human individual. See no. 27, below.

The way leading to the cessation of suffering, as a noble truth is this: It is simply the eightfold noble path [of] right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

b. Their Centrality

As long as the . . . true knowledge and insight as regards these Four Noble Truths was not quite clear in me, so long was I not sure that I had won that supreme Enlightenment. . . . But as soon as the true knowledge and insight as regards these Four Noble Truths had become perfectly clear in me, there arose in me the assurance that I had won that supreme Enlightenment unsurpassed.

22. The Eightfold Path as the Middle Way

Also from the Buddha's first sermon, "Setting Rolling the Wheel of Truth":

Monks, these two extremes ought not to be cultivated by one gone-forth from the home-life. What are the two? There is . . . indulgence . . . in the objects of sensual desire, which is inferior, low, vulgar, ignoble, and leads to no good; and there is devotion to self-torment, which is painful, ignoble, and leads to no good.

The middle way . . . avoids both these extremes; it gives vision, it gives knowledge, and it leads to peace, to direct acquaintance to nibbāna. And what is that middle way? It is simply the noble eightfold path. . . . [See 21a.]

23. Karma

a. Volition

It is volition that I call "karma." Having willed, one [then] acts by body, speech, and mind.

b. Deeds

All beings are the owners of their deeds (karma), the heirs of their deeds; their deeds are the womb from which they sprang. . . . Whatever deeds they do—good or evil—of such they will be the heirs.

c. Ignorance and Craving

Truly, because beings, obstructed by ignorance and ensnared by craving, seek ever fresh delight, fresh rebirth continually comes to be.

24. The Three Poisons: Greed, Hatred, Delusion

And the action . . . that is done out of greed, hatred and delusion, . . . wherever this action ripens there one experiences the fruits of this action, be it in this life, or the next life, or in some future life. . . .

25. Samsara

a. Its Inconceivable Beginnings

Inconceivable is the beginning of this Samsara; not to be discovered is any first beginning of beings, who obstructed by ignorance and ensnared by craving, are hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths.

b. The Tears Shed on This Long Way

Which do you think is more: the flood of tears, which weeping and wailing you have shed upon this long way—hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths, united with the undesired, separated from the desired—this, or the waters of the four oceans?

Long have you suffered the death of father and mother, of sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. And whilst you were thus suffering, you have indeed shed more tears upon this long way than there is water in the four oceans.

26. The Three Marks of Existence

All formations are impermanent [*anicca*]; all formations are subject to suffering [*dukkha*]; all things are "without a self" [*anatta*].

27. The Five Skandhas or Groups of Existence

The skandhas are the Buddha's fivefold classification of the physical and mental factors comprising reality; unreflective persons mistake the local interaction of these factors for an ego or personality.

And what, in brief, are the Five Groups of Existence? They are materiality, sensation, perception, moods and thoughts.⁶

28. Anatta or Without-a-Self

Anatta is a fundamental Buddhist doctrine. It suggests that just as what we designate by the name car has no existence apart from axle, wheels, shaft, motor, and so on, that which we conventionally designate person or "I" is nothing but a continually shifting combination of impersonal physical and mental phenomena.

Suppose a person who was not blind beheld the many bubbles on the Ganges as they drove along. . . . After he had carefully watched them and examined them they would appear to him empty, unreal and unsubstantial. In exactly the same way does the student of the Buddha behold all corporeal phenomena, sensations, perceptions, moods, and thoughts. . . . He watches them, examines them care-

6. Adapted; my source uses the terms *corporeality, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness.*

fully; and, after carefully examining them, they appear to him empty, void and without a self.

29. Dependent Origination

The doctrine of dependent origination is the counterpart of the anatta doctrine. Because all processes are empty-of-self, they cocondition and codetermine each other. Accordingly, reality is a vast field of mutually conditioning events.

a. The Buddha on the Centrality of Dependent Origination

Who sees Dependent Origination sees the Dhamma⁷; who sees the Dhamma sees Dependent Origination.

b. The Basic Formula

This body, monks, is not yours, nor does it belong to others. It should be regarded [as the product of] former karma, effected through what has been willed and felt. In regard to it, the [wise person] reflects on Dependent Origination itself: If this is, that comes to be; from the arising of this, that arises; if this is not, that does not come to be; from the stopping of this, that is stopped.

c. The Twelve Links of the Chain of Dependent Origination

Conditioned by ignorance are the karma-formations; conditioned by the karma-formations is consciousness; conditioned by consciousness is mind-and-body; conditioned by mind-and-body are the six sense-fields⁸; conditioned by the six sense-fields is sense impression; conditioned by sense-impression is feeling; conditioned by feeling is craving; conditioned by craving is grasping; conditioned by grasping is becoming; conditioned by becoming is

7. Or Dharma (Sanskrit); that is, the Way of Truth.

8. In Buddhism, mind is the sixth sense. It "senses" thoughts in the same way a tongue senses tastes.

birth; conditioned by birth there come into being ageing and dying, grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair. This is the origin of the whole mass of suffering.

And now the reversal of this process:

But from the stopping of ignorance is the stopping of the karma-formations [and so on until we come to] the stopping of the whole mass of suffering.

d. The Image of Dependent Origination: Indra's Net

This great imaginary net . . . is to be visualized . . . as stretching throughout the entire universe: its vertical extension representing time; its horizontal, space. At every point where the net's threads interconnect [every point-instant of existence], one imagines a crystal bead symbolizing an individual existence. Each one of these innumerable crystal beads reflects on its surfaces not only every other bead in the net but every reflection of every other bead, thus creating numberless, endless reflections of each other while forming one complete and total *whole*.

30. The Five Precepts

I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from killing living beings . . . to abstain from taking things not given . . . to abstain from sexual misconduct⁹ . . . to abstain from false speech . . . to abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness.

31. The Nature of Right Speech

Right speech covers more than abstention from lying. Because how and what we speak influence the way we think, attention to how we speak is essential to transforming what we speak.

9. The meaning of sexual misconduct is subject to interpretation. An ancient canonical gloss prescribes "no intercourse with such persons as are still under the protection of father, mother, brother, sister or relatives, nor with married women, nor female convicts, nor lastly, with betrothed girls." *Anguttara Nikāya* 10.176.

He avoids tale-bearing. . . . What he has heard here, he does not repeat there so as to cause dissension; . . . thus he unites those that are divided; and those that are united, he encourages. Concord gladdens him . . . and it is concord that he spreads by his words.

He avoids harsh language. . . . He speaks such words as are gentle, soothing to the ear, loving, such words as go to the heart, and are courteous, friendly, and agreeable to many.

He avoids vain talk. . . . He speaks at the right time, in accordance with facts, speaks what is useful, speaks of the law and the discipline: his speech is like a treasure, uttered at the right moment, accompanied by arguments, moderate and full of sense.

32. Right Mindfulness and the Transformation of Consciousness

The Satipatthāna Sutta (The Foundations of Mindfulness) is one of Buddhism's most important teachings on the practice of meditation. It is difficult to appreciate as a text, for it yields its treasures only in the context of sustained practice under the guidance of a teacher. It may be compared to a computer manual: hard to read for pleasure but indispensable when coping with a complex circuitry. A sutta (Sanskrit, sutra) is a Buddhist text that claims to have been uttered by the Buddha himself.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

The only way that leads to the . . . end of pain and grief, to the entering of the right path and the realization of Nibbana, is by the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. And which are these four?

Herein the disciple dwells in sustained awareness¹⁰ of the Body, in sustained awareness of Sensation,¹¹ in sustained awareness of the Mind, in sustained awareness of the Mind-Objects; ardent,

10. Throughout this passage I am using *sustained awareness* where my source uses *contemplation*.

11. I have substituted the word *sensation* where my source used the word *feeling*, in order to underscore the bodily basis of this exercise. Feeling *qua* emotion can be misconstrued as a purely mental phenomenon.