



BUDDHA

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Buddha

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Also in this series:

Volume 2 Dhamma (Sept 2021)

Volume 3 Sangha (Oct 2021)

Venerable Mahinda

Venerable Mahinda was ordained in 1976 under the tutelage of the late Venerable Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Thera. He has taught Mindfulness and Metta Meditation for 45 years in over 20 countries.

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Preface

The aim of this series on the Buddha Dhamma Sangha is to highlight their great qualities and to draw inspiration for us to walk the Dhamma's path.

When we are living in fear and danger, worry and anxiety, we need to seek refuge in the Buddha Dhamma Sangha. We need their blessings, guidance and protection.

Those who have faith and devotion to the Buddha will naturally find solace in times of need. Those who have developed insights into the Dhamma will have greater awareness and acceptance of the ups and downs of life.

Those who connect with the Sangha will receive the necessary guidance and inspiration along the path.

Many years ago, I heard my teacher saying:

ABHIÑÑEYYAṀ ABHIÑÑĀTAM,
BHĀVETABBAÑCA BHĀVITAM;

PAHĀTABBAM PAHĪNAM ME,
TASMĀ BUDDHOSMI BRĀHMAṆAⁱ

These words kept resonating in my mind. As I made some effort to understand the meaning of these words, I realised the profoundness of the Buddha and his teachings. I wish to share this Dhamma with all our Dhamma brothers and sisters.

What little I have learned is from my teacher and his teachers' teacher. I am indeed grateful for all their kindness, inspiration and sacrifices. Their teachings are so relevant in these challenging times.

I dedicate Volume 1 in this series to the memory of my teacher, the late Ven. Dr K. Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Thera, on the occasion of the 15th anniversary since his passing away on 31 August 2006. May he attain to perfect enlightenment.

ⁱ What should be known is known, what should be developed is developed; What should be destroyed is destroyed – therefore I am awakened, O Brahmin.' (Brahmāyu Sutta, MN 91)

BUDDHA

The word BUDDHA means to know, or to be awakened to the realities of life. It comes from the Sanskrit/Pali root '*budh*', whose literal meaning is 'to wake up', but also 'to become aware', or 'to understand'¹.

'Buddha' is a title given to someone who has 'woken up' to the true nature of life and gone beyond the saṃsāric cycle of birth and death. There are Buddhas of the past, present and future, and also of the ten directions. The last historical Buddha was GOTAMA (in Pali) or GAUTAMA (in Sanskrit), who was born at Lumbini in the kingdom of Kapilavastu² as Prince Siddhartha Gautama in 623BCE. He was born in a clan of people called the Sakyans and thus he is also known as SAKYAMUNI, or 'sage of the Sakyan clan'.

¹ MW Sanskrit Dict.

² Which covers part of present-day Nepal and part of India.

The Buddha's Journey

The Buddha's path from an ordinary being to an Awakened One began many eons ago. As a merchant, he was travelling on a sea voyage with his blind mother. They met a huge storm and his mother fell overboard. He jumped into the water to save her, and upon saving her life, he realised that all sentient beings, like his own mother, are immersed in the ocean of suffering. Filled with compassion, he made the strong aspiration to gain Enlightenment in order to relieve the suffering of all sentient beings.

Thence began his journey as the Bodhisatta. Over countless lifetimes he practised to perfect the virtues, knowledge and skills in order to become a fully-enlightened being with the ability to enlighten others. The Jataka tales relate how the Bodhisatta used different circumstances throughout his lives to develop his virtues and was eventually able to give up his kingdom, his own wife, children, and even his own life to perfect the Ten Pāramīs (or Perfections) of a fully-enlightened Buddha:

The Ten Pāramīs

1. **DĀNA** – Generosity
2. **SĪLA** – Morality
3. **NEKKHAMMA** – Renunciation
4. **PAÑÑĀ** – Wisdom
5. **VIRIYA** – Effort
6. **KHANTI** – Patience
7. **SACCA** – Truthfulness
8. **ADHITTHĀNA** – Determination
9. **METTĀ** – Loving-kindness
10. **UPEKKHĀ** – Equanimity

These ten qualities enabled the Buddha to confront and overcome whatever challenges he met on his journey through saṃsāra, seeking enlightenment from life to life for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Birth

This culminated in his final birth in this era as Prince Siddhartha Gautama, at Lumbini more than 2,500 years ago. The practice of these virtues yielded the merits for him to be born as a prince with all its

luxuries, yet at the same time having the wisdom to see the fleeting nature of worldly pleasures, as well as the courage to leave such luxury behind to seek and eventually realise the truth.

Although he was born as a human being just like us, the Buddha's birth was no ordinary birth. Prior to his birth, the Bodhisatta – who at that time was called Setaketu – was residing in Tusita heaven.³ He was able to choose the time, the country and the locality of his birth; to decide who would be his mother, and the clan where he would be born. Ordinary beings are not able to do such things.

The Buddha's life, too, was no ordinary life. After 29 years of luxurious, worldly life as a prince, he had the courage and the compassion to give up his kingdom, his family and all the material comforts to seek the truth, to find the way to liberate himself and all other beings from suffering.

³ Setaketu-Jātaka (377)

Enlightenment

On the night of his enlightenment, under the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya, he fully realised the knowledge that liberates beings from saṃsāra, and the path that leads beings to actually realise this knowledge. It was then that he became known as ‘the Awakened One’, or ‘Buddha’. Shortly after, he clearly explained to the five ascetics at Sarnath the wisdom he had realised in form of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Through his wisdom, compassion and skills, he taught all over India and beyond for the next 45 years, in order to awaken beings so that they would realise the truth for themselves.

More than 2,500 years later, his teachings have spread far beyond India, and are revered by millions of Buddhists as well as non-Buddhists throughout the world.

Passing Away

His passing away, or MAHĀ-PARINIBBĀṆA,⁴ was no ordinary death. We use the term ‘MAHĀ-PARINIBBĀṆA’ to illustrate that the Buddha did not die or pass away like ordinary human beings.

The Buddha passed away at Kushinagar with perfect mindfulness and awareness. Having completely liberated himself from the ignorance that binds us to the saṃsāric cycle of birth and death, his passing away represents the dissolution of his physical body, but his enlightened mind had already gone beyond ordinary death and rebirth.

The Buddha’s birth, enlightenment and passing away all coincided with a full-moon day. Today, we celebrate these three events on the occasion of Vesak, usually falling on the full moon in the month of May. As we celebrate, we should recall that the Buddha’s appearance in this world, his activities, and dispensation of the Dhamma represent the

⁴ Mahā-parinibbāṇa is defined as the complete cessation of the Five Aggregates, without remainder, thus putting an end to rebirth.

culmination of countless lifetimes of practice, to perfect the virtues, knowledge and skills necessary to become a fully-enlightened being with the ability to enlighten others.

He also demonstrated the full potential of a human life – that it is possible, for each and every one of us, to awaken to the truth about life, and to free ourselves from all suffering. Therein lies the true significance of Vesak.

Who was the Buddha?

The Buddha was not just an ordinary human being. Although he was born as a human being, he transcended the life of an ordinary human. Simply upon meeting this great being, people were impressed by his physical appearance, bearing and radiant complexion. This is illustrated in three main encounters – with Upaka the ascetic, Dona the Brahmin, and Brahmāyu, an elderly Brahmin – where the Buddha himself declared who he was.

Upaka

After the Buddha's enlightenment, he stayed near Bodhgaya for seven weeks. After this, he decided to head to Varanasi to meet the five ascetics who had attended to him earlier. The wandering ascetic named Upaka met the Buddha on his way to Varanasi soon after his enlightenment, as he was passing through the township of Gaya.

Seeing his clear and magnificent aura, Upaka remarked:

O friend, clear are your senses, pure and bright is your complexion. Who inspired your renunciation? Who is your teacher? Whose doctrine do you follow?

The Buddha replied:

The Conqueror, Omniscient am I – nothing to cling to, everything released, I am freed from craving. Having comprehended all by myself, who can I call my teacher?

I have no teacher, I have no equal. In this world of gods and men, I have no rival. For I am an Arahant, an unsurpassed teacher. I am Fully-Enlightened, cool and at peace.

Upaka was a follower of Nigantha Nātaputta, the leader of the Jainas. That is why the Buddha used the term ‘Conqueror’ or JINA – which was used by the Jainas to refer to their saints. The Buddha gave the word JINA a new meaning: a conqueror means one who has conquered greed, hatred and delusion, and the Buddha was such a conqueror. But Upaka held different views, so he merely replied: “It may be so, friend,” and shaking his head, he walked away. The Buddha was unperturbed and continued on to Varanasi.⁵

However, this meeting with the Buddha actually did impress itself in Upaka’s heart. After some years, Upaka met the Buddha again, and was ordained. He took instructions and became an ANĀGĀMI (or Non-returner). Upaka’s wife Cāpā, who was the

⁵ Ariyapariyesana Sutta, MN 26

daughter of a hunter, also followed her husband in leaving the household life and became an Arahant.⁶

Dona

On another occasion, the Buddha was walking along the highway between Ukkatthā and Setavyā. The Brahmin Dona noticed the footprints of the Buddha, and saw something special about them – each footprint had at its centre a wheel with 1,000 spokes. So he decided to follow the footprints to their source.

He saw the Buddha seated under a tree, cross-legged, calm and serene. Dona was unable to tell what the person sitting there was, and thus he approached the Buddha and asked him: “Will you be a DEVA? A GANDHABBA?⁷ A YAKKHA?⁸ Or a human?”

⁶ The Great Chronicle of Buddhas, (1994). Vol 2.2, Chap 1. Mingun Sayadaw, Ti=Ni Publishing Centre.

⁷ PTS Pali-English Dict (p.244): gandhabba m. “A Gandharva or heavenly musician, as a class belonging to the demigods who inhabit the Cātummahārājika realm.”

⁸ PTS Pali-English Dict (p.546): yakkha m. “The customary (popular) etym. of Pali Commentators is... a being to whom a sacrifice is given... [Generally considered] a being half deified and of great power as regards influencing people (partly helping, partly hurting)... Their usual capacity is one of kindness to

The Buddha replied: “I am none of these things, Dona.”

Confused and a little annoyed, Dona then asked: “You said you are none of these things. Then what are you?”

“Dona, I have cut off all the defilements that might lead to birth as a deva, gandhabba, yakkha or human;” then the Buddha continued:⁹

PUNḌARĪKAṂ YATHĀ VAGGU,
TOYENA NUPALIPPATI;
NUPALIPPĀMI LOKENA,
TASMĀ BUDDHOSMI BRĀHMAṆĀ’TI.

Just like a lotus, born and grown in muddy water, but rising above and unstained by the mud – in the same way I, born and raised in the world, have overcome the world and live unstained by the world. Remember me, Brahmin, as the Awakened One.

men... Often, however, they are cruel and dangerous.”

⁹ Dona Sutta, AN 4.36

Brahmāyu

When Brahmāyu, an elderly man of 120 years old who was very learned in the Vedas and Sanskrit, met the Buddha, he inquired about the MAHĀ-PURISA-LAKKHAṆA or the characteristics of a great being. He wanted to see these characteristics of the Buddha (even up to his private parts). With his psychic power, the Buddha showed them to Brahmāyu.

The Buddha then declared:¹⁰

YE TE DVATTIṀSĀTI SUTĀ,
MAHĀ-PURISA-LAKKHAṆĀ;

SABBE TE MAMA KĀYASMIṀ, MĀ TE
KAṆKHĀHU BRĀHMAṆA.

ABHIÑÑEYYAṀ ABHIÑÑĀTAM,
BHĀVETABBAṆCA BHĀVITAM;

PAHĀTABBAM PAHĪNAM ME,
TASMĀ BUDDHOSMI BRĀHMAṆA.

The 32 marks of a Great Man which you have heard of,

¹⁰ Brahmāyu Sutta, MN 91

They are all on my body – You should not doubt,
O Brahmin.

What should be known is known, what should be
developed is developed;

What should be destroyed is destroyed – therefore
I am awakened, O Brahmin.

From these three encounters, we see how the Buddha
himself declared he was a fully-enlightened, fully-
awakened being.

The Buddha's Perfect Features

The MAHĀ-PURISA-LAKKHAṆA are physical
features of the body of a Buddha. There are 32 major
marks and 80 minor marks, as mentioned in the
LAKKHAṆA SUTTA, including:¹¹

1. Level feet
2. 1000-spoked wheel symbol on the
soles of the feet

¹¹ DN 30

3. Long slender fingers
4. UṆHĪSA-SĪSO – fleshy protuberance on the crown of the head
5. UṆṆĀ-LOMA – hair in the middle of the forehead (emits light)

These features are also present in a CAKKAVATTĪ king – a powerful monarch. But in the case of the Buddha, when he was born his father, King Suddhodana, invited many sages to inspect the baby boy. All the sages but one said he would either be a great spiritual teacher or a CAKKAVATTĪ king. But one sage, Koṇḍañña, the youngest present, said he could only be a great spiritual teacher. This is because he noticed how the UṆṆĀ-LOMA curled in an anti-clockwise direction.¹²

These perfect features were practically impossible to depict on an image or statue. So, in early times, the Buddha was often depicted simply by his footprint. In Anuradhapura, workshops have been found where stone footprints of the Buddha were produced as a symbol of worship.

¹² “The Buddha Word” (1985), Weragoda Sarada. p.4

However, in 1st century BC, artists in the Gandhara region, heavily influenced by the Greco-Roman style, started to sculpt Buddha images in the style of youthful Greek gods like Apollo. So the images of the Buddha we see can differ due to cultural differences, and the skill of the artists.

The True Body of the Buddha

So how do we see or realise who the Buddha really is? The answer was given to the monk named Vakkali. The Buddha was then dwelling at Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrel Sanctuary.

The monk Vakkali was dwelling nearby. He was very ill and wanted to see the Buddha. So he asked one of his attendants to inform the Buddha. The Buddha consented and upon his approach Vakkali tried to rise from his bed with great difficulty.

The Buddha told him there was no need to do so as there was already a seat nearby. So he sat down and

inquired about Vakkali's condition. Vakkali informed the Buddha that he was not getting any better, and that he had wanted to see the Buddha for a long time but could not manage to do so.

The Buddha asked Vakkali why he wanted to see this "foul body"?

Then the Buddha preached to Vakkali:¹³

YO DHAMMAM PASSATI,

SO MAM PASSATI

He who sees the Dhamma sees me.

That is how we too can see the Buddha, by practising the Dhamma.

The Nine Qualities of the Buddha

There are nine special qualities which illustrate how the Buddha is unique amongst all beings. These

¹³ Vakkali Sutta, SN 22.87

are recited as daily devotions in what is referred to as BUDDHĀNUSSATI, or contemplation on the Buddha:

ITI PI SO BHAGAVĀ ARAHAM SAMMĀ-
SAMBUDDHO

Such indeed is the Blessed One, the Worthy One,
the Perfectly Enlightened One;

VIJĀ-CARAṆA-SAMPANNO SUGATO
LOKAVIDŪ

Endowed with knowledge and virtue; Well-gone;
Knower of the worlds;

ANUTTARO PURISA-DAMMASĀRATHĪ

An incomparable guide for individuals to be
tamed;

SATTHĀ DEVAMANUSSĀNAM

Teacher of gods and men;

BUDDHO BHAGAVĀ TI

the Enlightened One, the Blessed One.

1. ARAHAM

The Buddha is an Arahant, or “Worthy One”. He is worthy of reverence and offerings because he has completely eradicated all the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion.

He has thereby ended the cycle of birth and death – the cycle of saṃsāra. Arahant also means having no secrets. Having purified his mind to the fullest extent, he has nothing to hide. This is why he is most worthy of respect.

2. SAMMĀ-SAMBUDDHA

Even more than an Arahant, he is “perfectly enlightened”. He has attained complete liberation through his own efforts. The Buddha mentioned to Upaka that he had no teacher, but we must understand that he was referring to how his realisation of Nibbana was accomplished on his own.

He actually did have meditation teachers such as Ālāra-Kālāma and Uddaka-Rāmaputta, who taught him to

develop his mind to the eighth jhāna. But during the six years while he was struggling for Enlightenment, going through extreme ascetic practices, he made no further progress. Then the Buddha recalled his childhood, when he had naturally entered meditative concentration under a rose apple tree. This gave him the inspiration to break through and eventually attain full enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya.

A SAMMĀ-SAMBUDDHA has also perfected all the 10 PĀRAMĪS or Perfections and has the unique ability to fully understand each person's temperament and qualities, and to accordingly provide the most beneficial instructions for that person.

In the Sutta it says: “The appearance in this world of a Tathāgatha, worthy and perfectly Enlightened – is very, very rare.”¹⁴

3. VIJJĀ-CARAṆA-SAMPANNA

“Fully endowed with knowledge and conduct”. Here, knowledge refers to three kinds of supreme knowledge:

¹⁴ Ekapuggala Vagga, AN 1.171

perfect recollection of past events; clear vision of present and future events; and full understanding of the nature of life.

There are three sources of knowledge or wisdom. In Pali they are called: SUTAMAYĀ-PAÑÑĀ, CINTAMAYĀ-PAÑÑĀ, BHĀVANĀMAYĀ-PAÑÑĀ.

The first, SUTAMAYĀ is the knowledge we gain by listening to the experiences and instructions of others. The second, CINTAMAYĀ refers to how we use our rational mind to reason things out for ourselves.

However, neither of these two knowledges will lead you to be totally free from suffering. It is only the last, BHĀVANĀMAYĀ, which is knowledge gained through meditation, that will lead to one's final liberation. The Buddha's realisation of truth is derived through this method, which is also called VIPASSANĀ-ÑĀṆA. This truth is the truth of the nature of life – of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self.

Conduct is traditionally explained as the steps along the path that led him to Buddhahood and enabled him to

bring benefit to all beings. These are: morality, sense-restraint, restraint in eating and sleeping, faith, shame and dread (with regard to unwholesome actions), vast learning, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and insight.

This quality can be summarised as: “The Blessed One’s possession of clear vision is the perfection of wisdom, while his possession of conduct is the perfection of great compassion... through wisdom he knows what is good and bad for beings, and through compassion wards them away from harm and guides them towards good.”¹⁵

4. SUGATA

Sugata literally means “Well gone”. He is well gone because both the path he took and the goal he reached, perfect Enlightenment, are supreme. The Buddha also came to the world with a single goal – for the sake of Enlightenment – he made effort, giving up all the pleasures in life in order to realise his goal, and passed away having completed it. In this way, his journey

¹⁵ Visuddhimagga, VII.2.32

was perfect and well-travelled. Remember the Paeon of Joy the Buddha uttered after his Enlightenment:¹⁶

ANEKA-JĀTI-SAMŚĀRAM
SANDHĀVISSAM ANIBBISAM
GAHA-KĀRAKAM GAVESANTO
DUKKHĀ JĀTI PUNAPPUNAM
GAHA-KĀRAKA DIṬṬHO'SI
PUNA GEHAM NA KĀHASI
SABBĀ TE PHĀSUKĀ BHAGGĀ
GAHA-KŪṬAM VISANĀKHATAM
VISANĀKHĀRA-GATAM CITAM
TAṆHĀNAM KHAYAM AJJHAGĀ'TI

Through many a birth I wandered in this saṃsāra (endless cycle of birth and death), seeking, but not finding the builder of this house. Sorrowful is repeated birth.

O house builder! You are seen. You shall build no house again.

All your rafters are broken. Your ridge-pole is shattered.

¹⁶ Dhammapada 153-4

My mind has attained the unconditioned.
Achieved is the end of craving.

This is the highest of achievements, the final destination, the highest happiness from where there is no return to suffering in saṃsāra. We should all set ourselves in the same direction.

5. LOKAVIDŪ

The Buddha is “Knower of the worlds”. Through the laboratory of his enlightened mind, the Buddha was able to understand the nature of the universe, without referring to astronomy, geology or any other science. He was able to describe the cosmos in terms of micro-, medio- and macro-cosmic systems.¹⁷

He knew the three realms of beings: the sensual realm (KĀMA-LOKA), which includes the realms of demigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell realms; the realms of form (RŪPA-LOKA), of which there are four Brahma heavens, corresponding to the first four JHĀNAS; and the formless realms

¹⁷ (Tika) Abhibhū Sutta, AN 3.80

(ARŪPA-LOKA), also divided into four realms of beings without physical form, which correspond to the fifth to eighth JHĀNAS.¹⁸

In comparison, our knowledge is very limited. Although we study all sorts of things, there are many things we cannot comprehend and we do not even know the true nature of ourselves, because of the clouded nature of our minds.

The Buddha was also able to see how beings die and are reborn in various places and various forms according to the law of karma – cause and effect. He also saw that there is not a single being in any of the 31 planes of existence who is free from suffering, and he knows why they are suffering – due to the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion.

In the Rohitassa Sutta, the Buddha explained: “There is no end to suffering by knowing or reaching the end of the world.” Instead, he encouraged people to look within themselves. The Buddha said: “Rather, it is in this fathom-long body with its perceptions and

¹⁸ Sattāvāsa Sutta, AN 9.24

its consciousness that I make known the world, the arising of the world, the cessation of the world and the way leading to the cessation of the world.”¹⁹ In other words, the study of the world is the study of the self.

6. ANUTTARA PURISA-DAMMASĀRATHĪ

“An incomparable guide for individuals who can be tamed”. The Buddha has the unique quality of being able to tame the minds of beings, making them suitable vessels to receive the Dhamma. This is because he is able to evaluate the five mental faculties that make up a person’s mind – faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom²⁰ - and can prescribe the appropriate practice to each individual to develop these faculties in a balanced manner. Thus the Buddha is the most effective trainer.

¹⁹ AN 4.45

²⁰ PAÑCA-INDRIYA: SADDHĀ, VIRIYA, SATI, SAMĀDHI, PAÑÑĀ

He also trains beings to take birth in the realms of gods and humans, where they can attain their liberation. The reason why the Buddha is ‘incomparable’ is because only a Buddha can perfectly guide beings to liberation. He is also ‘incomparable’ because he trains not only humans, but beings from all the six realms of existence, such as Nālāgiri the elephant, Āḷavaka the demon, and many others.

A good example is Lord Sakka, king of the devas of Tāvatiṃsa heaven. Sakka once came to pose some questions to the Buddha. Through the Buddha’s answers he gained faith and realised the truth, entering the first stage of sainthood. After some time passed, he passed away and due to his merits and faith, he was again reborn as the present Sakka, who is both a Noble being and a Dhamma protector.

7. SATTHĀ DEVAMANUSSĀNAM

“Teacher of gods and humans”. The Buddha taught the Dhamma in all its aspects, both mundane and supramundane. To humans, the Buddha gave mundane teachings on how to fulfil our duties and

prosper in this human birth, how to live in peace and harmony, and how to avoid evil and do good, leading to future rebirth in the human and deva realms. He also gave supramundane teachings on how to purify the mind in order to attain final liberation.

The Buddha also gave teachings to the devas, such as on the occasion of the preaching of the Mangala Sutta, and when the Buddha went to Tāvātimsa heaven to teach his mother who had been reborn there. There are many devas who are disciples of the Buddha.

Those beings who have done meritorious actions in this life, but have not yet attained liberation are often born in the deva realms. Such devas are also followers of the Buddha, some of whom are Dhamma protectors, guarding those who practise and live by the Dhamma. That is why we have the practice of sharing merits with them, and requesting their blessings and protection.

8. BUDDHA

The Buddha has ‘woken up’ from the dream-like ignorance that binds us to samsāra. All of us in samsāra are actually living a dream-like experience, and we cling onto it, which results in suffering. Specifically, he has realised the emptiness of this self, and seen the impermanent nature of the universe. Having awakened to the true nature of life, he also has the ability to awaken others.

9. BHAGAVĀ

The term Bhagavā is very commonly used in India. Many great teachers, masters, and even Indian deities are all called Bhagavā. In the case of the Buddha, it means ‘blessed’ or ‘exalted’.

The Buddha is ‘blessed’ because having developed his merits and virtues over countless lifetimes he was able to accomplish whatever he wished. He taught the Dhamma which has benefitted countless beings, and established the Sangha which has preserved the teachings for more than 2,500 years until this very

day. He was ‘blessed’ with perfect memory, great strength and a good appearance. Even his physical body, with its perfect features – 32 major and 80 minor marks – was able to inspire those who saw him to walk the spiritual path.

Recollecting the Nine Virtues

When we reflect on the extraordinary characteristics and qualities of the Buddha, we will realise that it is not easy to truly fathom the greatness of the Buddha. These qualities are the culmination of lifetimes practising and perfecting virtues, merits and wisdom. When we consider how difficult it is for us to overcome our own cravings and aversions, we will realise the greatness of the Buddha, who has totally overcome all the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion.

Hence these nine qualities of the Buddha are very useful for us to remember – first to recite, then eventually to commit to memory. And when we have

impressed them in our minds, we should try to live up to these qualities and develop them in our lives. In so doing, one day you will realise who the Buddha really is.

When we are reciting the nine virtues, or paying respects and making offerings before a Buddha image, we should try to recall the great qualities of the Buddha as much as we can. Images of the Buddha not only portray his perfect physical attributes, but more significantly, they symbolise his sublime qualities and supreme spiritual realisation. Paying respects towards an image of the Buddha is not idol-worship, but an inspiration for us to emulate the qualities that will lead us to liberation.

Conclusion

The Buddha is an embodiment of great wisdom and great compassion. Through wisdom, he purified his mind from the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion, and developed the higher knowledge and skills to enlighten others. Through compassion, the

Buddha practised various virtues from life to life until their perfection, generating the merits and supporting conditions to attain enlightenment, as well as developing the necessary skills to benefit others.

The Buddha demonstrates the full potential of a human life; that it is possible, for each and every one of us, to attain ultimate freedom – liberation from the saṃsāric cycle of birth and death.

The greatness of the Buddha is difficult for us to fathom or realise with our mundane minds. Even though Upaka the ascetic, Dona the Brahmin, and Brahmāyu, an elderly Brahmin, all met the Buddha face to face, they were unable to recognise the Buddha for who he was. This was because of their views, the teachings they had received from other teachers. That is why the teaching of Dhamma is so important, to correct our wrong views, our preconceived ideas. When we have Right View, everything flows – the Noble Eightfold Path comes naturally.

The Significance of the Buddha Dhamma Sangha

The Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are known as the ‘Three Jewels’ or ‘Triple Gem’ because of their preciousness. They are the best and most reliable source of refuge.

When we are ill, we will visit a doctor and take the medicine prescribed to cure our illness. In a similar light, in order to cure our suffering in saṃsāra we can look to the Buddha as the doctor, the Dhamma as the medicine, and the Sangha as one who administers the medicine.

The blessings, guidance and protection of the Buddha Dhamma Sangha lead us to success, not only in our worldly pursuits but also in the pursuit of our final liberation and Enlightenment.

We all have the same basic awareness as the Buddha, whether we believe it or not. The difference lies in its clarity. The Buddha's awareness is vast and crystal clear. Our awareness is clouded and tainted by greed, hatred and delusion, along with all their ramifications or manifestations.

As we continue to grow in faith and devotion to the Buddha Dhamma Sangha, and keep on doing good, avoiding evil, and purifying our minds, we will slowly remove the layers of cloud that have been obstructing and obscuring us and eventually attain the awareness and clarity of the Buddha.

YO DHAMMAṀ PASSATI,

SO MAṀ PASSATI²¹

He who sees the Dhamma sees me.

—The Buddha

²¹ Vakkali Sutta, SN 22.87

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Venerable Mahinda