

## CHAPTER 12

# THE BUDDHA'S MINISTRY

"Freed am I from all bonds, whether divine or human.  
You, too, O bhikkhus, are freed from all bonds."

—Vinaya, Mahāvagga I.10

**T**he Buddha's beneficent and successful ministry lasted forty-five years. From his 35th year, the year of his enlightenment, till his death in his 80th year, he served humanity both by example and by precept. Throughout the year he wandered from place to place, at times alone, sometimes accompanied by his disciples, expounding the Dhamma to the people and liberating them from the bonds of *saṃsāra*. During the rainy season (*vassāna*) from July to November, owing to incessant rains, he lived in retirement as was customary with all ascetics in India in his time.

In ancient times, as today, three regular seasons prevailed in India, namely *vassāna* (rainy), *hemanta* (winter), and *gimhāna* (hot). The *vassāna* or rainy season starts in *Āsālha* and extends up to *Assayuga*, that is, approximately from the middle of July to the middle of November.

During the *vassāna* period, due to torrential rains, rivers and streams usually get flooded, roads get inundated, communications get interrupted and people as a rule are confined to their homes and villages and live on what provisions they have collected during the previous seasons. During this time the ascetics find it difficult to engage in their preaching tours, wandering from place to place. An infinite variety of vegetable and animal life also appears to such an extent that people could not move about without unconsciously destroying them. Accordingly all ascetics including the disciples of the Buddha, used to suspend their itinerant activities and live in retirement in solitary places. As a rule the Buddha and his disciples were invited to spend their rainy seasons either in a monastery or in a secluded park. Sometimes, however, they used to retire to forests. During these rainy seasons people flocked to the Buddha to hear the Dhamma and thus availed themselves of his presence in their vicinity to their best advantage.

## ***The First Twenty Years***

### ***First Year at Benares***

After expounding the Dhammacakka Sutta to his first five disciples on the Āsālha full moon day, he spent the first rainy season in the Deer Park at Isipatana, near Benares. Here there was no special building where he could reside. Yasa's conversion took place during this retreat.

### ***Second, Third, and Fourth Years at Rājagaha***

Rājagaha was the capital of the kingdom of Magadha where ruled King Bimbisāra. When the Buddha visited the king, in accordance with a promise made by him before his enlightenment, he offered his Bamboo Grove (*veluvana*) to the Buddha and his disciples. This was an ideal solitary place for monks as it was neither too far nor too near to the city. Three rainy seasons were spent by the Buddha in this quiet grove.

### ***Fifth Year at Vesāli***

During this year while he was residing in the Pinnacle Hall at Mahāvana near Vesāli, he heard of the impending death of King Sudhodhana and, repairing to the king's death chamber, preached the Dhamma to him. Immediately the king attained arahantship. For seven days thereafter he experienced the bliss of emancipation then passed away.

It was in this year that the bhikkhūṇī order was founded at the request of Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī. After the cremation of the king, when the Buddha was temporarily residing at Nigrodhārāma, Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī approached the Buddha and begged permission for women to enter the order. But the Buddha refused and returned to the Pinnacle Hall at Rājagaha. Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī was so intent on renouncing the world that she, accompanied by many Sākya and Koliya ladies, walked all the way from Kapilavatthu to Rājagaha and, through the intervention of Venerable Ānanda, succeeded in entering the order.<sup>179</sup>

### ***Sixth Year at Mankula Hill in Kosambi, near Allahabad***

Just as he performed the "twin wonder" (*yamaka pāṭihāriya*)<sup>180</sup> to overcome the pride of his relatives at Kapilavatthu, even so did he perform it for the second time at Mankula Hill to convert his alien followers.

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179. See also Chapt. 9.

180. See p. 113.

### ***Seventh Year at Tāvatiṃsa Heaven***

A few days after the birth of Prince Siddhattha Queen Mahā Māyā died and was born as a deva (god) in the Tusita Heaven. In this seventh year, during the three rainy months, the Buddha preached the Abhidhamma<sup>181</sup> to the devas of the Tāvatiṃsa Heaven where the mother-Deva repaired to hear him. Daily he came to earth and gave a summary of his sermon to the Venerable Sāriputta who in turn expounded the same doctrine in detail to his disciples. What is embodied in the present Abhidhamma Piṭaka is supposed to be this detailed exposition of the Dhamma by him.

It is stated that, on hearing these discourses, the deva who was his mother attained the first stage of sainthood.

### ***Eighth Year at Bhesakalā Forest, near Suṃsumāra Rock, in the Bhagga District***

### ***Ninth Year at Kosambi***

It was in this year that Māgandiyā harboured a grudge against the Buddha and sought an opportunity to dishonour him.

Māgandiyā was a beautiful maiden. Her parents would not give her in marriage as the prospective suitors, in their opinion, were not worthy of their daughter. One day as the Buddha was surveying the world, he perceived the spiritual development of the parents. Out of compassion for them he visited the place where the father of the girl was tending the sacred fire. The brahmin, fascinated by the Buddha's physical beauty, thought that he was the best person to whom he could give his daughter in marriage and requesting him to stay there until his arrival, hurried home to bring his daughter. The Buddha in the meantime stamped his footprint on that spot and moved to a different place. The brahmin and his wife, accompanied by their daughter who was dressed in her best garments, came to that spot and observed the footprint. The wife who was conversant with signs said that it was not the footprint of an ordinary man but of a pure person who had eradicated all passions. The Brahmin ridiculed the idea, and, noticing the Buddha at a distance offered his daughter unto him. The Buddha describing how he overcame his passions said:

“Having seen Taṇhā, Arati, and Ragā,<sup>182</sup>  
I had no pleasure for the pleasures of love.

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181. Abhidhamma (“higher doctrine”) deals with Buddhist philosophy. See Chapter 15.

182. The three daughters of Māra.

What is this body, filled with urine and dung?  
I should not be willing to touch it, even with my foot.”<sup>183</sup>

Hearing his Dhamma, the brahmin and his wife attained *anāgāmi*, the third stage of sainthood. But proud Māgandiya felt insulted and she thought to herself, “If this man has no need of me, it is perfectly proper for him to say so, but he declares me to be full of urine and dung. Very well, by virtue of birth, lineage, social position, wealth, and the charm of youth that I possess I shall obtain a husband who is my equal, and then I shall know what ought to be done to the monk Gotama.”

Enraged by the words of the Buddha, she conceived a hatred towards him. Later she was given as a consort to the king of Udena. Taking advantage of her position as one of the royal consorts, she bribed people and instigated them to revile and drive the Buddha out of the city. When the Buddha entered the city, they shouted at him, saying: “You are a thief, a simpleton, a fool, a camel, an ox, an ass, a denizen of hell, a beast. You have no hope of salvation. A state of punishment is all that you can look forward to.”

Venerable Ānanda, unable to bear this filthy abuse, approached the Buddha and said, “Lord, these citizens are reviling and abusing us. Let us go elsewhere.”

“Where shall we go, Ānanda?” asked the Buddha.

“To some other city, Lord,” said Ānanda.

“If men revile us there, where shall we go then?” inquired the Buddha.

“To still another city, Lord,” said Ānanda.

“Ānanda, one should not speak thus. Where a difficulty arises, right there should it be settled. Only under those circumstances is it permissible to go elsewhere. But who are reviling you, Ānanda?” questioned the Buddha.

“Lord, everyone is reviling us, slaves and all,” replied Ānanda. Admonishing Venerable Ānanda to practise patience, the Buddha said:

- i) “As an elephant in the battle-field withstands the arrows shot from a bow, even so will I endure abuse. Verily, most people are undisciplined.”
- ii) “They lead the trained horses or elephants to an assembly. The king mounts the trained animal. The best among men are the disciplined who endure abuse.”

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183. *Buddhist Legends*, part i, p. 274.

- iii) “Excellent are trained mules, so are thorough-bred horses of Sindh and noble tusked elephants; but the man who is disciplined surpasses them all.”<sup>184</sup>

Again he addressed Venerable Ānanda and said, “Be not disturbed. These men will revile you only for seven days, and, on the eighth day they will become silent. A difficulty encountered by the Buddhas lasts no longer than seven days.”<sup>185</sup>

### ***Tenth Year at Pārileyaka Forest***

While the Buddha was residing at Kosambi, a dispute arose between two parties of bhikkhus—one versed in the Dhamma, the other in the Vinaya—with respect to the transgression of a minor rule of etiquette in the lavatory. Their respective supporters also were divided into two sections.

Even the Buddha could not settle the differences of these quarrelsome monks. They were adamant and would not listen to his advice. The Buddha thought: “Under present conditions the jostling crowd in which I live makes my life one of discomfort. Moreover these monks pay no attention to what I say. Suppose I were to retire from the haunts of men and live a life of solitude.” In pursuance of this thought, without even informing the Sangha, alone he retired to the Pārileyaka Forest and spent the rainy season at the foot of a beautiful Sal tree.

It was on this occasion, according to the story, that an elephant and a monkey ministered to his needs.<sup>186</sup>

### ***Eleventh Year at Ekanālā, Brahmin Village***

The following Kasībhāradvāja Sutta<sup>187</sup> was delivered here:

On one occasion the Buddha was residing at Ekanālā in Dakkhināgiri, the brahmin village in Magadha. At that time about five-hundred ploughs belonging to Kasībhāradvāja brahmin were harnessed for the sowing. Thereupon the Exalted One, in the forenoon, dressed himself and taking bowl and robe went to the working place of the brahmin. At that time the distribution of food by the brahmin was taking place. The Buddha went to the place where food was being distributed and stood aside. The brahmin Kasībhāradvāja saw the Buddha waiting for alms. Seeing him, he spoke thus: “I, O ascetic, plough and sow; and having ploughed and sown, I eat. You also, O ascetic, should plough and sow; and having ploughed and sown, you should eat.”

184. DhP vv. 320, 321, 322.

185. See *Buddhist Legends*, vol. 1, p. 176.

186. *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā*, Kosambaka Vatthu.

187. Sutta Nipāta, p. 12,

"I, too, O brahmin, plough and sow; having ploughed and sown, I eat," said the Buddha.

"But we see not the Venerable Gotama's yoke, or plough, or plough-share, or goad, or oxen, albeit the Venerable Gotama says, "I too plough and sow; and having ploughed and sown, I eat," remarked the brahmin.

Then the brahmin Bhāradvāja addressed the Exalted One thus:

"A farmer you claim to be, but we see none of your tillage. Being questioned about ploughing, please answer us so that we may know your ploughing."

The Buddha answered:

"Confidence (*saddhā*) is the seed, discipline (*tapo*) is the rain, wisdom (*paññā*) my yoke and plough, modesty (*hiri*) the pole of my plough, mind (*mano*) the rein, and mindfulness (*sati*) my ploughshare and goad.

"I am controlled in body, controlled in speech, temperate in food. With truthfulness I cut away weeds. Absorption in the Highest (*arahantship*) is the release of the oxen.

"Perseverance (*virīya*) is my beast of burden that carries me towards the bond-free state (*āna*). Without turning it goes, and having gone it does not grieve.

"Thus is the tilling done: it bears the fruit of deathlessness. Having done this tilling, one is freed from all sorrow."

Thereupon the brahmin Kasibhāradvāja, filling a large bronze bowl with milk-rice, offered it to the Exalted One, saying "May the Venerable Gotama eat the milk-rice! The Venerable Gotama is a farmer, since the Venerable Gotama tills a crop that bears the fruit of deathlessness."

The Exalted One, however, refused to accept this saying:

"What is obtained by reciting verses is not fit to be eaten by me. This, O brahmin, is not the rule of seers. The Enlightened reject such food. While this principle lasts, this is the livelihood.

"Serve the unique, cankerless, great sage of holy calm with other kind of food and drink, for he is like a field to him that desires to sow good deeds."

### ***Twelfth Year at Verañjā***

A brahmin of Verañjā, hearing that the Buddha was residing at Verañjā near Naleru's Nimba tree with a large company of his disciples, approached him and raised several questions with regard to his conduct. The brahmin was so pleased with his answers that he became a follower of the Buddha and invited him and his disciples to spend the rainy season at Verañjā. The Buddha signified his assent as usual by his silence.

Unfortunately at this particular time there was a famine at Verañjā and the Buddha and his disciples were compelled to live on food intended for horses. A horse-dealer very kindly provided them with coarse food available, and the Buddha partook of such food with perfect equanimity.

One day, during this period, Venerable Sāriputta, arising from his solitary meditation, approached the Buddha and respectfully questioned him thus: "Which Buddha's dispensation endured long and which did not?"

The Buddha replied that the dispensations of the Buddhas Vipassi, Sikhī, and Vessabhū did not endure long. While the dispensations of the Buddhas Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, and Kassapa endured long.<sup>188</sup>

The Buddha attributed this to the fact that some Buddhas made no great effort in preaching the Dhamma in detail and promulgated no rules and regulations for the discipline of the disciples, while other Buddhas did so.

Thereupon Venerable Sāriputta respectfully implored the Buddha to promulgate the fundamental precepts (*pātimokkha*) for the future discipline of the Sangha so that the holy life may endure long.

"Be patient, Sāriputta, be patient," said the Buddha and added:

"The Tathāgata alone is aware of the time for it. Until certain defiling conditions arise in the Sangha the Tathāgata does not promulgate means of discipline for the disciples and does not lay down the fundamental precepts (*pātimokkha*). When such defiling conditions arise in the Sangha, only then the Tathāgata promulgates means of discipline and lays down the fundamental precepts for the disciples in order to eradicate such defilements.

"When, Sāriputta, the Sangha attains long standing (*rattaññū-mahattaṃ*), full development (*vepulla-mahattaṃ*), great increase in gains (*lābhagga-mahattaṃ*) and greatness in erudition (*bahussuta-mahattaṃ*), defiling conditions arise in the Sangha. Then does the Tathāgata promulgate means of discipline and the fundamental precepts to prevent such defilements.

"Sāriputta, the order of disciples is free from troubles, devoid of evil tendencies, free from stain, pure, and well established in virtue. The last of my five-hundred disciples is a *sotāpanna* (stream-winner) not liable to fall, steadfast and destined for enlightenment."<sup>189</sup>

188. Vinaya Piṭaka, Suttavibhaṅga (Pārājikā) pp. 1–11. Miss I. B. Horner, *Book of the Discipline*, Part 1, pp.1–23.

189. The Buddha was referring to Venerable Ānanda.

(The rainy season at Verañjā forms the subject of the Introduction to the Pārājikā Book of the Vinaya Piṭaka.)

At the end of this rainy season the Buddha went on a preaching tour to Soreyya, Saṅkassa, Kaṇṇakujja, Payāga, and then, crossing the river, stayed some time in Benares and returned thence to Vesāli to reside at the Pinnacle Hall in Mahāvana.

***Thirteenth Year was spent at Cāliya Rock***

***Fourteenth Year at Jetavana Monastery, Sāvattihī***

The Venerable Rāhula received his higher ordination at this time on the completion of his twentieth year.

***Fifteenth Year at Kapilavatthu***

The pathetic death of King Suppabuddha who was angry with the Buddha for leaving his daughter, Princess Yasodharā, occurred in this year. It may be mentioned that the Buddha spent only one rainy season in his birthplace.

***Sixteenth Year at the city of Āḷavi***

The conversion of Āḷavaka the demon,<sup>190</sup> who feasted on human flesh, took place in this year.

Āḷavaka, a ferocious demon, was enraged to see the Buddha in his mansion. He came up to him and asked him to depart. "Very well, friend," said the Buddha and went out. "Come in," said he. The Buddha came in. For the second and third time he made the same request and the Buddha obeyed. But when he commanded him for the fourth time, the Buddha refused and asked him to do what he could.

"Well, I will ask you a question," said Āḷavaka, "If you will not answer, I will scatter your thoughts, or tear out your heart, or take you by your feet and fling you across the Ganges."

"Nay, friend," replied the Buddha, "I see not in this world inclusive of gods, brahmas, ascetics, and brahmins, amongst the multitude of gods and men, any who could scatter my thoughts, or tear out my heart, or take me by my feet and fling me across the Ganges. However, friend, ask what you wish."

Āḷavaka then asked the following questions:

"Herein, which is man's best possession?

Which well practised yields happiness?

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190. Sutta Nipāta, Āḷavaka Sutta, p. 31, Chalmers, *Teachings of the Buddha*, p. 45.



Which indeed is the sweetest of tastes?  
How lived, do they call the best life?"

To these questions the Buddha answered thus:

"Herein confidence is man's best possession.  
Dhamma well practised yields happiness.  
Truth indeed is the sweetest of tastes.  
Life lived with understanding is best, they say."

ĀḶavaka next asked the Buddha:

"How does one cross the flood?  
How does one cross the sea?  
How does one overcome sorrow?  
How is one purified?"

The Exalted One replied:

"By confidence one crosses the flood,  
by heedfulness the sea.  
By effort one overcomes sorrow,  
by wisdom is one purified."

ĀḶavaka then inquired:

"How is wisdom gained?  
How are riches found?  
How is renown gained?  
How are friends bound?  
Passing from this world to the next,  
how does one not grieve?"<sup>191</sup>

In answer the Buddha said:

"The heedful, intelligent person of confidence gains wisdom by hearing the Dhamma of the Pure Ones that leads to Nibbāna. He who does what is proper, persevering and strenuous, gains wealth. By truth one attains to fame. Generosity binds friends.

"That faithful householder who possesses these four virtues—truthfulness, good morals, courage and liberality—grieves not after passing away.

"Well, ask many other ascetics and brahmins whether there is found anything greater than truthfulness, self-control, generosity, and patience.

Understanding well the meaning of the Buddha's words, ĀḶavaka said:

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191. See *Kindred Sayings*, part 1, pp. 276–277.

"How could I now ask diverse ascetics and brahmins? Today I know what is the secret of my future welfare.

"For my own good did the Buddha come to Āḷavi. Today I know where gifts bestowed yield fruit in abundance. From village to village, from town to town will I wander honouring the Fully Enlightened One and the perfection of the sublime Dhamma."

***Seventeenth Year was spent at Rājagaha***

***Eighteenth Year was spent at Cāliya Rock***

***Nineteenth and Twentieth years were spent at Rājagaha***

### ***Buddha and Aṅgulimāla***

It was in the 20th year that the Buddha converted the notorious murderer Aṅgulimāla.<sup>192</sup> Ahimsaka (Innocent) was his original name. His father was chaplain to the king of Kosala. He received his education at Taxila, the famous educational centre in the olden days, and became the most illustrious and favourite pupil of his renowned teacher. Unfortunately his colleagues grew jealous of him, concocted a false story, and succeeded in poisoning the teacher's mind against him. The enraged teacher, without any investigation, contrived to put an end to his life by ordering him to fetch a thousand human right-hand fingers as teacher's honorarium. In obedience to the teacher, though with great reluctance, he repaired to the Jālīni forest, in Kosala, and started killing people to collect fingers for the necessary offering. The fingers thus collected were hung on a tree, but as they were destroyed by crows and vultures he later wore a garland of those fingers to ascertain the exact number. Hence he was known by the name Aṅgulimāla (Finger-wreathed). When he had collected 999 fingers, so the books state, the Buddha appeared on the scene. Overjoyed at the sight, because he thought that he could complete the required number by killing the great ascetic, he stalked the Buddha drawing his sword. The Buddha by his psychic powers created obstacles on the way so that Aṅgulimāla would not be able to get near him although he walked at his usual pace. Aṅgulimāla ran as fast as he could but he could not overtake the Buddha. Panting and sweating, he stopped and cried: "Stop, ascetic." The Buddha calmly said: "Though I walk, yet have I stopped. You too, Aṅgulimāla stop." The bandit thought — "These ascetics speak the truth, yet he says he has stopped, whereas it is I who have stopped. What does he mean?"

Standing, he questioned him:

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192. *Psalms of the Brethren*, pp. 318–325. Also see Aṅgulimāla Sutta (MN 86).

"You who are walking, monk, say: 'I have stopped!'  
 And me you say, who have stopped, I have not stopped!  
 I ask you, monk, what is the meaning of your words?  
 How can you say that you have stopped but I have not?"

The Buddha sweetly replied:

"Yes, I have stopped, Aṅgulimāla, forever.  
 Towards all living things renouncing violence;  
 You hold not your hand against your fellow men,  
 Therefore I have stopped, but you still go on."

Aṅgulimāla's good kamma rushed up to the surface. He thought that the great ascetic was none other but the Buddha Gotama who out of compassion had come to help him.

Straightaway he threw away his armour and sword and became a convert. Later, as requested by him he was admitted into the Noble order by the Buddha with the mere utterance, 'Come, O bhikkhu!' (*ehi bhikkhu*).

News spread that Aṅgulimāla had become a bhikkhu. The king of Kosala, in particular, was greatly relieved to hear of his conversion because he was a veritable source of danger to his subjects.

But Aṅgulimāla had no peace of mind, because even in his solitary meditation he used to recall memories of his past and the pathetic cries of his unfortunate victims. As a result of his evil kamma, while seeking alms in the streets he would become a target for stray stones and sticks and he would return to the monastery 'with broken head and flowing blood, cut and crushed' to be reminded by the Buddha that he was merely reaping the effects of his own kamma.

One day as he went on his round for alms he saw a woman in travail. Moved by compassion, he reported this pathetic woman's suffering to the Buddha. He then advised him to pronounce the following words of truth, which later came to be known as the Aṅgulimāla Paritta.<sup>193</sup>

"Sister, since my birth in the ariya clan (i.e., since his ordination) I know not that I consciously destroyed the life of any living being. By this truth may you be whole, and may your child be whole."<sup>194</sup>

He studied this paritta and, going to the presence of the suffering sister, sat on a seat separated from her by a screen, and uttered these words. Instantly she was delivered of the child with ease. The efficacy of this paritta persists to this day.

193. *Paritta* = Protective discourse.

194. *Yato' haṃ bhaginī ariyāya jātiyā jāto n'abhihānāmi sañicca pāṇa jivitā voropetā. Tena saccena sotthi te hotu, sotthi gabbhassā 'ti.*

In due course Venerable Āṅgulimāla attained arahantship.  
Referring to his memorable conversion by the Buddha, he says:

“Some creatures are subdued by force,  
Some by the hook, and some by whips,  
But I by such a One was tamed,  
Who needed neither staff nor sword.”<sup>195</sup>

The Buddha spent the remaining twenty-five years of his life mostly in Sāvattihī at the Jetavana Monastery built by Anāthapiṇḍika, the millionaire, and partly at Pubbārāma, built by Visākhā, the chief benefactress.




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195. *Psalm of the Brethren*, p. 328.