

CHAPTER 13

THE BUDDHA'S DAILY ROUTINE

“The Lord is awakened. He teaches the Dhamma for awakening.”

— Majjhima Nikāya

The Buddha can be considered the most energetic and the most active of all religious teachers that ever lived on earth. The whole day he was occupied with his religious activities except when he was attending to his physical needs. He was methodical and systematic in the performance of his daily duties. His inner life was one of meditation and was concerned with the experiencing of nibbānic bliss, while his outer life was one of selfless service for the moral upliftment of the world. Himself enlightened, he endeavoured his best to enlighten others and liberate them from the ills of life.

His day was divided into five parts: (i) the forenoon session, (ii) the afternoon session, (iii) the first watch, (iv) the middle watch, and (v) the last watch.

The Forenoon Session

Usually early in the morning he surveys the world with his divine eye to see whom he could help. If any person needs his spiritual assistance, uninvited he goes, often on foot, sometimes by air using his psychic powers, and converts that person to the right path.

As a rule he goes in search of the vicious and the impure, but the pure and the virtuous come in search of him.

For instance, the Buddha went of his own accord to convert the robber and murderer Aṅgulimāla and the wicked demon Ālavaka, but pious young Visākhā, generous millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika, and intellectual Sāriputta and Moggallāna came up to him for spiritual guidance.

While rendering such spiritual service to whomsoever it is necessary, if he is not invited to partake of alms by a lay supporter at some particular place, he, before whom kings prostrated themselves, would go in quest of alms through alleys and streets, with bowl in hand, either alone or with his disciples.

Standing silently at the door of each house, without uttering a word, he collects whatever food is offered and placed in the bowl and returns to the monastery.

Even in his eightieth year when he was old and in indifferent health, he went on his rounds for alms in Vesālī.

Before midday he finishes his meal. Immediately after lunch he daily delivers a short discourse to the people, establishes them in the three refuges and the five precepts and if any person is spiritually advanced, he is shown the path to sainthood.

At times he grants ordination to them if they seek admission to the order and then retires to his chamber.

The Afternoon Session

After the noon meal he takes a seat in the monastery and the bhikkhus assemble to listen to his exposition of the Dhamma. Some approach him to receive suitable objects of meditation according to their temperaments; others pay their due respects to him and retire to their cells to spend the afternoon.

After his discourse or exhortation to his disciples, he himself retires to his private perfumed chamber to rest. If he so desires, he lies on his right side and sleeps for a while with mindfulness. On rising, he attains to the ecstasy of great compassion (*mahā-karuṇā-samāpatti*) and surveys, with his divine eye, the world, especially the bhikkhus who retired to solitude for meditation and other disciples in order to give them any spiritual advice that is needed. If the erring ones who need advice happen to be at a distance, there he goes by psychic powers, admonishes them and retires to his chamber.

Towards evening the lay followers flock to him to hear the Dhamma. Perceiving their innate tendencies and their temperaments with the buddha-eye,¹⁹⁶ he preaches to them for about one hour. Each member of the audience, though differently constituted, thinks that the Buddha's sermon is directed in particular to him. Such was the Buddha's method of expounding the Dhamma. As a rule the Buddha converts others by explaining his teachings with homely illustrations and parables, for he appeals more to the intellect than to emotion.

To the average man the Buddha at first speaks of generosity, discipline, and heavenly bliss. To the more advanced he speaks on the evils of material pleasures and on the blessings of renunciation. To the highly advanced he expounds the four noble truths.

196. *Buddhacakkhu* constitutes the knowledge of the one's inclinations (*āsaya*) and the innate tendencies (*āsayaṇusaya-ñāṇa*) and the knowledge of the dullness and keenness of faculties such as confidence, mindfulness, concentration, energy and wisdom (*indriyaparopariyattana-ñāṇa*)

On rare occasions as in the case of Aṅgulimāla and Khemā did the Buddha resort to his psychic powers to effect a change of heart in his listeners.

The sublime teachings of the Buddha appealed to both the masses and the intelligentsia alike. A Buddhist poet sings:

“Giving joy to the wise, promoting the intelligence of the middling, and dispelling the darkness of the dull-witted, this speech is for all people.”¹⁹⁷

Both the rich and the poor, the high and the low, renounced their former faiths and embraced the new message of peace. The infant *sāsana* (dispensation of the Buddha), which was inaugurated with a nucleus of five ascetics, soon developed into millions and peacefully spread throughout central India.

The First Watch

This period of the night extends from 6 to 10 p.m. and was exclusively reserved for instruction to bhikkhus. During this time the bhikkhus were free to approach the Buddha and get their doubts cleared, question him on the intricacies of the Dhamma, obtain suitable objects of meditation, and hear the doctrine.

The Middle Watch

During this period, which extends from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., celestial beings such as devas and brahmas, who are invisible to the physical eye, approach the Buddha to question him on the Dhamma. An oft-recurring passage in the suttas is: “Now when the night was far spent a certain deva of surpassing splendour came to the Buddha, respectfully saluted him and stood at one side.” Several discourses and answers given to their queries appear in the Saṃyutta Nikāya.

The Last Watch

The small hours of the morning, extending from 2 to 6 a.m., which comprise the last watch, are divided into four parts.

The first part is spent in pacing up and down (*caṅkamana*). This serves as a mild physical exercise to him. During the second part, that is from 3 to 4 a.m. He mindfully sleeps on his right side. During the third part, that is from 4 to 5 a.m., he attains the state of arahantship and experiences nibbānic bliss. For one full hour from 5 to 6 a.m. He attains

197. *Satapañcasataka*, v. 78.

the ecstasy of great compassion (*mahā karuṇā samāpatti*) and radiates thoughts of loving kindness towards all beings and softens their hearts. At this early hour he surveys the whole world with his buddha-eye to see whether he could be of service to any. The virtuous and those that need his help appear vividly before him though they may live at a remote distance. Out of compassion for them he goes of his own accord and renders necessary spiritual assistance.

The whole day he is fully occupied with his religious duties. Unlike any other living being he sleeps only for one hour at night. For two full hours in the morning and at dawn he pervades the whole world with thoughts of boundless love and brings happiness to millions. Leading a life of voluntary poverty, seeking his alms without inconveniencing any, wandering from place to place for eight months throughout the year preaching his sublime Dhamma, he tirelessly worked for the good and happiness of all till his eightieth year.

According to the *Dharmapradīpikā* the last watch is divided into these four parts. According to the commentaries the last watch consists of three parts. During the third part the Buddha attains the ecstasy of great compassion.

