

CHAPTER 14

THE BUDDHA'S PARINIBBĀNA (DEATH)

“The sun shines by day. The moon is radiant by night.
Armoured shines the warrior king.
Meditating the brāhmaṇa shines.
But all day and night the Buddha shines in glory.”

—Dhp 387

The Buddha was an extraordinary being. Nevertheless he was mortal, subject to disease and decay as are all beings. He was conscious that he would pass away in his eightieth year. Modest as he was he decided to breathe his last not in renowned cities like Sāvathī or Rājagaha, where his activities were centred, but in a distant and insignificant hamlet like Kusinārā.

In his own words the Buddha was in his eightieth year like “a worn-out cart.” Though old in age, yet, being strong in will, he preferred to traverse the long and tardy way on foot accompanied by his favourite disciple, Venerable Ānanda. It may be mentioned that Venerable Sāriputta and Moggallāna, his two chief disciples, predeceased him. So did Venerable Rāhula and Yasodharā.

Rājagaha, the capital of Magadha, was the starting point of his last journey.

Before his impending departure from Rājagaha King Ajātasattu, the parricide, contemplating an unwarranted attack on the prosperous Vajjian Republic, sent his Prime Minister to the Buddha to know the Buddha's view about his wicked project.

Conditions of welfare

The Buddha declared that (i) as long as the Vajjians meet frequently and hold many meetings; (2) as long as they meet together in unity, rise in unity and perform their duties in unity; (3) as long as they enact nothing not enacted, abrogate nothing that has already been enacted, act in accordance with the already established ancient Vajjian principles; (4) as long as they support, respect, venerate and honour the Vajjian elders, and pay regard to their worthy speech; (5) as long as no women or girls of their families are detained by force or abduction; (6) as long as they support, respect, venerate, honour those objects of worship—internal and

external—and do not neglect those righteous ceremonies held before; (7) as long as the rightful protection, defence and support for the arahants shall be provided by the Vajjians so that arahants who have not come may enter the realm and those who have entered the realm may live in peace—so long may the Vajjians be expected not to decline, but to prosper.

Hearing these seven conditions of welfare which the Buddha himself taught the Vajjians, the Prime Minister, Vassakāra, took leave of the Buddha, fully convinced that the Vajjians could not be overcome by the king of Magadha in battle, without diplomacy or breaking up their alliance.

The Buddha thereupon availed himself of this opportunity to teach seven similar conditions of welfare mainly for the benefit of his disciples. He summoned all the bhikkhus in Rājagaha and said:

(1) "As long, O disciples, as the bhikkhus assemble frequently and hold frequent meetings; (2) as long as the bhikkhus meet together in unity, rise in unity, and perform the duties of the Sangha in unity; (3) as long as the bhikkhus shall promulgate nothing that has not been promulgated, abrogate not what has been promulgated, and act in accordance with the already prescribed rules; (4) as long as the bhikkhus support, respect, venerate and honour those long-ordained Theras of experience, the fathers and leaders of the order, and respect their worthy speech; (5) as long as the bhikkhus fall not under the influence of uprisen attachment that leads to repeated births; (6) as long as the bhikkhus shall delight in forest retreats; (7) as long as the bhikkhus develop mindfulness within themselves so that disciplined co-celibates who have not come yet may do so and those who are already present may live in peace—so long may the bhikkhus be expected not to decline, but to prosper.

As long as these seven conditions of welfare shall continue to exist amongst the bhikkhus, as long as the bhikkhus are well-instructed in these conditions—so long may they be expected not to decline, but to prosper.

With boundless compassion the Buddha enlightened the bhikkhus on seven other conditions of welfare as follows:

"As long as the bhikkhus shall not be fond of, or delight in, or engage in, business; as long as the bhikkhus shall not be fond of, or delight in, or engage in, gossiping; as long as the bhikkhus shall not be fond of, or delight in sleeping; as long as the bhikkhus shall not be fond of, or delight in, or indulge in, society; as long as the bhikkhus shall neither have, nor fall under, the influence of base desires; as long as the

bhikkhus shall not have evil friends or associates and shall not be prone to evil—so long the bhikkhus shall not stop at mere lesser, special acquisition without attaining arahantship.”

Furthermore, the Buddha added that as long as the bhikkhus shall be devout, modest, conscientious, full of learning, persistently energetic, constantly mindful and full of wisdom—so long may the bhikkhus be expected not to decline, but to prosper.

Sāriputta's Praise

Enlightening the bhikkhus with several other discourses, the Buddha, accompanied by Venerable Ānanda, left Rājagaha and went to Ambalaṭṭhikā and thence to Nālandā, where he stayed at the Pāvārika mango grove. On this occasion the Venerable Sāriputta approached the Buddha and extolled the wisdom of the Buddha, saying: “Lord, so pleased am I with the Exalted One that methinks there never was, nor will there be, nor is there now, any other ascetic or brahmin who is greater and wiser than the Buddha as regards self enlightenment.”

The Buddha, who did not approve of such an encomium from a disciple of his, reminded Venerable Sāriputta that he had burst into such a song of ecstasy without fully appreciating the merits of the Buddhas of the past and of the future.

Venerable Sāriputta acknowledged that he had no intimate knowledge of all the supremely Enlightened Ones, but maintained that he was acquainted with the Dhamma lineage, the process through which all attain supreme buddhahood, that is by overcoming the five *nīvaraṇa* namely, (i) sense-desires, (ii) ill will, (iii) sloth and torpor, (iv) restlessness and brooding, (v) indecision; by weakening the strong passions of the heart through wisdom; by thoroughly establishing the mind in the four kinds of mindfulness; and by rightly developing the seven factors of enlightenment.

Pāṭaliputta

From Nālandā the Buddha proceeded to Pāṭaligāma where Sunīdha and Vassakāra, the chief ministers of Magadha, were building a fortress to repel the powerful Vajjians.

Here the Buddha resided in an empty house and, perceiving with his supernormal vision thousands of deities haunting the different sites, predicted that Pāṭaliputta would become the chief city inasmuch as it is a residence for ariyas, a trading centre and a place for the interchange of

all kinds of wares, but would be subject to three dangers arising from fire, water and dissension.

Hearing of the Buddha's arrival at Pāṭaligāma, the ministers invited the Buddha and his disciples for a meal at their house. After the meal was over the Buddha exhorted them in these verses:

“Wheresoe'er the prudent man shall take up his abode.
Let him support the brethren there, good men of self-control,
And give the merit of his gifts to the deities
who haunt the spot.
Revered, they will revere him: honoured,
they honour him again,
Are gracious to him as a mother to her own, her only son.
And the man who has the grace of the gods,
good fortune he beholds.”¹⁹⁸

In honour of his visit to the city they named the gate by which he left “Gotama-Gate”, and they desired to name the ferry by which he would cross “Gotama-Ferry,” but the Buddha crossed the overflowing Ganges by his psychic powers while the people were busy making preparations to cross.

Future states

From the banks of the Ganges he went to Kotigama and thence to the village of Nadika and stayed at the Brick Hall. Thereupon the Venerable Ānanda approached the Buddha and respectfully questioned him about the future states of several persons who died in that village. The Buddha patiently revealed the destinies of the persons concerned and taught how to acquire the mirror of the Dhamma so that an ariya disciple endowed therewith may predict of himself thus: “Destroyed for me is birth in a woeful state, animal realm, Peta¹⁹⁹ realm, sorrowful, evil, and low states. A stream-winner am I, not subject to fall, assured of final enlightenment.”

The Mirror of the Dhamma (Dhammādāsa)

Then the Buddha explained the mirror of the Dhamma as follows:

“What, O Ānanda, is the mirror of the Dhamma?

“Herein a noble disciple reposes perfect confidence in the Buddha reflecting on his virtues thus:

198. Prof. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, vol ii, p. 91.

199. Peta: “hungry ghost.” See discussion on p. 251.

“Thus, indeed, is the Exalted One, a Worthy One, a Fully Enlightened One, Endowed with wisdom and conduct, an Accomplished One, Knower of the worlds, an Incomparable Charioteer for the training of individuals, the Teacher of gods and men, Omniscient, and Holy.”²⁰⁰

“He reposes perfect confidence in the Dhamma reflecting on the characteristics of the Dhamma thus:

“Well expounded is the Dhamma by the Exalted One, to be self-realised, immediately effective, inviting investigation, leading onwards (to Nibbāna), to be understood by the wise, each one for himself.”²⁰¹

“He reposes perfect confidence in the Sangha reflecting on the virtues of the Sangha thus:

“Of good conduct is the order of the disciples of the Exalted One; of upright conduct is the order of the disciples of the Exalted One; of right conduct is the order of the disciples of the Exalted One; of proper conduct is the order of the disciples of the Exalted One. These four pairs of persons constitute eight individuals. This order of the disciples of the Exalted One is worthy of gifts, of hospitality, of offerings, of reverence, is an incomparable field of merit to the world.”²⁰²

“He becomes endowed with virtuous conduct pleasing to the ariyas, unbroken, intact, unspotted, unblemished, free, praised by the wise, untarnished by desires, conducive to concentration.”

From Nadika the Buddha went to the flourishing city of Vesālī and stayed at the grove of Ambapālī, the beautiful courtesan.

Anticipating her visit, the Buddha in order to safeguard his disciples, advised them to be mindful and reflective and taught them the way of mindfulness.

Ambapālī

Ambapālī, hearing of the Buddha’s arrival at her mango grove, approached the Buddha and respectfully invited him and his disciples for a meal on the following day. The Buddha accepted her invitation in preference to the invitation of the Licchavi nobles which he received later. Although the Licchavi nobles offered a large sum of money to obtain

200. *Iti’pi so bhagavā araham, sammā sambuddho, vijjācaraṇasampanno, sugato, lokavidū, anuttaro purisadamma-sārathi, satthā deva-mānussānaṃ, buddho, bhagavā’ti.*

201. *Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo, sandiṭṭhiko, akāliko, ehipassiko, opāyiko, paccattaṃ vedittabbo viññūhi’ti.*

202. *Supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, ujupaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, nāyapaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, sāmīcipaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, yadidaṃ cattāri purisayugāni aṭṭhapurisapuggalā, esa bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, āhuneyyo, pāhuneyyo dakkhiṇeyyo, añjalikaraṇīyo, anuttaraṃ, puññakkhettaṃ lokassā’ti.*

from her the opportunity of providing this meal to the Buddha, she politely declined this offer. As invited, the Buddha had his meal at Ambapālī's residence. After the meal Ambapālī, the courtesan, who was a potential arahant, very generously offered her spacious mango grove to the Buddha and his disciples.²⁰³

As it was the rainy season the Buddha advised his disciples to spend their retreat in or around Vesālī, and he himself decided to spend the retreat, which was his last and forty-fifth one, at Beluva, a village near Vesālī.

The Buddha's Illness

In this year he had to suffer from a severe sickness, and "sharp pains came upon him even unto death." With his iron will, mindful and reflective, the Buddha bore them without any complaint.

The Buddha was now conscious that he would soon pass away. But he thought that it would not be proper to pass away without addressing his attendant disciples and giving instructions to the order. So he decided to subdue his sickness by his will and live by constantly experiencing the bliss of arahantship.

Immediately after recovery, the Venerable Ānanda approached the Buddha, and expressing his pleasure on his recovery, remarked that he took some little comfort from the thought that the Buddha would not pass away without any instruction about the order.

The Buddha made a memorable and significant reply which clearly reveals the unique attitude of the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Sangha.

The Buddha's Exhortation

"What, O Ānanda, does the order of disciples expect of me? I have taught the Dhamma making no distinction between esoteric and exoteric doctrine.²⁰⁴ In respect of the truths the Tathāgata has no closed fist of a teacher. It may occur to anyone: 'It is I who will lead the order of

203. Later Ambapālī entered the order and attained arahantship.

204. *Anantaram abāhiraṃ karitvā*: These two terms refer to both individuals and teachings. "This much of my doctrine will I not teach others"—such a thought means limiting the Dhamma to an inner circle. "This much of my doctrine will I teach others"—such a thought means barring the Dhamma to others. "To this person I shall teach"—by such a thought a limitation is made to an inner circle. "To this person I shall not teach"—such a thought implies individual discrimination. The Buddha makes no such distinctions both with regard to his teaching or his disciples. The Buddha had nothing esoteric in his teachings. Nor had he an inner circle or outer circle amongst his disciples.

bhikkhus,' or 'The order of bhikkhus is dependent upon me,' or 'It is he who should instruct any matter concerning the order.'

"The Tathāgata, Ānanda, thinks not that it is he who should lead the order of bhikkhus, or that the order is dependent upon him. Why then should he leave instructions in any matter concerning the order?

"I, too, Ānanda, am now decrepit, aged, old, advanced in years, and have reached my end. I am in my eightieth year. Just as a worn-out cart is made to move with the aid of thongs, even so methinks the body of the Tathāgata is moved with the aid of thongs.²⁰⁵ Whenever, Ānanda, the Tathāgata lives plunged in signless mental one-pointedness, by the cessation of certain feelings and unmindful of all objects, then only is the body of the Tathāgata at ease.²⁰⁶

"Therefore, Ānanda, be you islands²⁰⁷ unto yourselves. Be you a refuge to yourselves. Seek no external refuge. Live with the Dhamma as your island, the Dhamma as your refuge. Betake to no external refuge.²⁰⁸

"How, Ānanda, does a bhikkhu live as an island unto himself, as a refuge unto himself, seeking no external refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge, seeking no external refuge?

"Herein, Ānanda, a bhikkhu lives strenuous, reflective, watchful, abandoning covetousness in this world, constantly developing mindfulness with respect to body, feelings, consciousness, and Dhamma.²⁰⁹

"Whosoever shall live either now or after my death as an island unto oneself, as a refuge unto oneself, seeking no external refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge, seeking no external refuge, those bhikkhus shall be foremost amongst those who are intent on discipline."

Here the Buddha lays special emphasis on the importance of individual striving for purification and deliverance from the ills of life. There is no efficacy in praying to others or in depending on others. One might question why Buddhists should seek refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Sangha when the Buddha had explicitly advised his followers not to seek refuge in others. In seeking refuge in the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha) Buddhists only regard the Buddha as an

205. *Vedhamissakena*

206. Referring to the bliss of arahantship (*phalasamāpatti*).

207. Havens.

208. *Attadīpa viharatha attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā; dhammadīpā viharatha, dhammasaraṇā, anaññasaraṇā.*

209. These are the four kinds of *satipaṭṭhānas* (foundations of mindfulness). Here the term *dhamma* is used in a different sense and it cannot adequately be rendered by one English word as it refers to both mental and physical objects. See *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya* No. 10 (also included below on page 411).

instructor who merely shows the path of deliverance, the Dhamma as the only way or means, the Sangha as the living examples of the way of life to be lived. By merely seeking refuge in them Buddhists do not consider that they would gain their deliverance.

Though old and feeble the Buddha not only availed himself of every opportunity to instruct the bhikkhus in various ways but also regularly went on his rounds for alms with bowl in hand when there were no private invitations. One day as usual he went in quest of alms in Vesāli and after his meal went with Venerable Ānanda to the Capala Cetiya, and, speaking of the delightfulness of Vesāli and other shrines in the city, addressed the Venerable Ānanda thus:

Whosoever has cultivated, developed, mastered, made a basis of, experienced, practised, thoroughly acquired the four means of accomplishment (*iddhipāda*)²¹⁰ could, if he so desires, live for an aeon (*kappa*)²¹¹ or even a little more (*kappāvesesa*). The Tathāgata, O Ānanda, has cultivated, developed, mastered, made a basis of, experienced, practised, thoroughly acquired the four means of accomplishment. If he so desires, the Tathāgata could remain for an aeon or even a little more.

The text adds that “even though a suggestion so evident and so clear was thus given by the Exalted One, the Venerable Ānanda was incapable of comprehending it so as to invite the Buddha to remain for an aeon for the good, benefit, and the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and men”.

The sutta attributes the reason to the fact that the mind of Venerable Ānanda was, at the moment, dominated by Māra the evil one.

The Buddha Announces his Death

The Buddha appeared on earth to teach the seekers of truth things as they truly are and a unique path for the deliverance from all ills of life. During his long and successful ministry he fulfilled his noble mission to the satisfaction of both himself and his followers. In his eightieth year he felt that his work was over. He had given all necessary instructions to his earnest followers—both the householders and the homeless ones—and they were not only firmly established in his teachings but were also capable of expounding them to others. He therefore decided not to control the remainder of his life span by his will-power and by experiencing

210. The four *iddhipādas* are will (*chanda*), effort (*virīya*), thought (*citta*), and investigation or wisdom (*vīmaṃsā*)

211. Here the term *kappa* means the normal life-term which was about 100 years. *Kappāvesesa* means an extra fraction of a *kappa*—i.e., about 120 or so.

the bliss of arahantship. While residing at the Capala Cetiya the Buddha announced to Venerable Ānanda that he would pass away in three months' time.

Venerable Ānanda instantly recalled the saying of the Buddha and begged of him to live for a *kappa* for the good and happiness of all.

"Enough Ānanda, beseech not the Tathāgata. The time for making such a request is now past," was the Buddha's reply.

He then spoke on the fleeting nature of life and went with Venerable Ānanda to the Pinnacled Hall at Mahāvana and requested him to assemble all the bhikkhus in the neighbourhood of Vesāli.

To the assembled bhikkhus the Buddha spoke as follows:

"Whatever truths have been expounded to you by me, study them well, practise, cultivate and develop them so that this holy life may last long and be perpetuated out of compassion for the world, for the good and happiness of the many, for the good and happiness of gods and men."

"What are those truths? They are:

the four foundations of mindfulness,
the four kinds of right endeavour,
the four means of accomplishment,
the five faculties,
the five powers,
the seven factors of enlightenment, and
the Noble Eightfold Path."²¹²

He then gave the following final exhortation and publicly announced the time of his death to the Sangha.

The Buddha's Last Words

Behold, O bhikkhus, now I speak to you. Transient are all conditioned things. Strive on with diligence.²¹³ The passing away of the Tathāgata will take place before long. At the end of three months from now the Tathāgata will pass away.

Ripe is my age. Short is my life. Leaving you I shall depart. I have made myself my refuge. O bhikkhus, be diligent, mindful and virtuous. With well-directed thoughts guard your mind. He who lives heedfully in this dispensation will escape life's wandering and put an end to suffering.²¹⁴

Casting his last glance at Vesāli, the Buddha went with Venerable Ānanda to Bhandagāma and addressing the bhikkhus said:

212. These are the thirty-seven constituents of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiya-dhamma*)

213. *Vayadhammā saṅkhārā, appamādena sampādettha.*

Morality, concentration, wisdom, and deliverance supreme.
 These things were realised by the renowned Gotama.
 Comprehending them, the Buddha taught the doctrine to the
 disciples.
 The Teacher with sight has put an end to sorrow
 and has extinguished all passions.

The Four Great References

Passing thence from village to village, the Buddha arrived at Bhoganagara and there taught the four great citations or references (*mahāpadesa*) by means of which the word of the Buddha could be tested and clarified in the following discourse:

(1) "A bhikkhu may say thus: 'From the mouth of the Buddha himself have I heard, have I received thus: "This is the doctrine, this is the discipline, this is the teaching of the Master.'" His words should neither be accepted nor rejected. Without either accepting or rejecting such words, study thoroughly every word and syllable and then put them beside the discourses (*sutta*) and compare them with the disciplinary rules (*vinaya*). If, when so compared, they do not harmonise with the discourses and do not agree with the disciplinary rules, then you may come to the conclusion. 'Certainly this is not the word of the Exalted One, this has been wrongly grasped by the bhikkhu.'

"Therefore you should reject it.

"If, when compared and contrasted, they harmonise with the discourses and agree with the disciplinary rules, you may come to the conclusion: 'Certainly this is the word of the Exalted One, this has correctly been grasped by the bhikkhu.'

"Let this be regarded as the first great reference.

(2) "Again, a bhikkhu may say thus: 'In such a monastery lives the Sangha together with leading theras. From the mouth of that Sangha have I heard, have I received thus: "This is the doctrine, this is the discipline, this is the Master's teaching.'" His words should neither be accepted nor rejected. Without either accepting or rejecting such words, study thoroughly every word and syllable and then put them beside the discourses and compare them with the disciplinary rules. If, when so compared, they do not harmonise with the discourses and do not agree with the disciplinary rules, then you may come to the conclusion: 'Cer-

214. *Paripakko vayo mayhaṃ parittaṃ mama jīvitaṃ.
 Pahāya vo gamissāmi kataṃ me saraṇamattano
 Appamattā satimanto susilā hotha bhikkhavo
 Susamāhita saṅkappā sacittamanurakkhatha
 Yo imasmiṃ dhammavinaye appamatto vihessati
 Pahāya jātisaṃsāraṃ dukkhassantaṃ karissati.*

tainly this is not the word of the Exalted One, this has been wrongly grasped by the bhikkhu.'

"Therefore you should reject it.

"If, when compared and contrasted, they harmonise with the discourses and agree with the disciplinary rules, you may come to the conclusion: 'Certainly this is the word of the Exalted One, this has correctly been grasped by the bhikkhu.'

"Let this be regarded as the second great reference.

(3) "Again, a bhikkhu may say thus: 'In such a monastery dwell many theras and bhikkhus of great learning, versed in the teachings, proficient in the Doctrine, Vinaya (discipline), and matrices (*mātikā*). From the mouth of those theras have I heard, have I received thus: "This is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya, this is the teaching of the Master."' His words should neither be accepted nor rejected. Without either accepting or rejecting such words, study thoroughly every word and syllable and then put them beside the discourses and compare them with the disciplinary rules. If, when so compared, they do not harmonise with the discourses and do not agree with the disciplinary rules, then you may come to the conclusion: 'Certainly this is not the word of the Exalted One, this has been wrongly grasped by the bhikkhu.'

"Therefore you should reject it.

"If, when compared and contrasted, they harmonise with the Suttas and agree with the Vinaya, then you may come to the conclusion: 'Certainly this is the word of the Exalted One, this has been correctly grasped by the bhikkhu.'

"Let this be regarded as the third great reference.

(4) "Again, a bhikkhu may say thus: 'In such a monastery lives an elderly bhikkhu of great learning, versed in the teachings, proficient in the Dhamma, Vinaya, and Matrices. From the mouth of that therā have I heard, have I received thus: "This is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya, this is the Master's teaching."' His words should neither be accepted nor rejected. Without either accepting or rejecting such words, study thoroughly every word and syllable and then put them beside the discourses and compare them with the disciplinary rules. If, when so compared, they do not harmonise with the discourses and do not agree with the disciplinary rules, then you may come to the conclusion: 'Certainly this is not the word of the Exalted One, this has been wrongly grasped by the bhikkhu.'

"Therefore you should reject it.

"If, when compared and contrasted, they harmonise with the suttas and agree with the Vinaya, then you may come to the conclusion: 'Certainly this is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya, this is the Master's teachings.'

"Let this be regarded as the fourth great reference.

"These, bhikkhus, are the four great references."

The Buddha's Last Meal

Enlightening the disciples with such edifying discourses, the Buddha proceeded to Pāva where the Buddha and his disciples were entertained by Cunda the smith. With great fervour Cunda prepared a special delicious dish called 'sūkaramaddava'.²¹⁵ As advised by the Buddha, Cunda served only the Buddha with the sūkaramaddava and buried the remainder in the ground.

After the meal the Buddha suffered from an attack of dysentery and sharp pains came upon him. Calmly he bore them without any complaint.

Though extremely weak and severely ill, the Buddha decided to walk to Kusinārā²¹⁶ his last resting place, a distance of about three gāvutas²¹⁷ from Pāva. In the course of this last journey it is stated that the Buddha had to sit down in about twenty-five places owing to his weakness and illness.

On the way he sat at the foot of a tree and asked Venerable Ānanda to fetch some water as he was feeling thirsty. With difficulty Venerable Ānanda secured some pure water from a streamlet which, a few moments earlier, was flowing fouled and turbid, stirred up by the wheels of five hundred carts.

At that time a man named Pukkusa approached the Buddha, and expressed his admiration at the serenity of the Buddha, and, hearing a sermon about his imperturbability, offered him a pair of robes of gold.

As directed by the Buddha, he robed the Buddha with one and Venerable Ānanda with the other.

When Venerable Ānanda placed the pair of robes on the Buddha, to his astonishment, he found the skin of the Buddha exceeding bright, and said, "How wonderful a thing is it, Lord and how marvellous, that the colour of the skin of the Exalted One should be so clear, so exceeding

215. According to the commentary it is flesh of a boar neither too young nor too old, but not killed for his sake (*pavattamamsa*). Some say it is a kind of mushroom. It is also believed to be a special kind of delicious dish by that name, or a nutritious chemical food. See *Questions of Milinda*, Vol. 1, p. 244 and *Dialogues of the Buddha* part 2 p. 136 n. 1

216. According to the commentary the Buddha chose Kusinārā to pass away for three reasons: first, to preach the Mahāsudassana Sutta in order to inspire people to be more virtuous; second, to convert Subhadda, his last disciple, who could not have been converted by any other but himself; and third, to enable Dona, a brahmin, to distribute his relics peacefully amongst his followers.

217. A little more than six miles.

bright. For when I placed even this pair of robes of burnished gold and ready for wear on the body of the Exalted One, it seemed as if it had lost its splendour."

Thereupon the Buddha explained that on two occasions the colour of the skin of the Tathāgata becomes clear and exceeding bright—namely on the night on which the Tathāgata attains buddhahood and on the night the Tathāgata passes away.

He then pronounced that at the third watch of the night on that day he would pass away in the Sāla Grove of the Mallas between the twin Sāla trees, in the vicinity of Kusinārā.

Cunda's Meritorious Meal

He took his last bath in the river Kukuttha and resting a while spoke thus—"Now it may happen, Ānanda, that some one should stir up remorse in Cunda the smith, saying: 'This is evil to thee, Cunda, and loss to thee in that when the Tathāgata had eaten his last meal from your provisions, then he died.' Any such remorse in Cunda the smith should be checked by saying: 'This is good to thee, Cunda, and gain to thee, in that when the Tathāgata had eaten his last meal from your provision, then he died.' From the very mouth of the Exalted One, Cunda, have I heard, from his very mouth have I received this saying: "These two offerings of food are of equal fruit, and of equal profit, and of much greater fruit and of much greater profit than any other, and which are the two?

"The offering of food which when a Tathāgata has eaten he attains to supreme and perfect insight, and the offering of food which when a Tathāgata has eaten he passes away by that utter cessation in which nothing whatever remains behind—these two offerings of food are of equal fruit and of equal profit, and of much greater fruit, and of much greater profit than any other.

"There has been laid up by Cunda the smith a kamma redounding to length of life, redounding to good birth, redounding to good fortune, redounding to good fame, redounding to the inheritance of heaven and of sovereign power.

"In this way, Ānanda, should be checked any remorse in Cunda the smith."

Uttering these words of consolation out of compassion to the generous donor of his last meal, he went to the Sāla Grove of the Mallas and asked Venerable Ānanda to prepare a couch with the head to the north

between the twin Sāla trees. The Buddha laid himself down on his right side with one leg resting on the other, mindful and self-possessed.

How the Buddha is Honoured

Seeing the Sāla trees blooming with flowers out of season, and other outward demonstrations of piety, the Buddha exhorted his disciples thus:

It is not thus, Ānanda, that the Tathāgata is respected, revered, venerated, honoured, and revered. Whatever bhikkhu or bhikkhunī, upāsaka or upāsika lives in accordance with the teaching, conducts himself dutifully, and acts righteously, it is he who respects, reverences, venerates, honours, and reveres the Tathāgata with the highest homage. Therefore, Ānanda, should you train yourselves thus: 'Let us live in accordance with the teaching, dutifully conducting ourselves, and acting righteously.'

At this moment the Venerable Upavāna, who was once attendant of the Buddha, was standing in front of the Buddha fanning him. The Buddha asked him to stand aside.

Venerable Ānanda wished to know why he was asked to stand aside as he was very serviceable to the Buddha.

The Buddha replied that devas had assembled in large numbers to see the Tathāgata and they were displeased because he was standing in their way concealing him.

The Four Sacred Places

The Buddha then spoke of four places, made sacred by his association, which faithful followers should visit with reverence and awe. They are:

1. The birthplace of the Buddha,²¹⁸
2. The place where the Buddha attained enlightenment,²¹⁹
3. The place where the Buddha established the incomparable wheel of truth²²⁰ (*dharmacakka*), and
4. The place where the Buddha attained *parinibbāna*.²²¹

"And they," added the Buddha, "who shall die with a believing heart, in the course of their pilgrimage, will be reborn, on the dissolution of their body, after death, in a heavenly state."

218. Lumbinī on the Indian borders of Nepal.

219. Buddha Gayā, about eight miles from the Gayā station.

220. Saranāth.

221. Kusinārā—modern Kasiā—about thirty-two miles from Gorakhpur station.

Conversion of Subhadda

At that time a wandering ascetic, named Subhadda,²²² was living at Kusinārā. He heard the news that the Ascetic Gotama would attain parinibbāna in the last watch of the night. And he thought, "I have heard grown-up and elderly teachers, and their teachers, the wandering ascetics, say that seldom and very seldom, indeed, do exalted, fully enlightened arahants arise in this world. Tonight in the last watch the Ascetic Gotama will attain parinibbāna. A doubt has arisen in me, and I have confidence in the Ascetic Gotama. Capable, indeed, is the Ascetic Gotama to teach the doctrine so that I may dispel my doubt.

Thereupon Subhadda, the wandering ascetic, went to Upavattana Sāla grove of the Mallas where the Venerable Ānanda was, and approaching him spoke as follows: "I have heard grown-up and elderly teachers and their teachers, the wandering ascetics, say that seldom, and very seldom, indeed, do exalted, fully enlightened arahants arise in this world. Tonight in the last watch the Ascetic Gotama will attain parinibbāna. A doubt has arisen in me, and I have confidence in the Ascetic Gotama. Capable, indeed, is the Ascetic Gotama to teach the doctrine so that I may dispel my doubts. Shall I, O Ānanda, obtain a glimpse of the Ascetic Gotama?"

"Enough, friend Subhadda, do not worry the Accomplished One. The Exalted One is wearied," said the Venerable Ānanda.

For the second and third time Subhadda repeated his request, and for the second and third time Venerable Ānanda replied in the same manner.

The Buddha heard the conversation between the Venerable Ānanda and Subhadda, and addressing Ānanda, said:

"Nay, Ānanda, do not prevent Subhadda. Let Subhadda, O Ānanda, behold the Accomplished One. Whatsoever Subhadda will ask of me, all that will be with the desire for knowledge, and not to annoy me. And whatever I shall say in answer he will readily understand."

Thereupon the Venerable Ānanda introduced Subhadda to the Buddha.

Subhadda exchanged friendly greetings with the Buddha and sitting aside said: "There are these ascetics and priests, O Gotama, who are leaders of companies and congregations, who are heads of sects and are well-known, renowned religious teachers, esteemed as good men by the

222. This Subhadda should be distinguished from another Subhadda who entered the order in his old age. It was the latter who remarked that the death of the Buddha was no occasion for sorrow as the bhikkhus were free to do whatever they liked, without being bound by the injunctions of the Master. This remark of Subhadda prompted Venerable Kassapa to take immediate steps to hold a convocation of the Dhamma and the Vinaya.

multitude, as, for instance, Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambali, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Belatthiputta, Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta,²²³ have they all, as they themselves claim, thoroughly understood the truth or not, or have some of them understood and some not?"

"Let it be, O Subhadda! Trouble not yourself as to whether all or some have realised it or not. I shall teach the doctrine to you. Listen and bear it well in mind. I shall speak."

"So be it, Lord!" replied Subhadda.

The Buddha spoke as follows:

"In whatever dispensation there exists not the Noble Eightfold Path, neither is the first *samaṇa* (recluse), nor the second, nor the third, nor the fourth to be found therein. In whatever dispensation, O Subhadda, there exists the Noble Eightfold Path, there also are to be found the first *samaṇa*, the second *samaṇa*, the third *samaṇa*, the fourth *samaṇa*.²²⁴ In this dispensation, O Subhadda, there exists the Noble Eightfold Path.

"Here, indeed, are found the first *samaṇa*, the second *samaṇa*, the third *samaṇa*, and the fourth *samaṇa*. The other foreign schools are empty of *samaṇas*. If, O Subhadda, the disciples live rightly, the world would not be void of arahants.²²⁵

"My age was twenty-nine when I went forth as a seeker after what is good. Now one and fifty years are gone since I went forth. Outside this fold there is not a single ascetic who acts even partly in accordance with this realisable doctrine."

Thereupon Subhadda spoke to the Buddha as follows:

"Excellent, Lord, excellent! It is as if, O Lord, a man were to set upright that which was overturned, or were to reveal that which was hidden, or were to point the way to one who has gone astray, or were to hold a lamp amidst the darkness, so that whoever has eyes may see, even so has the doctrine been expounded in various ways by the Exalted One.

"And I, Lord, seek refuge in the Buddha, the Doctrine, and the Order. May I receive the lesser and the higher ordination in the presence of the Exalted One!"

"Whoever, Subhadda," said the Buddha, "being already committed to the other doctrines desires the lesser²²⁶ and the higher ordination,²²⁷ remains on probation for four months.²²⁸ At the end of four months, the

223. They all flourished in the time of the Buddha.

224. The four *samaṇas* refer to the *sotāpanna* (stream-winner), the *sakadāgāmi* (once-returner), *anāgāmi* (non-returner), and *arahant*, the worthy one, who is the perfect saint.

225. *Suññā parappavādā samaṇehi aññehi. Ime ca Subhadda bhikkhū sammā vihareyyuṃ asuñño loko arahantehi assā'ti.*

disciples approving, he is ordained and raised to the status of a bhikkhu. Nevertheless, on understanding, I make individual exception.”

Then said Subhadda:

“If, Lord, those already committed to other doctrines, who desire the lesser and the higher ordination in this dispensation, remain on probation for four months, I too will remain on probation; and after the lapse of that period, the disciples approving, let me be received into the order and raised to the status of a bhikkhu.”

Thereupon the Buddha addressed Ānanda and said:

“Then, Ānanda, you may ordain Subhadda.”

“So, be it, Lord!” replied Ānanda.

And Subhadda, the wandering ascetic, spoke to the Venerable Ānanda as follows:

“It is a gain to you, O Venerable Ānanda! It is indeed a great gain to you, for you have been anointed by the anointment of discipleship in the presence of the Exalted One by himself.”

Subhadda received in the presence of the Buddha the lesser and the higher ordination.

And in no long time after his higher ordination, the Venerable Subhadda, living alone, remote from men, strenuous, energetic, and resolute, realised, in this life itself, by his own intuitive knowledge, the consummation of that incomparable life of holiness, and lived abiding in that state for the sake of which sons of noble families rightly leave the householder’s life for the homeless life. He perceived that rebirth was ended, completed was the holy life which after this life there was none other.

And the Venerable Subhadda became one of the arahants. He was the last personal convert of the Buddha.

The Last Words to Ānanda

The Venerable Ānanda desired to know what they should do with the body of the Tathāgata.

The Buddha answered, “Do not engage yourselves in honouring the remains of the Tathāgata. Be concerned about your own welfare (i.e., arahantship). Devote yourselves to your own welfare. Be heedful, be

226. *Pabbajjā* (renunciation). This refers to the ordination as a novice, which is done by donning the yellow robe after having shaved hair and beard and taking the three refuges and the ten precepts. The novice is called a *sāmaṇera*. He has cut himself off from the world and its ways. Henceforth by him even his parents are addressed “lay-disciples.”

227. *Upasampadā*: This refers to the higher ordination, which is bestowed only after the completion of the 20th year of life. He who receives it is a full member of the order and is called a bhikkhu.

228. A probation is not demanded of the Buddhist aspirant to ordination.

strenuous, and be intent on your own good. There are wise warriors, wise brahmins, wise householders who are firm believers in the Tathāgata. They will do honour to the remains of the Tathāgata.”

At the conclusion of these interesting religious talks Venerable Ānanda went aside and stood weeping at the thought: “Alas! I am still a learner with work yet to do. But my Master will finally pass away—he who is my sympathiser.”

The Buddha, noticing his absence, summoned him to his presence and exhorted him thus—“Enough, O Ānanda. Do not grieve, do not weep. Have I not already told you that we have to separate and divide and sever ourselves from everything that is dear and pleasant to us?

“O Ānanda, you have done much merit. Soon be freed from defilements.”

The Buddha then paid a tribute to Venerable Ānanda, commenting on his salient virtues.

After admonishing Venerable Ānanda in various ways, the Buddha ordered him to enter Kusinārā and inform the Mallas of the impending death of the Tathāgata. Mallas were duly informed, and came weeping with their wives, young men, and maidens, to pay their last respects to the Tathāgata.

The Last Scene

Then the Blessed One addressed Ānanda and said:

“It may be, Ānanda, that you will say thus: ‘Without the Teacher is the sublime teaching! There is no Teacher for us.’ Nay, Ānanda, you should not think thus. Whatever Doctrine and Discipline have been taught and promulgated by me, Ānanda, they will be your teacher when I am gone.²²⁹

“Let the Sangha, O Ānanda, if willing, abrogate the lesser and minor rules after my death,”²³⁰ remarked the Buddha.

Instead of using the imperative form the Buddha has used the subjunctive in this connection. Had it been his wish that the lesser rules should be abolished, he could have used the imperative. The Buddha foresaw that Venerable Kassapa, presiding over the first council, would, with the consent of the Sangha, not abrogate any rule hence his use of the subjunctive, states the commentator.

229. *Yo ca kho mayā dhammo ca vinayo ca desito paññatto so ‘vo mamaccayena satthā.*

230. *Ākaṅkhamāno, Ānanda, saṅgho, mamaccayena khuddānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni samūhantu!*

As the Buddha has not clearly stated what these minor rules were and as the arahants could not come to any decision about them, they preferred not to alter any rule but to retain all intact.

Again the Buddha addressed the disciples and said: “If, O disciples, there be any doubt as to the Buddha, or the doctrine, or the order, or the path, or the method, question me, and repent not afterwards thinking—we were face to face with the Teacher, yet we were not able to question the Exalted One in his presence.” When he spoke thus the disciples were silent.

For the second and third time the Buddha addressed the disciples in the same way. And for the second and third time the disciples were silent.

Then the Buddha addressed the disciples and said: “Perhaps it may be out of respect for the teacher that you do not question me. Let a friend, O disciples, intimate it to another.”

Still the disciples were silent.

Thereupon the Venerable Ānanda spoke to the Buddha as follows:

“Wonderful, Lord! Marvellous, Lord! Thus am I pleased with the company of disciples. There is not a single disciple who entertains a doubt or perplexity with regard to the Buddha, the doctrine, the order, the Path and the Method.”

“You speak out of faith, Ānanda, with regard to this matter. There is knowledge in the Tathāgata, that in this company of disciples there is not a single disciple who entertains a doubt or perplexity with regard to the doctrine, the order, the path and the method. Of these five hundred disciples, Ānanda, he who is the last is a Stream Winner, not subject to fall but certain and destined for enlightenment.”²³¹

Lastly the Buddha addressed the disciples and gave his final exhortation:

“Behold, O disciples, I exhort you. Subject to change are all component things. (*Vayadhammā saṅkhārā. Appāmadena sampādettha*). Strive on with diligence.” These were the last words of the Blessed One.

The Passing Away

The Buddha attained to the first ecstasy (*jhāna*). Emerging from it, he attained in order to the second, third, and fourth ecstasies. Emerging from the fourth ecstasy, he attained to “the realm of the infinity of space” (*ākāsānañcāyatana*). Emerging from it he attained to “the realm of the infinity of consciousness” (*viññāṇañcāyatana*). Emerging from it, he attained to “the realm of nothingness” (*ākīṇcaññāyatana*). Emerging

231. The reference was to the Venerable Ānanda, who encouraged by those words, attained arahantship later.

from it, he attained to “the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception” (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*). Emerging from it, he attained to “the cessation of perceptions and sensations” (*saññāvedayitanirodha*).

Venerable Ānanda, who had then not developed the divine eye, addressed Venerable Anuruddha and said: “O Venerable Anuruddha, the Exalted One has passed away.”

“Nay, brother Ānanda, the Exalted One has not passed away but has attained to “the cessation of perceptions and sensations.”

Then the Buddha, emerging from “the cessation of perceptions and sensations”, attained to “the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.” Emerging from it, he attained to “the realm of nothingness.” emerging from it, he attained to “the realm of the infinity of consciousness.” Emerging from it, he attained to “the realm of the infinity of space.” Emerging from it, he attained to the fourth ecstasy. Emerging from it, he attained to the third ecstasy. Emerging from it, he attained to the second ecstasy. Emerging from it, he attained to the first ecstasy. Emerging from it, he attained to the second ecstasy. Emerging from it, he attained to the third ecstasy. Emerging from it, he attained to the fourth ecstasy. Emerging from it, and immediately after, the Buddha finally passed away.²³²



232. The death of the Buddha occurred in 543 BCE on a Vesak full-moon day.