

1.3 How Buddhism Was Discovered

The 7 weeks after the Great Awakening

[Source: Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples* lecture series, Singapore, ©2002]

1. THE FIRST WEEK

After his enlightenment, the Buddha fasted for 49 days. During the first week, he spent all his time meditating in the lotus posture (*padm'āsana*) under the Bodhi tree, experiencing the bliss of Release (*vimutti,sukha*), i.e. Nirvana. At the end of the week, the Buddha reflected on the Law of Dependent Origination. During the first watch of the night (6-10 p.m.), he reflected on this law in direct order, thus:

When this (cause) exists, this (effect) is;
With the arising of this (cause), this (effect) arises.

In the middle watch of the night (10 p.m.-2 a.m.), he reflected on the same law in reverse order, thus:

When this (cause) does not exist, this (effect) is not;
With the stopping of this (cause), this (effect) stops.

In the third and last watch of the night (2-6 a.m.), he reflected the same law in direct and reverse order, thus:

When this (cause) exists, this (effect) is;
With the arising of this (cause), this (effect) arises.
When this (cause) does not exist, this (effect) is not;
With the stopping of this (cause), this (effect) stops.

2. THE SECOND, THIRD AND FOURTH WEEKS

During the 2nd week after his enlightenment, the Buddha gazed at the Bodhi tree with the motionless eye as a mark of gratitude to it for having sheltered him during his struggle for enlightenment. The emperor Aśoka was said to have built the “**Shrine of the Unblinking Eye**” (*animisa,cetiya*) to mark the sacred spot (UA 52; MA 2:184; J 1:77).

During the 3rd week, he mindfully paced up and down on the “**jewelled promenade**” (*ratana-caṅkamaṇa*) near the Bodhi tree. The Buddha had made this promenade using his psychic power to convince some skeptical devas that he had actually attained Enlightenment.

During the 4th week, the Buddha sat meditating on the Abhidharma (Higher Doctrine)¹ in the “**jewelled chamber**” (*ratana,ghara*). His mind and body were so pure that he radiated the **Buddha aura** or rays of the five colours, namely, blue, yellow, red, white, orange, and a mixture of the five (*pabhassara*). Blue stands for confidence, yellow for holiness, red for wisdom, white for purity, orange for detachment, and the mixture of the five represents all these noble qualities. From then on, the Buddha radiated these colours whenever he desired to. These colours are incorporated into the **international Buddhist flag** officially adopted at the meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Colombo, Śrī Lanka, in 1950.

¹ **Abhidharma**. Traditionally, it is said that the Buddha here reflected on the Paṭṭhāna, the 7th and last book of the Abhidhamma. The Paṭṭhāna is a book of “causation”, dealing with the 24 *paccayā* or modes of relations between mental and material states. While the other Abhidhamma texts take the analytical approach, this is the only Abhidhamma text that takes the synthetical approach. It is also important to note that what the Buddha is mediating on here in the method of Abhidhamma, not the Seven Texts, which were compiled very much later (between the 2nd and 3rd Councils). [Chapters 4 & 6.]

3. THE FIFTH WEEK

From the narrative point of view, the 5th week after the Great Enlightenment was a very turbulent one. The Buddha spent this period in meditation under the **Goatherd Banyan tree** (*aja,pāla nigrodha*). According to the Saṃyutta Nikāya, Māra appears to the Buddha and invites him to pass away. When Māra fails in his effort, his **three daughters**, six times then tries to tempt the Buddha (S 1:124 f; cf A 5:46, J 1:78 f; DhA 3:195 f). At the end of the week, a conceited brahmin approached the Buddha.

(a) The conceited brahmin

At the end of the seven days, a conceited (*huhuṅka*) brahmin came and asked him who is a brahmin. The Buddha answered, saying:

The brahmin who is free from evil things,
Not conceited, pure and self-controlled,
Perfect in knowledge, and living the Holy Life
Can rightly call himself a “brahmin”
If he is proud of nothing in the world.

From this statement and other similar words, we can see that the Buddha is against the caste system. To him, one does not become a brahmin or a high class person because of birth. Whether one is a “high class” or a “low class” person depends on one’s own actions: one who does good is a brahmin, one who does evil is not.

In the Buddha declares to **Aggika Bhāradvāja** that “actions make the man”, not birth or status:

Not by birth is one an outcaste,
Not by birth is one a brahman;
By one’s deeds, one is an outcaste,
By one’s deeds, one is a brahman. (Sn 142)

4. THE SIXTH WEEK

During the 6th week, the Buddha stayed under **the Mucalinda tree** (*Barringtonia acutangula*), enjoying the bliss of Nirvana. A sudden storm with torrential rain and violent winds raged throughout the week. On the onset of the storm, the serpent-king Mucalinda emerged from his underground abode and coiling around the Buddha's body seven times, spread his hood over the Buddha to protect him from the rain, cold, heat, insects, and other discomforts.

At the end of the seventh day, the serpent-king uncoiled himself. Turning himself into a handsome young man, he paid his respects to the Buddha. The Buddha then said these words to him:

Solitude is happiness for one who is contented, who has heard the Dharma, who sees
Happy is goodwill in the world, and restraint towards living beings.

Happy is detachment in the world, having transcended sense desires;
But to be free of the conceit “I am”—that is the greatest happiness of all. (V 1:2)

5. THE FIRST LAY DISCIPLES

During the 7th week, the Buddha meditated under **the Rājāyatana tree** (*Buchania latifolia*). At the end of the seventh day of the seventh week, he emerged from his meditation, completing 49 days of fasting. At that time, that is, the 8th week, the merchants, **Tapussa** (Skt *Trapuṣa*) **and his younger**

brother Bhallika, were travelling by the road from Utkala (Ukkala, modern Orissa).

A certain deity who had been their relative in a former life told them that the newly enlightened Buddha was staying at the foot of the Rājāyatana tree, and that they should go and make some offerings to him for their own welfare and happiness. They took some rice cake and honey to the Buddha.

The Vinaya account relates that when the Buddha had nothing to receive the food with, the Four Guardian Kings brought **four crystal bowls** from the four quarters and offered them to the Buddha.

After the Buddha had partaken of this meal, the two merchants took **the Twofold Refuge** (*dve, vācika saraṇa*) (A 1:26). They thus became **the first Buddhist disciples** (*dve, vācika upāsaka*) by declaring:

We go to the Blessed One and the Dharma for refuge. As from today, let the Blessed One regard us as followers who have gone to him for refuge for as long as life lasts.

They took only the “Twofold Refuge” (*dve, vācika saraṇa, gamana*) because the Sangha or Buddhist Order was not yet founded. The Twofold Refuge was used only in the pre-Sangha days and consisted in taking Refuge in the Buddha and the Dharma.²

As they were simple merchants, the Buddha did not teach any profound doctrine to them, but according to **the Lalita, vistara**, he recited a blessing bestowing on them wealth and good fortune in the four quarters and under the twenty-eight constellations.

According to the Jātaka Commentary, when they asked the Buddha for an object of veneration, the Buddha gave them a bit of his **hair and nails**. The merchants then erected stupas over these relics. It is said that the hair relic is still enshrined in the famous Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Rangoon, Burma.

Later on, after listening to the Buddha in Rājagrha, Tapussa became a Stream-winner and Bhallika joined the Order and became an Arhant (V 1:3 f; AA 1:382 ff; ThaA 1:49 ff; J 1:80).

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² The first Threefold Refuge lay-disciple (*te, vācika upāsaka*) was Yaśa's father, and his (Yaśa's) mother together with the rest of the family later became the first female lay-disciples (*te, vācika upāsikā*), Vin 1:15 ff; DhA 1:72; JA 1:80 f.