

SD 63.1

The First 7 Weeks

after the great awakening¹

The first events after the great awakening

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5 The 7 weeks after the great awakening²**5.1 BODHI SUTTAS 1-3 (U 1.1-1.3)**

5.1.0 After the Buddha's passing, his life story continues to be retold in even greater grandeur and drama. The Commentaries say that the newly awakened Buddha spends 7 weeks meditating in various postures under the Bodhi tree and in its vicinity.³ Further, there is a set of canonical texts, **the Bodhi Suttas 1-3** (U 1.1-3),⁴ **the Nigrodha Sutta** (U 1.4),⁵ and the Vinaya that mention certain key events of the first weeks.⁶

¹ This is an extended version of SD 26.1 (5).

² This whole section is an extension of SD 26.1 (5) and should be read with it.

³ VA 5:951-960; MA 2:183-185; UA 51-53; BA 289-290; J 1:77-80; DhA 12-15.

⁴ U 1.1-3/1-4.

⁵ U 1.4/3.

⁶ On these 7 weeks, see also Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004 §§3.15-19.

5.1.1 Week 1 (Sutta)

The Bodhi Sutta 1 (U 1.1) says that the newly-awakened Buddha sits in meditation under the Bodhi tree for the whole of first week, enjoying the bliss of liberation.

5.1.2 Week 2 (Sutta)

Then, for the whole of the 2nd week, the Buddha stands in meditation, taking the Bodhi tree as the object. This is done out of gratitude to the tree for having sheltered him during his struggle for awakening.

5.1.3 Week 3 (Sutta)

During the 3rd week, says **the Bodhi Sutta 2** (U 1.2), the Buddha sits under the Bodhi tree, reflecting on dependent arising in the direct order (*anuloma*): *When this (condition) exists, this (effect) is; through the arising of this (condition), this (effect) arises.*⁷ This explains the real root-cause of existence. Then in the reverse order (*paṭiloma*): *When this (condition) is not, this (effect) is not; through the ending of this (condition), this (effect) ends.*⁸ This explains the destruction of conditions for suffering.

5.1.4 Week 4 (Sutta)

The Bodhi Sutta 3 (U 1.3) continues by saying that in the 4th week, the Buddha reflects on dependent arising in all its modes. After a day deep in dhyanic bliss, he reflects on dependent arising in the direct mode during the first watch (6.00-10.00 pm); during the second watch (10.00 pm-2.00 am), he reflects on it in the reverse mode; and during the last watch (2.00-6.00 am), he reflects on it in both direct and reverse modes.

5.2 VINAYA AND UDĀNA ACCOUNTS

5.2.1 The Vinaya (V 1:2 f) has the same accounts, but all 3 episodes are conflated into a single one, all apparently occurring in the same first week (since no intervening events are mentioned).⁹ Both the Udāna and the Vinaya then continue with the episode of the *hurmhuṅka* brahmin's visit. Both **the Vinaya** (V 1:2) and **the Nigrodha Sutta** (U 1.4) go on to say "[T]hen, at that time, the Blessed One has been sitting in one posture, cross-legged, experiencing the bliss of liberation." When he emerges from his meditation, a certain brahmin of the *hurmhuṅka* birth¹⁰ (the Buddha's first human visitor) visits him.¹¹ The Buddha gives him a short teaching, and both the accounts end right here. (The Commentaries put this episode in the 5th week.)

⁷ *Imasmim sati idaṃ hoti; imass'uppādā idaṃ uppajjati.*

⁸ *Imasmim asati idaṃ na hoti; imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati.*

⁹ Two possible explanations obtain here: (1) The V account is based on an older source; (2) The Commentarial episodes of weeks 3-4 were added later. The Vinaya, in this connection, has 4 sections: (1) the Talk on Awakening (*bodhi, kathā*, V 1:1 f); (2) on the Ajapāla (*ajapāla, kathā*, V 1:2 f); (3) on the Mucalinda (*mucalinda, kathā*, V 1:3); (4) on the Rājāyatana (*rājāyatana, kathā*, V 1:3 f); followed by Brahmā's entreaty leading up to the teaching of the First Discourse.

¹⁰ Be Se: *hurṃ, huṅka, jātiko*; but V (PTS) has *huhuṅka. jātiko*. See V:H 4:3 n3, U:W 3 n1, & esp JPTS 1897-1901: 42. On *hurṃ* meaning disapproval, see Vism 3.53/96 (but no brahmin is mentioned), 3.89/105 (said to be the waking sound of one of lustful temperament), Vimati, vinodanī Tīkā:Be 2:85; on meaning either approval or acceptance, VvA 77. Masfield also notes: "whilst on *hurmhuṅka* meaning one uttering the sound *hurṃ hurṃ*, cp the mantra *Oṃ maṇi padme hurṃ*, etc" (UA:M 13 n18). A similar episode is found at Mvst 3:325.

¹¹ V 1:2; U 1.4/3 (no week is mentioned).

5.2.2 Evidently, while the Udāna takes the “dependent arising” episodes as occurring over 3 weeks, the Vinaya account takes them as occurring in the same night as the awakening. Since the Vinaya Piṭaka is generally regarded as younger than the Suttas, as such it is likely that the Udāna version is the older. However, it is also possible that these two versions have come down from two different older sources (with the Vinaya source as the younger one). The popular “seven-week” tradition as we have it today generally follows the Vinaya and Commentarial versions of the “dependent arising” episode.

5.3 COMMENTARIAL ACCOUNTS

5.3.1 Week 2 (Commentarial)

5.3.1.1 The Commentaries say that at the end of the 1st week, the Buddha, to dispel the devas’ doubt about his awakening, rises into the air and displays the twin wonder (*yamaka pāṭihāriya*), where fire and water shoot out from his pores, dancing around his body, forming a magnificent mandorla around himself.¹² Technically, this miracle is an example of the Buddha’s *transfiguration*.¹³

5.3.1.2 The same Commentaries continue by saying that the Buddha then stands in meditation, gazing with unblinking eyes at the Bodhi tree, grateful for it having sheltered him during his struggle for awakening. This spot came to be called **the shrine of the unblinking eye** (*animisa, cetiya*).¹⁴ While it is possible that the Buddha is actually gazing with open eyes fully focused on the Bodhi tree, this is unlikely if we go by the nature of dhyanic experience. It is more likely that he begins by gazing at the Bodhi tree as his meditation object, and following that he goes into dhyana which would account for his ability to keep in a single posture of standing still for a full week.

5.3.2 Week 3 (Commentarial)

During the 3rd week after the awakening, the Buddha mindfully paces up and down on “**the jewelled walk**” (*ratana, caṅkamana*) near the Bodhi tree. The Buddha had made this promenade using his psychic power to convince some skeptical devas that he has actually attained bodhi (awakening). According to the Dhammapada Commentary, it is while meditatively walking up and down on the jewelled walk that the Buddha performs the twin wonder. This wonder, it explains, is induced by the fire kasina and the water kasina. (DhA 3:241 f)

5.3.3 Week 4 (Commentarial)

5.3.3.1 During the 4th week, the Buddha sits meditating on the Abhidhamma¹⁵ in **the jewelled house** (*ratana, ghara*), created by the devas, which is later called the Jewelled Shrine (*ratana, cetiya*).¹⁶ Traditionally, it is said that here the Buddha reflects on “conditional relations” (*paṭṭhāna*), which is also the name of the 7th and last book of the Theravāda Abhidhamma. The Commentaries actually say that the Buddha spends the whole week “thinking out the Abhidhamma Piṭaka in detail, including the entire Paṭṭhāna with its infinite methods.”¹⁷

¹² MA 2:184; UA 51; BA 8; J 1:77.

¹³ See **Miracles**, SD 27.5b (3) (The transfiguration).

¹⁴ MA 2:184; UA 52; BA 8; J 1:77.

¹⁵ In the suttas, *abhidhamma* means “concerning the Dharma,” often with *abhivinaya* (V 1:64 = 181; M 1:472, 2:239; A 1:289, 5:24), but in post-canonical usage it refers to “Higher Doctrine,” i.e. the Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

¹⁶ VA 5:957; MA 2:184; UA 52; BA 290; J 1:78; DhA 13-15.

¹⁷ *Tattha pallaṅkena nisīditvā abhidhamma, piṭakaṃ, vīsato c’ettha ananta, nayaṃ samanta, paṭṭhānaṃ vicinanto sattāhaṃ vītināmesi*, VA 5:957; MA 2:184; UA 52; BA 9; J 1:78; ApA 82. The last adds, “But the Abhidhammi-

5.3.3.2 The term *paṭṭhāna* is pre-commentarial, when it is used in the sense of “the Paṭṭhāna method,” especially in reference to the 4th chapter of the Netti-p,pakaraṇa, which attempts to categorise all suttas into a sixteenfold system, starting with those dealing with mental defilements.¹⁸ As such, according to Bhikkhu Bodhi, *paṭṭhāna* here has nothing to do with the Paṭṭhāna of later Abhidhamma.¹⁹

As a text, **the Paṭṭhāna** is a book of “causation or conditionality,” dealing with the 24 modes of relations (*paccaya*) amongst 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 what the Buddha is meditating on here is the method of Abhidhamma, not the Seven Texts,²⁰ which were compiled very much later (between the 2nd and 3rd Councils).

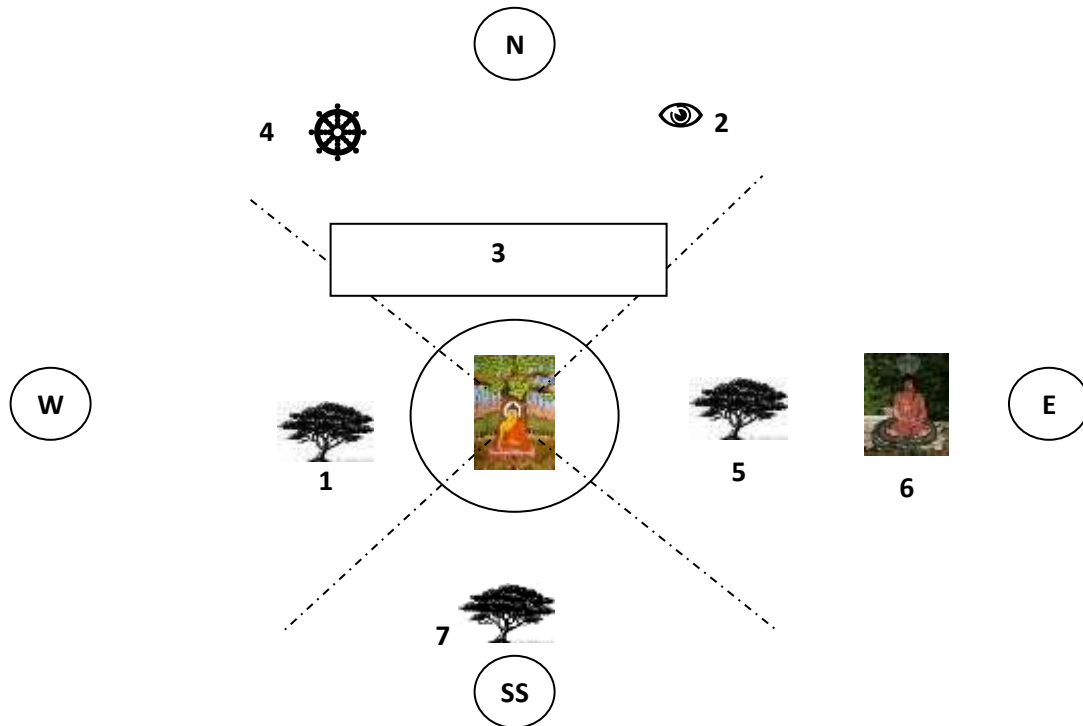


Diagram 6. Geography of the first 7 weeks

(UJA 51 f. 289 f: BA 8 f: cf UJA:M 211 & S Dhammika 1992:58)

Key:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) Bodhi tree. | (5) goatherd banyan (<i>ajapāla nigrodha</i>). |
| (2) shrines of the unblinking eye (<i>animisa, cetiya</i>). | (6) Mucalinda tree (VA 5:959). |
| (3) jewelled walkway (<i>ratana, caṇḍikamāna</i>). | (7) rāj'āyatana tree (VA 5:959). |
| (4) jewelled house (<i>ratana, ghara</i>). | |

kas say that the jewelled house does not refer to a house built of 7 types of gems, but a place where he masters (*sammasita*) the seven books of the Abhidhamma” (J 1:78): MA actually lists these titles (MA 2:184). On *ananta, -nayaṃ samanta, paṭṭhāna* or *ananta, naya, samanta, paṭṭhāna*, see JPTS 1915:28 f.

¹⁸ See UA:M 190 n496. Cf Nett:Ñ 173-250.

¹⁹ See UA:M 190 n496.

²⁰ *Satta-p, pakkaṇa*: see SD 26.1 (Table 2.1).

5.3.3.3 The Majjhima Commentary adds an interesting detail: as the Buddha reflects on the *paṭṭhāna*, his mind and body are so pure that he radiates the Buddha aura or six-coloured rays (*cha-b,baṇṇa raṁsī*), that is, the 5 colours, namely, blue, yellow, red, white, and orange, and clear radiance (*pabhassara*), and they burst forth from various parts of his body, radiating through all the worlds and heavens to the ends of the universe.²¹

Blue here stands for confidence, yellow for holiness, red for wisdom, white for purity, orange for detachment, and the clear radiance represents awakening. From then on, the Buddha radiates these colours whenever he wishes to. These colours are incorporated into the international Buddhist flag (right), officially adopted at the meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1950.²²

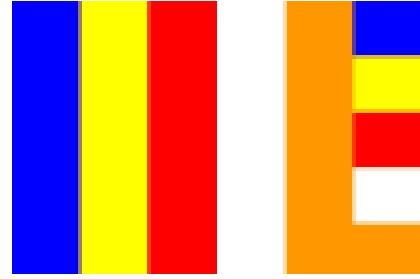


Fig 5.3.3.3

The international Buddhist flag

5.3.4 Week 5 (Sutta)

From the narrative viewpoint, the 5th week after the great awakening is a very turbulent one. The Buddha spends this week meditating under **the goatherd banyan tree** (*ajapāla nigrodha*). According to **the Satta Vassa Sutta** (S 4.24), Māra appears to the Buddha and discourages him from teaching the Dharma. When Māra fails in his effort, says **the Māra Dhītu Sutta** (S 4.25), his three daughters then try six times to seduce the Buddha.²³

5.3.5 Week 5 (Commentarial)

The Commentaries to the Vinaya and to the Udāna insert the *humhuṅka* brahmin episode at the end of the 5th week, while the Buddha is sitting under the goatherd (*aja, pāla*) banyan.²⁴ The Vinaya, however, says that this is in the 2nd week.²⁵ It is possible that the commentarial episodes of weeks 3-5 were erroneously inserted here before the goatherd banyan tree episode. The other Commentaries—other than VA and UA—do not mention the *humhuṅka* brahmin episode.

5.3.6 Week 6 (Sutta & Commentarial)

During the 6th week, the Buddha stays under **the Mucalinda tree** (*Barringtonia acutangula*), enjoying the bliss of nirvana. A sudden storm with torrential rain and violent winds rises and rages throughout the week. On the onset of the storm, the serpent-king Mucalinda emerges from his underground abode and, coiling around the Buddha's body 7 times, spreads his hood over the Buddha to protect him from the rain, cold, heat, insects, and other discomforts. At the end of the 7th day, the serpent-king uncoils himself. Turning himself into a comely young man, he pays his respects to the Buddha. The Buddha gives him a

²¹ MA 2:184 f; DhA 3:214; DhsA 13 f. See **Miracles**, SD 27.5b (3) (The transfiguration).

²² **The international Buddhist flag** was designed in 1880 by the Colombo Committee, comprising monks Hikkaduwē Sri Sumangala Thera (Chairman) and Migettuwatte Gunananda Thera, and laymen Don Carolis Hewavitharana (father of Anagarika Dharmapala), Andiris Perera Dharmagunawardhana (maternal grandfather of Anagarika Dharmapala), William de Abrew, Charles A de Silva, Peter de Abrew, H William Fernando, and N S Fernando and Carolis Pujitha Gunawardena (Secretary). Col Henry Steele Olcott, an American journalist of the New York Tribune and Theosophical Society pioneer, later made suggestions for modifying it, which were incorporated. It was first hoisted in 1885 in Sri Lanka.

²³ S 4.25/1:124-127 = SD 36.6; cf A 5:46; J 1:78 f; DhA 3:195 f.

²⁴ VA 5:957 f; cf UA 52-55, where the week is not specified.

²⁵ V 1:2, U 1.4/3.

brief instruction.²⁶

5.3.7 Week 7 (Sutta & Commentarial)

During the 7th week, the Buddha meditates under **the rāj'āyatana tree** (*Buchania latifolia*). At the end of the 7th day of the 7th week, he emerges from his meditation, completing 49 days of fasting.

At the end of the 49-day fast, two merchants, the brothers **Tapussa and Bhallika**,²⁷ meet the Buddha, offer him his first meal, and become the first lay disciples (taking the twofold refuge, that is, in the Buddha and the Dharma).²⁸

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²⁶ V 1:2.

²⁷ Their 1st meeting with the Buddha is after the great awakening, when they offer him his 1st meal, and then go for refuge in the Buddha and the Dharma (the sangha has not yet been formed then): V 1:4,1-27. Comy: Upon their request, the Buddha gives them some hair from his head, which they bring back to their home-city, Asīt'añjanā (said to be in Ukkala, modern Orissa) and enshrine it in a stupa (*cetiya*) they build specially for it (AA 1:383,19-27). The Burmese also believe that the Buddha's hair-relic is enshrined in the Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Yangon.

²⁸ V 1:3; VA 5:959-961; MA 2:185 f; BA 9; J 1:80 f. For events following this, see **Why the Buddha "hesitated" to teach**, SD 12.1.