From Siddhartha to Buddha
Genesis of an Awakening



"Jean-Luc Duez scattered this word, written like this, all over Paris. I didn't yet know that by constantly encountering it, it was also being written within me — until it became this book."

Baptiste Ozenne

“To those who do not yet know that they are on the way.“

The Prince
-
The World

Chapter 1

The one I am now

Used to be the elephant king.

Remember the tale of a previous birth[i].

(Chaddanta-jataka)

One upon a time there was a prince, a son of princes, who had been promised such a great destiny that his father, King Shuddhodana, became frightened and hid him in a golden prison. The wise men had predicted it: should the prince discover ugliness, he would no longer be a prince of this world. This happened more than 2500 years ago.

It all begins with a marvellous dream. In northern India, a sleeping Queen Maya, wife of King Shuddhodana, saw a sublime white elephant adorned with six prodigious tusks, coming towards her, carried by a dazzling light. Walking on rays of sunlight, he came closer and closer, until he merged with her. Queen Maya woke up, filled with a happiness she had never known before.

Amazed, she rushed to her spouse to tell him about the dream. Realising it was not just a dream, the couple consulted those who know how to read beyond words.

They all agreed:

“Your majesties, this marvellous dream is a most favourable omen: the queen will give birth to a son. His destiny will be exceptional. He will be a great man, not just for the kingdom but for the world. What a blessing that the queen should be carrying such a child.”

The royal couple were overjoyed. The king was especially happy, for the birth of a son fulfilled his wish: the future of his kingdom was assured; a king, a great one, his son, would succeed him on the throne.

When the time for the birth came, the queen, following tradition, set off to join her family, accompanied by her women friends. They had just left, when the queen felt that she was about to deliver. Guided by the memory of her dream, she used what was left of her strength to reach the beautiful Lumbini Gardens, which were not far. An exceptional child should be born in an exceptional place.

And, prodigiously, the whole of Nature came to the queen’s aid: a majestic tree bent its branches, so that the queen could hang on to them with her right hand; the birds sang sweetly, the grass became soft and fragrant, the streams tinkled gaily.

When the child was born, the servant women cradled him, astonished by his beauty and serenity. Some legends say he was born of his mother’s right side, so she wouldn’t suffer the pangs of giving birth. At that instant, a profound peace spread over the earth. Momentarily, people stopped fighting and their hearts filled with love for each other. Fierce animals became gentle as lambs. To spread the beauty, rainbows adorned the skies.

Amazed, wise men everywhere took note of these prodigies.They exclaimed:

“See these signs! Look! Admire! Today is an extraordinary day, a unique day, one that will remain in the memory of mankind; it is a happy day, a day of good news.”

Reassured that her joy was being shared by all, Queen Maya took her son in her arms and took him to his father's palace.

It was a day of full moon at the start of the fourth month of the Indian calendar, just before the beginning of summer (corresponding to our May-June), in the Terai region.

Chapter 2

Happy the mother of such a son!

Blissful his father as well!

He will reach Nirvana![ii]

(Vinayapitaka of the Mahîçasaka)

The queen's return to the palace with her newborn son was a joyful one. Sumptuous feasts to welcome the young prince succeeded one another throughout the kingdom. As an homage to the reigning joy and peace, the child was named Siddhartha: "The one who has brought all wellbeing has arrived". His name also means: "One who has accomplished his

goal". All the wise men agreed in their predictions: the signs that accompanied the birth of the prince were very favourable.

"Your son will surpass you in greatness," they told the king over and over. Filled with pride, the king daydreamed:

"My son will be lord not only of this realm but of the whole world. The honour of my line is assured. Everyone will remember our name, the name of the Gautama."

Visitors succeeded one another at the palace to pay tribute to the young prince and to contemplate the one for whom such a destiny had been predicted.

Even Asita himself came. The holy man lived as a hermit where no one else would venture. The fact that Asita would come out of his retreat filled hearts with amazement. What an honour! Heaping him with marks of their respect, the king and queen pressed the holy man for the reason for his visit.

"Your reception honours me," he replied, "I could not ignore such signs: a son has been born to you, and everything indicates that his science will be greater than that of any mortal who has come into the world so far. Also, I wanted to contemplate him. Permit me to see him with my own eyes."

This plea filled the king and queen with pride. Respectfully, they brought the child to him. Delicately, the king lifted him into the holy man's view. To their great astonishment and sorrow, he began to cry in silence.

Faced with these tears and sighs turned up to heaven, the king and queen were overcome with fear. Was Asita the only one to see an unfavourable omen? But his wisdom was more profound than that of all the other sages.They plied him with questions, trying to find out if all those who had predicted a grand destiny for the young Siddhartha had been mistaken.

The wise man's expression became tender:

"Do not torment yourselves," he told them. "Have no fear. I cry over my great age: when your son fulfils his destiny, I will no longer be here to see it. I assure you he will be a great man — I can see it by the light emanating from his fingertips. He might even become the greatest man, if he chooses a different path. If he chooses to reign after you, he will become the greatest king in human history. He will being peace and wellbeing to your people. But his destiny will be greater still if he

chooses not to rule. He will become the Master, the one who will open hearts and souls, who will impart all that there is to be taught. He will teach everyone what it means to live, what it is to be filled with love, what it is to spread love and peace. He will be the one through whom harmony becomes possible. He will see sorrow, sadness and evil, and because of this he will leave your palace and discover how to put an end to suffering. He will not keep this knowledge to himself, but will transmit it to those who are ready to hear and live it."

As he spoke these words, the old man's tears redoubled in intensity. He began again: "I have searched for this knowledge all my life. Today, I set eyes on the one who will transmit it. But I will no longer be here. You, his parents, must rejoice at having bestowed such a gift on the world."

The holy man looked at the child one last time, and left the palace with a heavy step and a bowed back.

While he was relieved his son's life was not in danger, the king found the idea the prince might not succeed him on the throne unbearable. The prince must become king first. Let him become a wise man like Asita in his old age — once peace and harmony reigned over the country. But he must reign as a king, as his father's son.

Chapter 3

He has resolved to leave,

For his hearth seems to him too narrow;

Like the swan abandoning its home lake,

He leaves his dwelling behind[iii].

(Arahantavagga)

Like Asita, Siddhartha's mother would not live to receive Siddhartha's teachings: she died while the prince was still a baby. Feeling herself about to leave this world, she asked her sister to replace her at Siddhartha's side.

"Watch over him," she said. "Be a mother to him, because soon I won't be able to any more."

The queen's sister did so, for she had loved her nephew since his tenderest age. She raised him like her own son. He grew into a young man of kind heart and spirit, his features the outward image of his inner qualities. The best professors were called to educate him, but they did not remain long at his side. Dazzled by his intelligence and powers of comprehension, they explained to the king that a few days had been enough to teach him all they knew. He was more master than pupil to them. They said:

"Wisdom burns within him like an ardent fire."

Overcome with pride, the king felt reassured about the future qualities of his successor.

The young prince was beloved by all, because of the qualities of his heart: he was always amiable, sweet, affectionate. He never got angry, and was always attentive to others. He was a peacemaker when others quarrelled, disdained jealousy, and respected all forms of life. When his companions amused themselves by playing at soldiers in mock combat, Siddhartha stayed away: he would rather be on his own than take part in violent behaviours.

In the palace gardens, animals were his companions — better yet, his friends. On a profound level, they knew he would never harm them. They came up to him, partaking in whatever he offered them. This was also true of the wild beasts, who came to eat out of his hand without fear. He never forgot them on his walks. He contemplated them, he understood them. So it is not surprising that one of the first remarkable events of his young life should involve animals.

Seated in the palace gardens, our prince was watching a flock of white swans in flight. It was a magnificent sight, worthy of these majestic animals — until one of them was hit. The great wounded bird fell at the prince's feet, one of its wings pierced by an arrow.

Siddhartha found this sight unbearable. Whispering softly, he reassured the animal: "Don't be afraid, noble swan. I will take care of you."

Once the distraught swan had stopped trembling, the prince took him delicately into his arms and removed the murderous weapon. Then he spread a soothing balm on the wound, dressing it in his own silk shirt to keep it from festering.

At this point a young boy his own age, his cousin Devadatta, ran up to them, armed with a bow and arrows.

“Have you seen my swan?” Devadatta cried proudly. “I let off an extraordinary shot and I hit one! On my first try!"

Then, flabbergasted, he saw his bloodstained arrow at Siddhartha’s feet. He also realised his cousin was delicately holding the swan in his arms. He almost choked:

“My swan! You have my swan! Give him to me! He’s mine! I want to bring my trophy home!”

Siddhartha didn’t budge. Devadatta tried to take the bird from him. For the first time, the young prince wielded his authority:

“I found this wounded bird and I took care of him. I will keep doing so until he is healed.”

Devadatta wouldn’t give up, even going so far as to call his cousin a thief. The argument heated up: the shooter growing more and more furious, the healer refusing to back down. Then Siddhartha proposed calmly:

“When grown-ups quarrel, they present their arguments before a court. It is not up to them to decide, but rather to the sages who have listened to them. Let’s do the same. Let’s ask others who the wounded swan should belong to.”

Devadatta wasn’t overjoyed, but accepted for lack of another solution.

They went back to the palace together, requested a hearing, and appeared before the king and his ministers. Many were smiling, finding it ridiculous that adults should waste time on a children’s quarrel — over a bird no less.

But the king cut them short:

“The court will be in session! It is good for two princes of royal blood to get to know the workings of the justice system. This means they will respect the rules.”

Each in turn, the two children recounted what had happened.

The ministers had a hard time deciding. Some thought the one who shot the arrow owns the bird. Others said the one who found the bird has a right to it. They debated for a long time, unable to reach a verdict.

The case would have remained unresolved, except for the arrival of an old man with a wise face, whom no one could recall ever having seen before. Having listened to the different arguments, the old man came forward:

“Life is the most sacred of properties, it is the good which every being holds

dearest. So the swan should belong to the one who tried to save his life, and not to the one who tried to deprive him of it."

Everyone agreed with this decision: the swan was awarded to Siddhartha.

But when the king tried to thank the old wise man, he was nowhere to be found.

Another mystery in the life of this unusual boy.

Chapter 4

Nothing troubles their peaceful happiness

Throughout their very long life.

There are no more men or women[iv].

(Dîrgha-agama)

Everyone loved Siddhartha, for he was very kind. His father was very proud of this quality, but it was also a cause for concern. A king must be capable of authority, of sitting in judgment — he will be called on to make difficult decisions. A king must be strong. Would this ascetic prince who loved to daydream in the garden know how to rule? Would he want to rule?

The king remembered Asita's prophecy. What he feared most was that saintliness would take precedence over wielding power. How to hold on to his son — how to prevent him from leaving, from choosing the path of the hermitage?

The king was so obsessed with this terror that he could no longer sleep. His son must grow into a great king who would be his successor and not into a sage —- though he clearly had the qualities to become either. Siddhartha's father ended up seeking the counsel of his closest advisors.

They suggested retaining the prince through the bonds of love: the prince should find a wife. That would put an end to his daydreaming in the garden, for he would want to make her proud. This would spur him to make an effort to deserve her. Loving a woman would bind him to this world.

The king liked this idea very much. Following the custom, he ordered a great feast, where the young prince would meet all the young princesses and noblewomen fit to become his wife. The candidates were very young — practically still children. They were highly intimidated: at the end of the party, the prince would give each of them a gift. The court looked on attentively, in hopes of discovering which of them would make the prince's heart beat faster. The young noblewomen didn't even dare raise their eyes as he gave one a bracelet, the other a gemstone. Except for the last princess, who came forward proudly. Her name was Yashodhara, or Carrier of Glory. She was the daughter of King Suprabuddha, who ruled over a neighbouring kingdom. Her beauty and panache caused the prince, for the first time, to look up while handing out a present.

The moment was magical: standing before everyone, the prince and the princess contemplated each other in silence, spellbound.

She dared to speak first:

"What gift have you chosen for me, O Prince?"

Starting as though he'd just woken from a dream, the prince looked down at the table and realised it was empty. With no hesitation, he took the biggest ring off one of his own fingers and gave it to her.

"This belongs to you," he said gravely. With a nod, she accepted the royal gift and returned to her place.

The preference was so obvious that before long, the king's ministers went to tell the king that the prince's future spouse had been found.

"Arrange this marriage without delay, and your son will rule for the love of Yashodhara."

Right away, King Shuddhodana entered into negotiations with King Suprabuddha. The latter was certain of Siddhartha's qualities, but he also wanted the best for his daughter:

"Let all the young noblemen who aspire to my daughter's hand compete in a tournament," he said. "The winner shall be the one who deserves to wed her."

King Shuddhodana could not very well object, but the idea unsettled him: how could his dreamy son win? The prince tried to reassure him:

"I will do anything to win the hand of the beautiful Yashodhara," he said.

Chapter 5

The perfumed breath of one night of love

Is worth a hundred years of sterile meditation[v].

(Ikkyû)

The preparations for the tournament were completed, and the jousting began with archery — the art of the nobleman warrior par excellence.

One must always aim far, Beyond the target.
Our breath, our spirit Travel with the arrow[vi].

To prove their worth all the competitors placed their targets at a great distance, and all hit the bull's eye. Siddhartha's cousin, Devadatta, who as the reader might recall was an excellent archer, did even better: he hit the bull's eye and... pierced it through and through. The spectators broke into thunderous applause: surely no one could do better than that. Only Yashodhara did not applaud. Instead she hid her face, concealing her tears at the thought of

losing the one she loved and having to marry another man.

But nothing could shake Siddhartha's confidence. When his turn came, he placed the target so far away it was barely visible. He took an arrow from his quiver, and drew his bow so far that…it broke in two.

"Bring me another bow," he said immediately. "But a solid bow — one fit for a man and a warrior."

An immense silence reigned over the field. Then one of the dignitaries came forward:

"There is such a bow. It is a venerable and very ancient bow, which once belonged to the most valiant warrior in the kingdom. Since his death no one has been able to draw it, not even to stretch the cord."

"It will be my bow," Siddhartha replied. "Let it be brought to me."

The spectators wondered if Siddhartha had lost his mind. Had he become arrogant?

Was he trying to lose the tournament?

They were even more astonished to see Siddhartha calmly taking the bow. He caressed it, stretching the cord without the slightest effort. He took an arrow from his quiver, cocked it, and drew the bow so far back that its extremities touched. The deafening hum of the projectile resounded in the silence of the spectators (they barely dared to breathe). Its speed was so great that not only did it hit the bull's eye dead center — the target didn't even slow down its trajectory.

All the spectators stood up as one, breaking into rousing applause for the prince who had unquestionably won the first test.

The second test was cutting a log with a sabre in a single blow. Any warrior worth the name had to be able to handle a sabre with strength and precision. Each competitor surpassed the one that came before. The logs got thicker and thicker: one metre fifty, two metres… The crowd proclaimed its admiration. The prince's turn came. He chose two trunks. He was so swift no one even saw him unsheathe his weapon — only a resounding hiss proved he'd swung the blade.

A cry of disappointment rose from the stands: the two trees were still standing. The prince hadn't even dented the first one. Yashodhara despaired. Then a slight breeze rose. The trees faltered, then slowly collapsed.

The delirious crowd rose to its feet, cheering the prince : what a clean, spectacular cut!

The prince had won.

Now came the third and final test: to tame a wild stallion. The powerful creature stamped, kicked, reared up; none of the contestants lasted more than a couple of seconds in the saddle. One managed to stay on — the grooms let go of the bridle. Mad with fury, the horse threw him and tried to trample him. But for a swift rescue, the rider would have been killed.

The challenge seemed insurmountable, dangerous even. Calls for it to be cancelled grew more and more insistent — the young princes should not have to risk their lives. Siddhartha insisted on taking his turn. He approached the fierce stallion without fear. Where everyone had resorted to force, he chose gentleness. First he spoke to the stallion. Then, while continuing to whisper to him, he softly caressed his forehead, then his head, his flanks. Patiently he waited for the creature to accept him. When the horse finally licked his hand, Siddhartha got into the saddle. The stallion had been tamed. They walked, then trotted, then galloped before the jury. Finally, they paraded in front of Yashodhara.

Cheers burst out. The prince had won by skill, strength, and gentleness. Yashodhara was his. He bowed respectfully before her. He had not only appealed to her, he had also deserved her.

Chapter 6

Detachment is joy and happiness.

Being devoid of hatred of the world is pleasant.

Not harming others is also[vii].

(Vinayapitaka of the Dharmaguptaka)

The time had come to celebrate the royal marriage. The two young people loved one another sincerely, and the king did not want his son to conceive a desire to leave the kingdom. King Shuddodhana spared no measure to celebrate the occasion in style: the custom was to build a palace for the newlyweds. He three of them built, each one more sumptuous than the last. The architects surpassed themselves: let it be paradise! The prince wouldn't even think of leaving.

There was to be a palace for each season: fresh marble surrounded with clear basins and fountains for summer, warm carpets and fireplaces for winter, and lastly a refuge for the rainy season, from which one could listen to the monsoon without fear.

Everything was done to make those palaces resemble an endless dream: the choicest materials, the greatest artists, the most beautiful stones —- everything had to be perfect. The five senses were ceaselessly stimulated. Hidden musicians played melodies that appeared to waft from nowhere. All the servants were young and very beautiful; if any one of them fell ill or got injured, they had to leave the palace on the spot. Exquisite dishes issued from the kitchens day and night. The minute the prince expressed a wish, it became reality.

Siddhartha lost himself in this dream. He lived in it for many long years, in which all he saw of the world was its perfection. Not only was everything beautiful to look at, to hear and touch and eat, but there was a ban on giving the prince bad news. Nothing must trouble or sadden him. Even the flowers in the garden were removed at the least sign of withering. Not once did the prince see a wilted flower or a dead plant. He lived in ignorance of death, suffering, illness and sorrow.

His dream was prolonged at the birth of his son, Rahula. The king was overjoyed: his lineage was assured, and the prince loved this life.

But what sort of life was it? One of lies, illusions, idleness. Would Siddhartha be content with this futile existence? Would he escape the great destiny he had been promised?

Chapter 7

Then the word “sovereign” appeared.

And the word “subjects".

(Dîrgha-agama)

One evening when he was being particularly idle, his head resting on his wife's lap, listening to musicians and servants singing and laughing, Siddhartha felt that something was missing. Every day was identical to the last and the one to come. Turning to one of his favourite singers, he said to her:

"Sing us a song we've never heard before. Surprise us. Let your voice beguile us with a new melody."

After a moment, her voice rose in an improvised chant about the beauties of the world

and the extraordinary kingdoms lying at the ends of the universe. Countries where gemstones grow on trees, whose streets are paved with gold and whose plains and forests are inhabited by fabulous animals. Accompanying herself on her zither, she embroidered her tale based on her memories of her native regions and the counties she had travelled through.

The prince was delighted. Another world opened up to him. As soon as the song was over, he questioned the musician:

"Did you imagine it all? Are the dreams you evoke just marvellous fantasies? Do such places exist? Are there really other paradises beyond this garden? And if such places are real, I beg you to tell me more about them — describe them, narrate them, so that I may no longer remain ignorant of the rest of the world."

Emboldened, the young musician dared to speak. For the first time, the prince heard a truthful word:

"O Prince, your palaces are among the most beautiful in the world and your gardens

are sublime. But the world is filled with other wonders: mountains, cities, fields, men of other colours, who speak other languages and wear astonishing clothe[viii]s. I have seen such wonders, or simply heard others describe them. Your kingdom is magnificent, but others also gleam with a different beauty. There is so much to discover beyond your walls."

Hearing these words, the prince was seized by a desire to leave the palace. For the first time, he saw its walls as a prison. The world did not end with his palaces and gardens. He inhabited them happily, but in an unconscious bliss. All of a sudden, this luxurious and futile beauty seemed unbearable.

He sent his father a message, asking him to organise a visit to the city. If he was to be king once day, he should get to know the capital. The king could not but agree. His son had remained shut in for so long, and after all…wasn't this a sign of interest in the kingdom, in his future role as king? He decided: let his son get to know that which he would rule one day.

Chapter 8

What is the decline due to old age?

An old man, laden with years,

Whose lifespan reaches its end…[ix]

(Nidanasûtra)

If the king was willing to let his son out of the palace, he was not ready to show him the whole kingdom. The prophecy was still in his head. He would show his son the city — but only a legendary version of it, so that nothing would trouble or disturb him. Just like within his palaces, ugliness, illness and death would be banished. The people would be joyful, laughter would ring out everywhere. Kapilavastu would be in the image of the palace: perfect and untrue.

Announcements were posted everywhere, heralds cried throughout the city:

“By order of the king, on the occasion of the prince’s visit, all homes must be decorated, all streets must be lined with flowers, and all dirt must be removed. The city must be dazzling with colour. May young people fill the streets, and the ill and the old remain indoors.” Soldiers rounded up the sick and the elderly and transferred them to a city district the prince would not visit.

On the morning of the appointed day, the prince’s favourite horse, Kantaka, was tethered by Channa, the most trustworthy coachman and... Siddhartha crossed the gates of his golden prison.

For the first time in his life, Siddhartha saw Kapilavastu. For the first time in their lives, the inhabitants of Kapilavastu saw their prince. Emotion ran high on both sides. The people had decked the city out in lively, joyous colours. They cheered their prince, marvelled at his beauty. This man would really be their king someday. They were very proud. Cries of joy rang out.

The prince’s dream continued: like his palace, his shining city was filled with happy festive people, their faces glowing with sincere smiles.

But, at a bend in a street, in the midst of the joyful crowd, the prince caught sight of an old man. His back curved, he tottered, his face radiating sadness. This vision stunned Siddhartha.

“Tell me Channa, who is that person? Why doesn’t he stand up straight? Why isn’t he dancing? And what about his face? Why is he all wrinkled and why is his skin so grey, almost faded? Why doesn’t this man look like all the others? "

“Why, because that man is old,” the coachman answered simply.

“Old? What do you mean? Has he always been that way? If not, how did he get that way?”

“Everyone grows old, my prince. That man used to look like us. Then over time his skin got wrinkled, his back bent over. It’s the weight of the years. All men feel it. Today I run and laugh, tomorrow I shall be like that man, sad and having trouble walking. You also will lose your energy and good spirits when you grow as old as that man.”

The prince was devastated. He imagined his wife and son growing old, racked with pain, ugly; before that, his father would age. He saw himself as an old man, his face creased, tottering, his

sight diminished. He was filled with sadness. For a long while he couldn't speak. Then he said to Channa:

"Le's go. This sadness in the midst of so much joy is unbearable. I can't see any more."

Obeying immediately, his trusty coachman took the prince back to the palace.

As soon as he was through the palace doors, Siddhartha ran to his room and locked himself in. This unusual behaviour had everyone worried. His wife, his servants and artists — they all tried unsuccessfully to distract him. Worse still, Siddhartha refused his favourite dish, which the palace chef had prepared for him. He began to refuse all food.

He kept repeating, over and over: "Old age, old age, old age…."

Chapter 9

Whatever the objects of human desires

Wherever pleasure is to be found in this world,

I possess them all in abundance.

I will give you what you want[x].

(Chaddanta-jataka)

Siddhartha's state had the king very worried. In an effort to cheer the prince up, he proposed a second outing into the city. "My son needs to have fun," thought the king. "He's been cloistered too long, he's bored."

This was an illfated decision, for it was during this second outing that the prince would see another of humanity's ills — and thus advance on the path of his destiny.

This visit was prepared with even more care than the first. Nothing must tarnish the meeting between the prince and his people.

Channa tethered Kanataka, and Siddhartha crossed the high palace gates once more.

The people shouted their joy at seeing their prince again. But in the midst of this jubilant crowd, Siddhartha only saw one person: a very ill young man who coughed and trembled, his cheeks red and his face pale.

"Look, Channa, look! Who is that man? Why is he so red and white in the face? Why is he shaking? Why is the sweat pouring from his face, even though he's not running? "

"That young man is sick, my prince." "Sick? What do you mean?"

"That man is shaking and sweating and flushed because he has a fever." "But why is he sick?"

"Well, we humans sometimes get sick, either because we couldn't handle a certain kind of food, or because we're tired, or because we caught cold because we didn't wear enough clothes on a monsoon day."

"Are you saying any man could fall ill? Even the happiest?"

"Yes, my prince. Being sick doesn't depend on mood or wealth. One day you're in top form and the next, you wake up trembling with fever."

Siddhartha was distraught at these words — even more than at the idea of old age,

which at least seemed like a a progressive process, whereas illness could apparently strike any time, for no particular reason.

"And do men manage to be happy, even while knowing they might fall ill the very next moment?"

Channa smiled, but did not reply.

"Take me back to the palace, please," said the prince, upset. "This is more than I can

bear."

For several days, Siddhartha couldn't speak a single word. He no longer laughed or

ate, and he avoided his wife and son. He stayed in his room or in the garden, on his own, muttering.

The situation became so serious that the king called a council. The ministers recommended that the next outing be strictly supervised: the prince's carriage should be surrounded by his favourite musicians, so that he wouldn't hear the sounds of the world. The streets should be decorated by artists from the palace, and not by the inhabitants. There should be no

false note — just a barrier between the prince and the city. Meanwhile, the king made another bad decision: he increased the pleasures of the five senses available to the prince, both day and night.

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"Are you saying any man could fall ill? Even the happiest?"

"Yes, my prince. Being sick doesn't depend on mood or wealth. One day you're in top form and the next, you wake up trembling with fever."

Siddhartha was distraught at these words — even more than at the idea of old age,

which at least seemed like a a progressive process, whereas illness could apparently strike any time, for no particular reason.

"And do men manage to be happy, even while knowing they might fall ill the very next moment?"

Channa smiled, but did not reply.

"Take me back to the palace, please," said the prince, upset. "This is more than I can bear."

For several days, Siddhartha couldn't speak a single word. He no longer laughed or ate, and he avoided his wife and son. He stayed in his room or in the garden, on his own, muttering.

The situation became so serious that the king called a council. The ministers recommended that the next outing be strictly supervised: the prince's carriage should be surrounded by his favourite musicians, so that he wouldn't hear the sounds of the world. The streets should be decorated by artists from the palace, and not by the inhabitants. There should be no false note — just a barrier between the prince and the city. Meanwhile, the king made another bad decision: he increased the pleasures of the five senses available to the prince, both day and night.

Chapter 10

This body is like a bubble on the water's surface.

Because of its fragility,

Who can be happy?[xi]

(Sutra)

But Siddhartha had been pledged to his destiny. Raised up in his carriage, the prince could see what no other person could. Far off, beyond the smiling and dancing crowd, the prince saw a group of men in tears, walking slowly behind a litter draped in a great white sheet.

“What is that, Channa?” he asked. “Why are those men not dancing with the rest of the crowd?”

“That is a funeral procession, my prince.”

“A funeral? But a procession is usually a happy occasion. What do you mean? Explain it to me.”

“One of their relatives or friends has died. The dead person is under that white sheet. They are taking him or her to the pyre near the river for the funeral rites. They are crying because they are sad: they will never see that person again. Soon the body will burn, and there will nothing left of him or her but ashes.”

"Dead? You said anyone can be stricken by disease and old age — is it the same with death? Do you mean that one day we will all be nothing but ash, and that someday we all must cry over the death of a loved one? Could it be that someday I might lose my adored wife or son, without hope?"

Gently Channa explained the cycle of life: from the newborn to the child, to the adult, to the old man, to death. He reminded Siddhartha that he had been raised by his aunt and not by his mother, who had died when he was little. For death does not only strike old people at the end of their lives but also the young, through illness or accident. And while some may be spared disease or old age, all must die.

Siddhartha was devastated. At the same time, he was angry: why dance, eat exquisite foods, cover oneself in jewels, wear the finest silks, if all would end up under a simple white sheet, burning on a pyre? Were men oblivious? Had they forgotten impending death? Did they play just to forget death? Life was such vanity! All this effort, just to die.

He asked Channa to take him back to the palace. He needed to think.

Chapter 11

The master's teaching is very difficult,

Leaving one's home and studying the Way, Is also difficult. (...)

None of your relatives and friends wanted you to leave to study the Way,

Your father and mother wept and lamented, Sad and afflicted,

They will not give you permission to leave your home to study the Way[xii].

(Rastrapala-Sutra)

This time, the coachman did not obey Siddhartha. He took the prince to a garden of delights, which was the culmination of the outing the king had planned: singers, dancers, fountains, fine food. Siddhartha was incapable of smiling. Neither could he speak. He was thinking about what Channa had revealed to him.

The more the guests tried to amuse him, the worse Siddhartha's state became. He saw nothing but the dead, the old, the sick. The hollowness of the joy transfixed him with pain.

Was he the only one to see this? Did all these people who were so busy dancing, singing,

drinking all around him — did they not understand they would all suffer one day? Didn't they know death would annihilate them — each and every one, without exception?

One of the king's closest ministers came to him:

"My prince, you are handsome, young, vigorous. Why not amuse yourself? You have all the time in which to be serious and strict. Let yourself be moved by the beauty of these young dancers!"

Siddhartha could no longer control himself.

"Perhaps this futile life is enough for you. But in these young beauties I see future old women with crumpled faces and toothless smiles, their legs incapable of holding them up, their mouths unable to eat. Old women who will have lost or witnessed the suffering of many of their loved ones, who will suffer themselves because they couldn't help them. The future forbids us from being happy now. I admire you for managing to amuse yourself, even while knowing the dangers that lie in wait for you!"

Due to the prince's foul mood, the feast ended. Everyone left sadly. The ministers informed the king of the state of his son. The king despaired. Was the time approaching in which the prince would no longer want to be the future monarch?

Chapter 12

It is in the darkest nights

That dawns germinate[xiii].

King Vikram *(attributed to)*

The prince's sadness got worse. Nothing cheered him up anymore. He was in despair, and drove all those who loved him to despair. Melancholy dragged him progressively into despair. Everything made him sad. He no longer spoke, barely ate, the smile had deserted his face. He saw the dancers not as they were in the present, but as the old women they would

become. He envisioned the palace as a ruin. The orderly garden was nothing but a future jungle. Everything disgusted him.

He went to see the king: "Allow me to leave the palace once more."

The king agreed. His son had to recover his joy in life. His ministers were tasked with strict surveillance of the prince.

Siddhartha saddled his horse himself. He set off, seeking comfort in beautiful landscapes. He didn't listen to the conversations of his guardians, who distanced themselves in order to speak freely among themselves. The prince reached a farm, where he admired a man who was labouring in his field with his oxen. For the first time in a while, he felt an inner peace: the straight furrows, the green meadows, the harmony of nature. But as he looked at the fruit of the man's labour more attentively, his sadness gradually returned. The plow had left myriad small chopped-up worms and insects in its wake. Death followed the peasant's labour. He saw the birds taking advantage of this labour, pouncing on the small slaughtered animals. Other, smaller birds flew anxiously, because of birds of prey were hovering above them.

The oxen sweated profusely, exhausted by their hard work. The farmer whipped them until they bled, driving them onwards without rest. With his burned skin and gnarled hands, the man was not much happier than his beasts.

The prince saw a vicious circle, in which each believed he was striving for happiness while in fact they were killing one another. They hurt one another. The world was decidedly horrible. He pitied these men and these animals. He was full of compassion for this life of misery.

He sat down in the shade of a majestic Malay apple tree to think it over. The more he contemplated nature, the calmer he was, the clearer his spirit was. Slowly he became aware of an inner peace such as he had never known before.

Body and spirit at rest, he began to think:

"All creatures seek happiness. But they go about it the wrong way. They are blind, and this blindness leads them to misery and despair. They gain nothing but fear, hunger, old age, and death."

Concentrating further, he saw clearly that the small pleasures no longer had a hold on him. Everything passing and ephemeral had to be left behind.

“I must find that which leads to lasting happiness. And not just for me, for all living beings. I must discover what allows us to stop suffering.”

It was his first meditation, one filled with compassion and love for all beings, human and animal. At peace, he opened his eyes. He saw a man. He was dressed in rags like a beggar, but his eyes were filled with joy.

“Who are you?” asked the prince.

“A man who used to be afraid, and then left his home and the company of men to live in nature, at peace.”

As soon as he uttered these words the beggar disappeared, as if by magic. Having discovered the three main aspects of human suffering (old age, disease, and death), Siddhartha now discovered the serenity of the one who has renounced everything: the ascetic.

The prince beamed with joy: he had finally found an objective. He too would leave, quit his home, his wife, his son, to find the path of happiness. He would be free as the wind. He started off for the palace. He had made a decision.

The Ascetic
-
The Way

Chapter 13

Do not look from afar

Do not look from up close.

It is not through hostility

That hostility is quelled[xiv].

(Vinayapitaka of the Theravadin)

As soon as he returned, Siddhartha went to see his father:

“I have understood what my path is meant to be. I ask your permission to depart, alone, stripped of my worldly goods, so that I may discover how to put an end to suffering.”

The moment the king had been dreading since the birth of his son had finally arrived.

However, Siddhartha’s words shocked him deeply. After a pause, he replied:

“My son, you are too young to follow the path of sainthood. It would be better for you ro stay here and rule with me. Your place is by my side. Your first duty is to serve our subjects.”

“Father, I will stay as long as you can make me four promises: I will never fall ill, I will never grow old, I will never die, I will never be unhappy. If you cannot promise me these things, I will leave.”

The king was outraged by these words. He became very angry:

“My son, your words are those of a madman. You must return to your senses. I will stop you from doing whatever you like. "

But Siddhartha resisted.

“I want to discover the means to put an end to suffering. Locking me up won’t do any good.”

The prince’s determination did nothing to make his father change his mind. He called his guards:

“Keep a close watch on my son. He must not leave the palace. Let soldiers be deployed at the outer walls.”

With these words he left the hall, filled with fear and rage at his son, whom he did not understand.

Chapter 14

Home life is oppression,

That dusty trail

The ascetic nomad lives outdoors[xv].

(Majjhimanikaya)

Siddhartha returned to his own palace. Its beauty no longer touched him: not the sumptuous wall hangings, nor the magnificent servants or the sweet music. He was detached from everything he saw. He had a single thought in his mind: to leave.

A strange phenomenon took place that night. Everyone — servants, guards, courtesans

— fell asleep. Even his wife, their son in her arms, passed early into the kingdom of dreams. "Let them sleep," thought Siddhartha. "I'm leaving. And to do that, I need a clear

mind."

He wanted to take his son in his arms one last time. But, seeing his wife and child so

closely entwined, he realised he couldn't touch his son without waking him up. And if that happened, how could he leave? While it was easy to forsake the lavish interiors and delicious foods, it was harder to leave his loved ones behind.

Noiselessly, he walked to the window nearest to the two beings he loved most in the world, opened it, and slid to the ground. Discreetly, he went to wake up Channa and tell him to saddle Kanataka.

If his groom was surprised at receiving this order in the middle of the night, he gave no sign, but immediately obeyed his prince.

Siddhartha murmured into the ear of his trusty steed:

"Gently, my old friend. We must leave without making a sound. No one must know we are going."

Miraculously, when they reached the main gate, it fell open without human intervention. They were able to enter the city without running into anyone. The universe was watching over Siddhartha's plan.

Once they had reached the outskirts of the capital city, the prince made a vow:

"I will not come back here as long as I have not found a way to end all suffering. "

They rode all night. In the small hours of the morning they reached a forest that was known to be home to a number of hermits — men who lived all on their own. Siddhartha spoke for the first time since leaving the palace:

"Channa, this is where our paths divide. Go back to the palace with my horse. I will continue my voyage."

Dismayed and worried for the prince, Channa tried to protest. He was also afraid for

himself: what would the king say?

His eyes filled with tears. Overwhelmed with emotion, he couldn't speak.

“Have no fear, my friend,” Siddhartha told him. “Here, take my jewels. From now on they are useless to me. Go to my father. Tell him I am not angry, that I love him. That it is because I love him so much that I must leave. My loved ones will see me again, if I find the means to end all suffering. Otherwise, we might as well part ways now, for death will separate us sooner or later.”

Channa understood he would not be able to make Siddhartha change his mind. He took Kanataka by the bridle and slowly departed. He couldn’t stop himself from turning to look back over and over, in hopes his prince had changed his mind. He was burdened by his mission: to announce to everyone that Siddhartha had abandoned the princely life.

Chapter 15

His temple is roofed with clouds

And has mountains for pillars.

He is free as the wind

And roams the earth without hindrance,

Erasing his tracks

In the deep valleys[xvi].

P. Fauliot

Far away in the forest, in the middle of nowhere, Siddhartha repeated to himself: “I am no longer a prince”. He saw clearly that he had to abandon all the markings that designated him as such. He walked over to a jasmine with big flowers, took a knife and cut off his long hair. He placed it as an offering at the foot of the flowering shrub. However, he was still wearing his rich garments. He came across a hunter:

“My friend, these clothes are no longer of use to me in my new life,” Siddhartha told him. “Won’t you exchange them?”

The hunter was overjoyed: he could sell the fine silks and the belt woven in gold thread at a good price — probably over one hundred pieces of silver.

Now dressed like a common man, Siddhartha began his new life. He begged for food, and never went hungry: everyone, no matter how poor, was happy to give him something — a crust of bread, a fruit — for they marvelled at the light that emanated from him.

Siddhartha was looking for a master who could teach him the truth. He followed many teachings, and although he learned a lot, he remained unsatisfied: they were systems of knowledge, but not the path to wisdom. As soon as he heard about a remarkable wise man, he would take off to meet him, eager to learn. He did not hesitate to travel quite far.

So it was that he walked to the kingdom of Magadha, whose King Bimbisara was a seeker of wisdom. As a young man, he had formulated five wishes: to succeed his father on the throne, to meet a sage or Buddha once he was king, to approach him and to make offerings to him, to have joyful thoughts and to hear the Good Law, and to know how to recognise the Good Law as soon as he heard it uttered.

As soon as he heard about this beggar, the king knew this was no ordinary ascetic. He felt in his heart that this time, four of his wishes would be fulfilled. He did not wait for Siddhartha to reach the capital, Rajagrha. He left to meet the saint atop a mountain, first astride an elephant, then on foot.

He saw a man begging with a water lily leaf, since he lacked even a bowl. They talked for a long time. The king returned to listen to him once, twice, many times over. In awe, he ended up asking him to become his adviser and help him rule.

Once again, temporal power was being offered to Siddhartha. Once again, he refused it. “Power and money do not interest me, Sire. Your proposition is very generous, but all

I seek is to advance on the path of wisdom. Do not resent me. This offer has already been made to me in the past and my answer was the same. I do not seek to rule. If I have come to your

kingdom, it is because I have heard many wise men live here. They could become my masters, and help me make progress."

The king bowed deeply before the beggar:

"Keep following your path. You will always be welcome here. If you change your mind, a throne awaits you. If you find your answer, you will be just as welcome, and we shall all be glad for you to show us the way."

After warmly thanking the king, Siddhartha got back on the road.

Chapter 16

The dust of the world no longer enters my home,

Nothing clutters my empty rooms any more.

Having lived in a cage too long,

I could return to my true nature at last[xvii].

Tao-Yuanming

Siddhartha found the forest inhabited by the wise men whose teachings he'd heard praised so often. He listened to Arada, then Udraka.

Very quickly he learned all that they had to teach him. He was still unsatisfied. Finally he understood:

"It is within me that I must seek for that which will put an end to all suffering. The teaching will not come to me from the outside."

He walked and walked for a long time, very far, until he reached Elephant Head Mountain. After that, he reached the Nairanagana River near the holy city of Gaya. Then, in the forest bordering on the village of Uruvilva, he met five ascetics: they ate very little, lived outdoors, sat motionless for hours.

Astonished at their habits, he asked them: "Why inflict such suffering on yourselves?" "Men believe pleasure allows them to avoid suffering, yet they suffer anyway," the five ascetics replied. "We learn to control suffering, in order to no longer experience it."

"Could this be the solution?" Siddhartha asked himself. "I have lived in the midst of pleasure for many long years, sleeping in soft beds with silk sheets, eating only the finest dishes. I have already left it all behind, but maybe I must do more. Giving up pleasure isn't enough — one must confront suffering."

"Will you accept me among you?" he asked the five ascetics humbly.

Beginning on that day in this twenty-ninth year, Siddhartha submitted to their hard discipline. Their exercises inflicted constant physical suffering: he had to remain seated for long hours in the same spot without moving a muscle. His back, his legs, every part of his body was in pain. Neither the burning sun, nor the violent monsoon rains, nor the icy winds of winter could be used as excuses to move from that spot. He ate just enough to survive. He told himself:

"I must persevere, go all the way to conquer suffering."

His five companions couldn't believe it. Although he had begun on the ascetic path after them, he had already outstripped them in terms of discipline. They told themselves:

"If anyone succeeds, it will be him. Let's stay by his side, so he can teach us once he has conquered suffering."

For six years Siddhartha persevered, reducing the amount of food he ate and the time he slept. He became nothing but skin and bones. He was so thin it was frightening. He sat still for so long, he became covered in dust. It became difficult to distinguish him from the surrounding vegetation.

He was about to turn thirty-five when he asked himself:

“Have I made any progress since leaving the palace? I lost years of my life to useless luxury. But I have lost just as many in subjecting my body to pointless tortures.”

Then he remembered a marvellous moment of his life: the one in which, seated against a tree and reflecting on the dead body he had just seen, a profound sense of calm had invaded him.

“I need to find a way that is neither that of pleasure nor that of pain: a way that lies between these two excesses. Let us meditate more, to see clearly what it could be.”

He went to the river, and was frightened at the sight of his reflection:

“How could I despise my body to this point? I’m dirty, exhausted, weakened. All my bones are visible. How will I meditate, when I have no strength left?”

With difficulty, he crawled to the water to wash himself. He almost drowned, but the lotus flowers watched over him and brought him back to shore. Then, he chose to rest.

Chapter 17

What have I really understood of life and death?

Beyond Heaven and Hell,

I keep within the light of the rising moon,

Free of the clouds of attachment[xviii].

Uesugi Kenshin

Siddhartha closed his eyes. When he reopened them, he saw a bowl at his feet. It had been placed there by a young shepherdess, Sujata, who lived with her husband near the forest. She had just given birth to their first child, and in gratitude, she had prepared a delicious offering for the forest divinities. Seeing Siddhartha, so handsome and so thin, she had thought he was a tree spirit.

Touched, Siddhartha took the bowl and drank slowly, silently, a smile lighting his lips.

The more he drank, the more luminous his body became. The young mother was dazzled.

He thanked her simply:

“You take me for a god, but I am just a man. You restored my strength. I was nothing but a breath, no longer even a spirit. You will be honoured for this. Thank you.”

His five ascetic companions were disappointed, angry even. Not only did Siddhartha take care of his body by bathing, he also ate, and even spoke to a woman!

“Siddhartha is not the holy man we thought he was. Let’s abandon him immediately!”

The five ascetics left, to avoid being distracted during their exercises; for them, Siddhartha was no longer interested in the truth.

But they were wrong. Warmed by the meal, comforted by the woman’s kindness, Siddhartha resumed his meditation. He was ready to discover what he had been seeking for so long. He got up, crossed the river, and went to sit under a tree. It was a pagoda fig tree, and would become legendary — the one history now knows as the Tree of Enlightenment.

Chapter 18

I have been that miserable thing They call "self"

And I have become

The vast Universe[xix].

Musô Soseki

The longawaited moment had arrived. Siddhartha walked calmly towards the tree. The closer he got to it, the clearer and stiller the air became. As Siddhartha prepared for Enlightenment, the world waited for him to unveil the path.

A man passed by, carrying grass he had just cut for his animals. His name was Auspicious. Siddhartha asked him for some grass, so he could make himself a comfortable and fragrant seat. The peasant replied simply:

"Take as much as you need. I'm not greedy."

Siddhartha piled up the cut grass and sat down on this natural throne. The branches of the fig tree curved over spontaneously, spreading a protective shadow over him.

He crossed his legs in the lotus position, let his right hand rest palm upward in his left, and resolved to meditate until he found what he was looking for. His body sat up straight, his mind emptied, his thoughts fixed on what he saw right in front of him. Night was falling.

It was the day of the full moon of the fourth month, near the village of Uruvilva. Nature rejoiced. The wind became soft, the birds warbled, the tigers stopped hunting.

All of nature? Almost. There was one evil spirit who was not happy at all, for he loved war and suffering. If Siddhartha found what he was looking for, the evil spirit would lose power. This baleful force was called Mara. He inspired men with the desire to kill, to possess at all costs, to envy. He instilled the poison of discord within men's hearts.

When Mara saw that Siddhartha was on the verge of reaching his goal, he flew into a rage. He called his demon children to his aid, causing a huge earthquake:

"If Siddhartha finds a way to conquer suffering, our power will be destroyed. We must disturb his meditation. We must prevent him from finding spiritual peace. Disrupt him!"

Mara and his children whipped up a thunderstorm, and led the lightning straight to Siddhartha. The wind raged, so he couldn't remain seated. Foul smells surrounded him. All around him, nature was devastated.

But nothing managed to trouble Siddhartha. He continued to meditate.

Then the demons tried to trouble his spirit and to wound his body. They screamed.

They sent him poisoned arrows. In vain: his ears were deaf, the arrows broke before reaching him.

He continued to meditate.

Mara chose another tactic: rather than trying to frighten Siddhartha, why not try tempting him? The horrible apparition changed into sublime creatures. Women danced around him, images of his wife and son appeared, captivating perfumes spread into the air.

But Siddhartha continued to meditate.

Mara wouldn't accept defeat. He sent his sons and daughters back. He walked over to Siddhartha and mocked him:

"So, you take yourself for a saint? You think you can succeed where so many others have failed? What have you done to deserve success? You spent your entire youth wallowing in luxury and idleness, you became a repulsive filthy beggar for six years. And you think that just because you want to, just like that, you're going to attain wisdom? Becoming a sage is something you have to earn!"

Contempt and mockery had no effect on Siddhartha. Quietly and peacefully, he went on meditating. He simply extended one hand and touched the ground. The earth was his witness: he had acted with sincerity, he had loved, he had been generous.

Mara tried one last tactic: flattery. He would do anything to prevent this man, Siddhartha, from curtailing his demonic powers over humanity:

"You won. You can enter Nirvana and become a god. Leave this world and enter the kingdom of the enlightened sages."

The temptation was great. But Siddhartha did not forget he had to find the light in order to enlighten other men. He kept on meditating. Mara knew he was defeated, and departed in a great billow of black smoke. Three of his daughters asked Siddhartha's forgiveness for having tried to divert him from his meditation. The thunderstorm ceased, the clouds dissipated. In the clear sky, the full moon blazed in all its splendour. The grass and the flowers became covered with dew, allowing their fragrances to fill the atmosphere.

The moment had arrived.

Chapter 19

All beings are nothing

But drops of water

Of the original ocean[xx].

Kuoan Shiyuan

Siddhartha continued his meditation. His mind was calm, his body at rest. Through isolation he advanced to the heart of all things. He saw the great and he saw the small.

He contemplated the stars, and the planets, and the meteors. He navigated from one to the other, and he understood the universe was nothing but grains of dust bound to one another. The sky was perpetually in motion. Its objects grew, diminished, then grew once more. Nothing was independent, nothing lived without being connected with other things. An event was due to a cause, and it led to an effect.

If life itself was an effect, he, Prince Siddhartha, was the effect of other lives he had lived before. He had forgotten his previous lives, but they were within him. They had been countless. They were the cause of that which he was today. He had been born for this instant in which he would understand what he was — the bearer of a message to other men. Men die, then are born, then die. It's a perpetual movement, without beginning or end. Death was nothing. When it occurs, a being's will to live starts looking for a new body. When a man dies, another is born. Life and death are a ceaselessly turning wheel. Everything is born, everything grows, everything transforms itself, everything withers, everything dies, everything disappears: everything is impermanent.

Travelling through his other lives, he saw he had never ceased to harm himself. He had been a father, a son, a lover, a husband. He had been the friend and the enemy. His role was never fixed. He had been poor and rich, kind and wicked. He had played all these roles, because he had forgotten his previous lives. He had worn thousands of masks. He had transmigrated endlessly from one life to another. He had been a man, a god, an animal.

Like other men, he had always sought pleasure and never obtained it. Desire's perpetual quest brought with it the pain of being unfulfilled. When a desire is sated, it is immediately replaced by another. Life is nothing but a succession of frustrations. It's a perpetual wheel, like life and death. Each time, he had returned to earth hungry and damned by his previous cravings. His past lives condemned him to rebirth in another form.

The wheel of pleasure can be deadly. It creates suffering for the one who desires. It also leads men to kill, steal or lie to get what they want. Their heart no longer feels love for other men. They hate, they envy. They are no longer at peace with themselves or others.

Then he saw a way to put an end to all suffering. The key was to break the wheel of desire. If the individual no longer sought pleasure, he or she would stop suffering and would no longer cause others to suffer. The individual must detach him or herself from human desires. In this way, selfishness would be conquered. Hatred would be defeated. The individual would be capable of loving the self and others.

Siddhartha had no more doubts. This was the solution. The universe appeared to him, flooded with light. He himself glowed with a halo of light. He had awakened. He was the Awakened One. He was the Buddha.

He had seen, and would no longer be able to be blind. Gently he came out of his meditation. A calm smile floated on his lips. The sun was rising. Light was invading the world. The night had been fruitful.

Chapter 20

May I be a protector to the lost,

Guide to those who travel,

And for those who aspire to the other shore,

May I be a boat, a bridge, a ford[xxi].

Shantideva

The Buddha was happy. He had seen, he knew. But other men still suffered. He needed to pass on what he had understood. Being at peace was not enough for him. All men could be as well — they just didn't know it yet.

Nature knew. The light had never been so soft, the flowers had never been so beautiful. The herbs and grasses perfumed the air with a subtle fragrance. The animals had given up hunting one another, at least for now.

For seven days, the Buddha remained near the Tree. He was peaceful. Suffering no longer ruined his existence. He savoured each instant. Wouldn't teaching other men bring a risk for renewed suffering? He was happy on his own. He thought about staying in this marvellous place forever.

The plant spirits couldn't accept for the Buddha to stay there. They had to bring him back to the world. Two merchant brothers were passing by. Their names were Trapusa and Bhallika. In a previous life, they had befriended the spirit of the Tree of Enlightenment. Now it spoke to them.

"An Awakened One is sitting in the clearing, very close by. He hasn't eaten in seven days. You should bring him some honey and some roasted bean flour."

Overjoyed, they immediately did what the Spirit asked of them. At the sight of the Buddha, their hearts jumped with joy. They offered him the food with great respect. The Buddha hesitated an instant: there was no dish to place it in. The watchful spirits immediately provided him with a bowl. Then he accepted the offering, his first since becoming the Blissful One.

Quietly he ate the honey and the roasted bean flour. Then he resumed his concentration for seven days.

Then a voice resounded within him:

"Don't abandon us! Don't let us suffer! Even before your birth, so many of us have prayed for you to teach us."

He thought in response:

"Who will be able to follow this teaching? Who will have the patience to do so for weeks, months, years? Who will have the necessary confidence to listen? Who in his heart will know how to understand?"

But the inner voice insisted:

"You have seen the movement of the stars. You have seen the wheel of life. It has been predicted that you would come to aid humanity. We have been waiting for you. We have been hoping for you. We beg you to teach us. Don't leave us in the darkness. Don't abandon us to our

suffering. Otherwise, your Enlightenment will have been useless. At your birth, it was said that you would be the prince of a kingdom or of humanity. You cannot only be the prince of yourself."

The god Brahma himself intervened:

"Some men are defiled but only slightly, and can still be taught. Others are still just seeds that are not ready to germinate. Others still have already sprouted, and ask only to be allowed to grow."

The Buddha remembered. He had set off from his palace because he suffered on behalf of others. He dreaded his father's death, his wife's old age, his son's illness. He had left not to escape, but to discover.

He replied to the inner voice:

"I will teach. I will pass on all I can, patiently. But the Buddha cannot do everything.

Some who are filled with errors and hateful desires cannot enter the Way. I can only help those who want to be helped. I will be like a doctor for those who want to heal their soul. But I can do nothing for those who wish to remain ill. I can show the way, not make the way for them."

How to distinguish those who aspire to be taught?

The Bhagavant ("the Blissful One") remained by his sacred tree another seven days. Then he remembered his teachers, Arada and Udraka. But he found out they had died. He also thought about his five companions, who had struggled with him to master their suffering. They wanted to know. Since he had found the Way, he could show them.

Then the Blissful One left the clearing he loved so much. He started off towards the Deer Park, certain that is where he would find some seekers of truth.

The Awakened One
-
The Way

Chapter 21

Wishing to restore sight to the blind,

The Buddha generously let

Some words fall from his golden mouth[xxii].

Daiô Kokushi

It was a long road to Varanasi. It became longer still. People flocked to the Buddha's side, attracted by the light that emanated from him. Whenever he crossed a village, many followed him. He soothed their heavy hearts. He knew how to find the right words to relieve their sorrows. If the Prince had been handsome, the Blissful One was luminous. Everyone perceived it — young and old, rich and poor. They came from every caste without distinction. He was a guiding light for those who hungered for peace. He radiated the love he felt for all humanity.

After marching for days and days, he reached the Deer Park. Seeing him approach, the five ascetics were not pleased. Siddhartha had disappointed them so! But the closer he came, the more they felt this was no longer the same Siddhartha.

When he arrived, instinctively they stood up, one after the other. The treated him like a sage: they gave him a seat made of moss, took his cloak, respectfully brought him a drink.

They gave him water to wash his feet, which were very dusty after his long march. It was a few minutes before they dared to speak:

"Welcome, O Siddhartha, your visit is an honour!" He thanked them. Then he said:

"I am no longer Siddhartha. I am another. I am the Awakened One. My name is Buddha."

The five ascetics were astonished. "Teach us!"

They dreamed of attaining that which they had sought for so long.

And that is how the Bhagavant began to teach. History has named that first lesson the Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Dharma.

"The are four Noble Truths," he said.

"The first Noble Truth concerns suffering. Pain is a part of life: from birth to death, humans seek pleasure and find suffering. Even while experiencing pleasure, they quickly get bored and return to suffering.

"The second Noble Truth concerns the cause of suffering. In seeking pleasure, we cause suffering. We are the cause of our own suffering.

"The third Noble Truth concerns the end of suffering. If we no longer seek pleasure, suffering dies along with its cause. Without the desire for pleasure, we gain peace.

"The fourth Noble Truth concerns the Way. If we cease to do harm, if our spirit seeks wisdom, then we are happy."

Joy flooded the hearts of the five ascetics, touched by the light that emanated from the Blissful One. They experienced a happiness they had never known until that moment. They became the first Buddhist monks.

That day, he taught them about the Middle Way and the Noble Eightfold Path: Right Understanding, Right Intent, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

The five monks kept repeating eagerly:

“Show us the path, O Buddha. Show us the Way.”

The monks were not the only ones rejoicing. The spirits of the Earth repeated the Buddha’s words, which spread quickly. Nature buzzed with his teachings. They were transmitted by the plants, the birds, the wind. The Wheel of the Supreme Law had been put in motion.

“The Buddha is teaching! Here are his words!”

Chapter 22

Do not linger in the past,

Do not think about the future;

The past is gone,

The future is not yet here.

Contemplate the gift of the present

Here and now[xxiii].

(Sutra)

The Bhagavant knew how to find the right words. When speaking to children, he told stories. When speaking to the educated, he provided explanations. Others still didn't need stories or explanations — the Buddha's presence alone was enough for them to be transfixed by the light he emanated.

Most importantly, he practiced what he preached. His example was the best school. He spread love and peace all around him — indeed, he embodied love and peace.

His disciples soon became manifold. Those who had a problem questioned him. He was the Awakened One. Those who suffered asked him to comfort them. He was the Blissful One. Godlike, he appeared to have all the answers. Some believed he could do anything. The mere sight of him was a balm.

Among the postulants was a woman who had lost her child. She was inconsolable. She could not accept the death of her son. Gently she placed the child's body on the Bhagavant's knees, as though fearing to wake him up. She demanded:

"Bring him back to life! Give me back my child!"

The Buddha felt immense compassion for this woman, who was experiencing the most heartrending loss. He understood that words would not be enough to comfort her.

"I can help you but in order to do so, I need you to bring me a handful of rice from a home in which no one has ever died," he told her.

Filled with hope, the woman immediately left on her mission. She went from house to house.

"Would you give me a handful of rice, so that my child can be brought back to life?"

No one denied her — after all, a handful of rice didn't cost anything. Everyone felt compassion for her. But every time she asked:

"Has someone ever died here?"

The answer was always yes. A father, a brother, a little girl — every family had experienced the death of a loved one.

She tried and tried, over and over. The answers to her two questions were always the same: in her own village, everyone agreed to give her a handful of rice, but everyone had known someone who died. She moved on to the neighbouring villages. The two answers were no different. In one home, the door was opened by an orphan, whose mother had died.

She came back to the Blissful One. Her dead child was still delicately resting on his knees. He had not budged. But she had changed.

“You see, Buddha, I was mad, mad with grief, mad to believe I was the only one who knew death. My son will be burned on the pyre this afternoon.”

Then she had one last moment of rebellion:

“Why did he have to die so young? He was just a child — practically still a baby!” “Be happy and proud of your son,” answered the Buddha. “If he died so young, it is

because he was a good man in his previous life. He only committed a small error. He had to

reincarnate in order to correct his mistake, but just for a little while. At such a young age, he had already made amends. His soul has been purified. Now he is experiencing the peace of definitive deliverance.”

She lowered her head. She had accepted the inevitable. Then, her eyes shining, she contemplated the Buddha:

“Teach me. I am ready to listen, so that my soul may also be purified.”

“If we must all die one day,” he replied, “we can live peacefully and happily. Come and listen to me.”

The young mother was at peace. She had grasped the Law of Impermanence in her own flesh and blood.

Chapter 23

The one who would harm a sage

Is like a man who spits at the sky.

His saliva does not sully the blue

But falls back on his head[xxiv].

(Sutra)

Not everyone accepted the Buddha's teaching. The more his fame spread, the more certain people detested him. To them, he was a liar and an usurper. They were suspicious of him.

One of his detractors even went so far as to insult him. The Blissful One looked at him gently. He did not reply. The man became even more furious.

"You're angry, aren't you?" asked the Buddha.

The young man was choking with rage, because his words didn't seem to harm the Bhagavant. He set off into the fields. Eventually, he slowed down. He began to regret having flown off the handle and insulting a sage. The next day, he returned to apologise.

Seeing him arrive, Ananda, the Buddha's cousin and disciple, tried to intervene. "Let him come," the Blissful One said.

In tears, the young man got down on his knees and begged to be forgiven. The Bhagavant placed his hand gently on the young man's head, who was overcome. He asked:

"How can you not resent me for hurting you? "

The Blissful One replied:

"If you offer a gift and the person doesn't want it, who does the gift belong to?" "To me, of course. To me!"

The Buddha smiled:

"Like your anger. You wanted it to touch me, but it was you who was touched. Your anger belongs to you. In wanting to harm me, you harmed yourself. You wanted to inflict violence, but there was no one to accept it. You have not struck me. Being able to admit one's mistakes is the sign of a great soul."

Taken aback, the young man didn't know what to say.

"If you let go of your anger, you will stop suffering. In trying to make others unhappy, all you do is make yourself unhappy. You will see that if you love others, they will love you back, and you will love yourself. Your actions are a mirror in which you see your own reflection."

The young man lowered his head. He remained silent a few minutes, then whispered: "Teach me, O Buddha, to be loving and to love myself."

"I will teach all those who wish to learn. Come, and follow me."

Chapter 24

Just as a boulder

Is not rattled by the wind,

The sage is indifferent

To criticism and flattery[xxv].

(Sutra)

His followers kept growing. The crowds rushed to hear the Buddha, see him, touch him. They raved:

"He is the greatest. No sage past or present has equalled him. He is the master of masters."

The Buddha was not pleased at these words. People thought they were flattering him, but they weren't. Pride is one of the greatest poisons of the soul. Nirvana, or the state of extinction of all desire, is only reachable for those who are free of pride. One day, he spoke:

"Who among you knows all the teachings of all the masters past and present?" No one answered.

"So how can you claim I am the greatest? In order to make this statement, you would have to know all the teachings."

"But your teaching inspires us so much!" they chorused.

"So live this teaching. It is not enough to hear and love it, you must also put it into practice. That's the most important thing."

The disciples were a little sheepish.

"My teaching is not a teaching of the spirit, but of life. If you love my words, make them come alive through your actions. You must test what I tell you. Words can be beautiful, but if they don't correspond to actions, then they are ugly.

"What I say is not important because I am the one saying it. Live what I say, test it, put it into practice. If my words are embodied in actions, that will be my reward. Do not cling to the mental aspect, detach yourselves from words and concepts.

"Saying 'love one another' is good, showing others that we love them, is better."

Many tried to put into practice what the Blissful One said. They spread love and compassion. In return, they were happy. Love is like a seed that spreads with the wind. It is sowed in one heart, and flowers in many others. This was a respectful and thoughtful love. The Buddha's disciples were learning to love themselves and others.

Chapter 25

Like colourful flowers

Lacking in fragrance

Are the fine words

Of those who don't practice them:

They bear no fruit[xxvi].

(Sutra)

However, there was one kind of love that was not spreading: the love for all living things, and not just for human beings. People were learning to love others, but they did not yet understand that the world was one. All living beings are linked to one another. Every human being, every animal is a part of the fabric of life. The whole world is an open book to those who know how to look beyond appearances.

On the contrary, people believed they made the gods happy by killing animals. They sacrificed cows and sheeps so the gods would grant them a good harvest or keep diseases away.

The Buddha had seen the Wheel of Life. He remembered the infinite sadness he felt when his cousin had wounded the swan. After that he had refused to go hunting, even though every young prince was expected to become a skilled hunter to prove his bravery and prowess.

He had understood that to kill an animal was to lose one's love for life, to become used to violence. Whereas he wanted to protect animals.

So the Blissful One tried to make his disciples, and especially those who made sacrifices, understand that one must not kill — neither men nor beasts.

Little by little, the teaching caught on. Many gave up killing and eating animals.

Among the first of these were the mother and wife of Yacaskara, one of the Buddha's first disciples. When Yacaskara left to follow the Buddha, the two women fell into despair and became suicidal. Only the arrival of the Blissful One himself stopped them from going through with it.

He taught them the Way of Deliverance: the Noble Eightfold Path. It called for Right Understanding, Right Intent, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. One's opinions and intentions, one's words and the care of one's body — everything had to be correct. They learned to behave morally, to live ascetically, to see all things with clarity. The discipline was tough but never excessive for the body or the spirit. They trained to follow the Middle Way: neither too much or too little.

His first five companions had a hard time giving up their selfinflicted tortures and pointless mutilations. Those of his disciples who had noble origins found it difficult to no longer have a choice in terms of clothes and food, and to content themselves with living in tiny huts. Monks who had been artisans had to make an effort to give up working, and to depend on charity.

They progressed spiritually, step by step, thanks to the aid and the example of the Buddha.

Chapter 26

In truth, he who contains his rage

As one retains a runaway chariot

Can bear the title of coachman.

The others are nothing but impostors

Who pretend to hold the reins[xxvii].

(Sutra)

The Bhagavant watched the Wheel of Life turning. He had traveled far from his home. Now he was returning to it step by step. He had not forgotten his promise to return to his family, if he found the way to put an end to all suffering.

The one nearest to him was King Bimbisara. He got on the road to Rajagaha. He settled on a hill near the capital, in the Bamboo Grove. Nature was his home, the bamboos his shelter. The king came often to hear him preach. The king's subjects also came — at first to imitate their ruler, then out of their own volition. The number of the Buddha's disciples swelled, became countless.

King Bimbisara offered the Buddha some land so that he could accommodate the crowds. Other noblemen did the same. Soon there was room for everyone to listen to the Blissful One in vast shady gardens. The Buddha's favorite park was called Jetavana, which means "Prince Jeta's Forest".

The king said so publicly: his wishes had been granted.

"My father the king died, and I was able to succeed him on the throne. A Buddha was born on this earth, and I was able to meet him. At his sight, my thoughts filled with joy. I was able to hear him preach, to find faith and understand the doctrine. I only have one wish left: for you to enter my capital, Rajagaha."

The Buddha accepted silently. The king heard his answer in his own heart, and rejoiced for himself and his people.

Was everyone overjoyed about this situation? Almost. Devadatta, the Buddha's own cousin, was jealous. His anger now was even greater than when they were children. Not only had the Buddha snatched the woman he wanted. He had renounced the throne and gone off, while he, Devadatta, had always done his duty and served the king. And now the whole world was at the Buddha's feet. It was unbearable. Cursing him wasn't enough — he had to be killed. That way one else would fall under the influence of this man who promised happiness, who never stayed in one place.

However, killing someone so widely beloved and admired was no easy task. Devadatta needed accomplices. It occurred to him that King Bimbisara's son was probably just as outraged as he was. His father talked of nothing but the Buddha, as though forgetting he had a son who would succeed him one day. Wasn't he afraid to weaken his kingdom? The king kept giving more and more land away to the Buddha. He spoke of nothing but love, and forgot to protect the country's borders from its enemies.

Devadatta's words fell on attentive ears. The king's son resented this man who seemed to be taking away his father, his king, his future. They thought about it a long time. They were aided by some noblemen from the Magadha region, who were worried about the king's new-found pacifism: how would the country defend itself if it came under attack? However, many inhabitants venerated the Buddha, so harming him was risky. The only way to get away with it was if the population thought it was an accident.

So, one day when the Buddha was meditating by the Peak of Vultures, they dropped a huge rock on him. But… the rock split in two just above the Buddha's head.

Another time, they got an elephant drunk and set it free just as the Blissful One was crossing a street nearby. Everyone, including the disciples, fled screaming in fear at the sight of the charging elephant — except the Buddha. The great animal was about to trample him when it got down on its knees, touched by grace. It felt the immense love that radiated from the Bhagavant.

When his disciples returned to his side, ashamed, the Buddha told them:

"Love conquers all. Do not be afraid."

From that day onwards, the elephant became the Buddha's faithful companion.

Chapter 27

He who has conquered himself

Is far greater

Than the conqueror of thousands of men[xxviii].

(Sutra)

In order to complete the loop of his earthly life, the Buddha had to make one more stop. He had to return to his father, wife, and son, in the kingdom where he was born.

He announced to his disciples:

"It's time for me to return to my father's kingdom." He set off on his journey, followed by a huge crowd.

The news spread faster than he could walk. The inhabitants of Kapilavastu exulted: "Our Prince has become a great man! He's famous!"

Everyone rushed out to meet him.

King Shuddhodana was too impatient to wait for his son to reach the city gates: he sent a messenger to go and take a look at this illustrious man whose name resounded far and wide.

When the messenger reached the forest where the Buddha and his disciples had camped, he almost fell off his horse. A great man? This thin, ragged vagabond carrying a wooden bowl and begging for food, with his throng of equally tattered followers?

The herald, who had made the journey at a gallop, was not in such a big hurry to return. How could he tell the king that his famous son was just a beggar?

When King Shuddhodana found out, he flew into a rage. The news brought shame upon his whole family. It had to stop, immediately.

He rushed to the campground in person, but his fury evaporated as soon as he set eyes on the Buddha: surrounded by an intense light, he breathed peace and joy. The king embraced his son, then asked him timidly:

"Is it true you beg for food?"

"Yes," the Blissful One replied mildly.

The calmness of the response revived the king's fury:

"Have you no shame? Have you thought about our reputation? You chose to live your own life, which was already painful for the kingdom. But to proudly show yourself as a beggar! A less than nothing! You insult me, you insult your son, you insult our people! You insult all our ancestors!"

“Your ancestors were kings, mine were sages. The wise man does not live in luxury, and is satisfied with little. He gladly allows people to show their generosity. In this way he encourages them to think of others, and not to be attached to earthly goods.”

The king went back to his palace. He became thoughtful, and returned to see the Blissful One several times. Little by little, he began to ask him questions, until he ended up asking the Buddha to teach him.

Gradually he mourned his son, an earthly prince, in order to admire the Bhagavant.

“Asita predicted it when you were born: you have become a master. You are greater than me. Let me bow to you.”

He followed the word with the deed.

The Blissful One took him by the shoulders and lifted him up.

“Bowing like this elevates you. Conserve your throne, and I will conserve mine. "

Then Yashodhara came, followed by his son, and his aunt. They all admired the Buddha, bowed, and became his disciples.

The transfigured family was happier than it had ever been. This is why one of the Buddha’s names is Shakyamuni, or “the wise man of the Shakya clan”, after the name of his tribe.

Chapter 28

If hate responds to hate,

How can it be extinguished?

Only compassion can dissolve it[xxix].

(Sutra)

The Buddha did not stay in Kapilavastu. His task was to teach everyone who wished to be taught. So he walked from province to province, and his doctrine spread all along the Ganges, the sacred river.

One day his cousin Devadatta — the one who had wished him so much harm — fell very ill. He was unconscious for days, and no doctor seemed to be able to cure him. The Bhagavant went to his bedside. Many did not understand this gesture.

“He hates you — he has hated you all his life. He even tried to kill you,” they objected.

The Blissful One smiled serenely. “Love is inexhaustible,” he replied.

“Explain it to us, master,” said the disciples. “You cannot love a man who harms you.”

“You think a sage loves certain men and detests others. But I tell you: we must love all human beings. We all want the same thing: to be happy, to be healthy, to not suffer. Each man is the mirror of every other.

“If what I say is true, and I truly harbour no hatred towards Devadatta, may he be imediately healed.”

To everyone’s astonishment, Devadatta stood up and smiled.

Not only did he make a quick recovery, but peace had conquered his heart. The Buddha had not healed his body alone.

Chapter 29

A master and his disciple Are like father and son.

The son must catch up to the father, And not stay behind.

If father and son become equal, They sit in the same place[xxx].

P. Fauliot

The Buddha preached across India until a very advanced age. One day, he announced to his disciples that it was time for him to leave this world. He had completed his life. Il leur avait appris les dix actes purs mais imparfaits qui leur permettaient d'obtenir la condition d'homme : ne pas tuer, ne pas voler, ne pas pratiquer la luxure, ne pas mentir, ne pas tenir de propos frivoles, ne pas calomnier, ne pas injurier, ne pas convoiter, ne pas nuire, ne pas avoir d'opinions fausses.

A dream told him where he needed to spend his last moments. The Wheel of Life would stop turning near his birthplace, Kapilavastu.

He had taught men to live, now he had to show them how to die. His disciples tried to retain him:

"We still need you, Master. We still have so much to learn. You are our model. Give us a little more time. Why does the Eye of the World close so quickly?"

But the sage knows when the time is right. The Buddha visited the Bamboo Grove one last time. Then, in the Sanctuary of Perfumes, he told them:

"You've been listening to me and looking at me for fifty years now. You've been putting my teachings into practice for the past fifty years. Have confidence in yourselves.

Remember to communicate and share with one another. Have confidence in the community. I will never be far from you. I am in your hearts."

Chapter 30

When a thought arises, An image appears.

When it fades,

A temple becomes a tomb[xxxi].

(Sutra)

The Buddha and his disciples resumed their march towards the high mountains of Tibet. They passed through Pataliputra, Kuti, Nada… Near Kapilavastu, when they entered the village of Kushinagara, the Blissful One said:

“This is it.”

They all stopped, overcome with fear.

The Buddha entered a garden near the river and lay down between two trees. His disciples sat in a perfect circle around him. Some were crying. Others kept watch, their spirits at peace. It was almost the winter solstice, three months after the rainy season.

The Buddha spoke one last time:

“Don’t forget, everything is suffering: birth, old age, illness, death, sorrow, separation… no one can escape pain, not even the gods. Suffering arises from desire, from the thirst for pleasure. That thirst spawns the three roots of evil: greed, hatred, and error. These three roots give birth to vices, passions and false opinions. Cease to desire. Cease to possess. Let go all attachments. Then you will be at peace, you will love. Your serenity will be unassailable.

“Don’t forget: none of the countless things that exist lasts forever.”

He turned onto his right side, placed his hand under his head and breathed his last breath. He was over eighty years old. During his Enlightenment, he had known the unassailable peace that followed on the extinction of all passions and errors. That is when he entered

Parinirvana, and was released from the cycle of death, suffering, and rebirth. He was completely quenched. He left his Doctrine behind as his heritage.

Chapter 31

You have taken the trouble to travel from afar To obtain a part of the relics,

But you won't succeed. (...)

Since you won't grant them to us

Our four-part army will remain here (...).

If you deem it impossible

For us to obtain them,

We will take them by force[xxxii].

(Sutra)

The adventure of the Buddha's earthly life couldn't end there. When he breathed his last breath, a great earthquake shook the world. The gods were troubled, the monks were frightened, the people were lost.

After seven days of mourning, the disciples prepared the pyre for the funeral rites.

They lit the fire… but the pyre didn't burn. They tried again. Nothing happened. They didn't know what to do.

The gentlest among the Bhagavant's disciples, his cousin Ananda, arrived seven days later. When the Buddha died, he had been preaching far away from Kushinagara. This delay allowed many people to bring flowers and perfumes in honour of the Awakened One. Their offerings blanketed the ground until its colour was no longer visible. Music resounded everywhere. After covering the body with sesame oil, Ananda knelt near the pyre, took a small twig in his right hand and… the pyre lit up all on its own.

The light from the flames rose to the sky. All those who saw it bowed. The people all wore white, while the monks wore saffron robes, following the wishes of the Blissful One. Little by little, the flames died out, leaving nothing but a small pile of ash.

Immediately, the Buddha's spiritual heritage appeared to be lost: eight kings started squabbling over who had the right to claim his remains.

"He belongs to us!" each proclaimed.

They were ready to declare war over a handful of cold ashes.

Finally, the brahmin Dhumragotra spoke. Although he spoke softly, everyone could hear him.

"The Buddha taught us to love one another, to forsake all attachments, to share with one another," he said.

"Let's divide the ashes into as many parts as there are kingdoms. Each will have its portion. Each will build a monument in his honour. Let everyone remember his words, and put them into practice."

The kings lowered their heads and agreed:

"Divide the bodily remains of the Buddha into eight equal parts for us." So Dhumragotra separated the ashes into eight equal parts.

Each king set off with his portion. Each erected a stupa, or shrine. A ninth monument was built to house the Buddha's upper canine tooth, while a tenth rose on the site of the funeral pyre.

Finally, an eleventh stupa was built on the spot where Siddhartha cut off his hair and renounced the material world. Thus the people of the kingdoms of Kushinagar, Pava, Allakappa, Ramagrama, Visnudvipa, Kapilavastu, Vaishali and Magadha had a place to go to meditate and pray whenever they were in doubt about what to do.

The Buddha's teaching continued to spread after his death. He lives in every person who follows that teaching.

All living beings Have the Buddha's nature.

Become Buddhas again

And let the lotus of infinite compassion

Flower in your hearts[xxxiii].

Kuoan Shiyuan

“To be passed on.“

Footnotes

[i] André Bareau, Following Buddha [translation and commentary of the Sutra-pitaka and the Vinaya-pitaka], Paris, Ph. Lebaud, 1985, p. 187.

[ii] André Bareau, Following Buddha, Paris, Ph. Lebaud, 1985, p. 43.

[iii] Verse by the Buddha, in André Chédel (ed.), Dhammapada, Paris, Dervy, 2011, pp. 67-68.

[iv] André Bareau, Following Buddha, Paris, Ph. Lebaud, 1985, p. 122.

[v] Extract from a poem by Ikkyû, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 51.

[vi] Kyudo oral tradition, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Japanese Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2008, p. 98.

[vii] André Bareau, Following Buddha, Paris, Ph. Lebaud, 1985, p. 60.

[viii] André Bareau, Following Buddha, Paris, Ph. Lebaud, 1985, p. 124.

[ix] Composed based on a sutra, quoted by André Bareau, Following Buddha, Paris, Ph. Lebaud, 1985, p. 132.

[x] André Bareau, Following Buddha, Paris, Ph. Lebaud, 1985, p. 178.

[xi] André Bareau, Following Buddha, Paris, Ph. Lebaud, 1985, p. 275.

[xii] André Bareau, Following Buddha, Paris, Ph. Lebaud, 1985, p. 189.

[xiii] Martine Quentier-Séguy, Tales of Sages from India, Paris, Seuil, 2003, p. 139.

[xiv] André Bareau, Following Buddha, Paris, Ph. Lebaud, 1985, p. 170.

[xv] André Bareau, Following Buddha, Paris, Ph. Lebaud, 1985, p. 152.

[xvi] Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 160.

[xvii] Extract from a poem by Tao-Yuanming, quoted by Pascal Fauliot & Patrick Fischmann, Tales of the Wise Gardeners, Paris, Seuil, 2011, p. 154.

[xviii] Extract from a poem by Uesugi Kenshin, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of the Wise Samurai, Paris, Seuil, 2011, p. 75.

[xix] Extract from a poem by Musô Soseki, quoted by Pascal Fauliot & Patrick Fischmann, Tales of the Wise Gardeners, Paris, Seuil, 2011, p. 101.

[xx] Extract from a poem by Kuoan Shiyuan, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 97.

[xxi] Extract from a poem by Shantideva, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Tibetan Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2006, p. 118.

[xxii] Extract from a poem by Daiô Kokushi, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 140.

[xxiii] Verse by the Buddha, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 65.

[xxiv] Verse by the Buddha, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 24.

[xxv] Verse by the Buddha, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 42.

[xxvi] Verse by the Buddha, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 78.

[xxvii] Verse by the Buddha, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 21.

[xxviii] Verse by the Buddha, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 152.

[xxix] Verse by the Buddha, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 161.

[xxx] Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, pp. 197-198.

[xxxi] Verse by the Buddha, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, pp. 90-91.

[xxxii] André Bareau, Following Buddha, Paris, Ph. Lebaud, 1985, p. 287.

[xxxiii] Extract from a poem by Kuoan Shiyuan, quoted by Pascal Fauliot, Tales of Buddhist Sages, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 97.