**The Life of Sakyumuni Buddha**

**Before Buddha's Birth**   
The religious life of India previous to the Buddha's birth was in a state of terrible confusion caused by the coexistence of a degenerated Brahmanism and the most diverse philosophical and pseudo philosophical tendencies. The Aryan conquerors of India, already established along the lower slopes of the Himalayas and in the fertile valley drained by the Ganges River, had during their long history developed a remarkable religion and philosophy. However, a sad deterioration was taking place. The Vedic hymns, the lofty poetry of the Rig-Veda, and the religions, which produced them, already lay in the distant past, forgotten by the people in general and known only to the Brahman priest. The philosophical ideas of the Upanishads were adulterated with much that was inconsistent with them; its' monotheism comprised with Vedic polytheism.

The Vedic literature was the religious scripture, and the Brahmanical teachers taught that the Gods might be appeased by the singing of hymns, the sacrifice of animals, offerings of prayers and by fasting. Many of these teachers had private esoteric paths of their own for which each claimed superiority over those of their rivals. The Indians who followed the Vedic literature had innumerable gods and believed that these gods could be moved to grant petitions by means of certain ceremonies, which only the priests could perform. Under this system a sinner was he who failed to pay for praise, prayer and sacrifice. The priestly cast, therefore, gained social supremacy and wielded immense power over its followers.  
  
While the early Aryan race was entirely free from the caste system, society gradually became more complicated and professions more specialized, until a custom developed through which certain families had the monopoly of particular professions or trades and so, slowly by degrees, the four main castes of priest, warrior, artisans and menial were formed. Far from attempting to reform this social injustice the Brahmans found a moral justification for its creation.  
  
Thus, Brahmanism, which had already reached its zenith, now was beginning to lose the true religious spirit and its authoritative power, at least among the thinking people. As the result of the dissatisfaction with traditional Brahmin conceptions new schools of thought began to flourish. Amongst them were philosophical schools that developed from the Upanishad, such as the Sankya system and the primitive forms of Yogi. Some of the six systems of the Indian philosophy are said to have originated at this time.  
  
In addition to these ancient Vedic doctrines and philosophies these were, many new metaphysical theories springing upon all sides not only independent of, but rather in protest against the ritualistic Vedic religions. The Buddha mentions some sixty-two diverse sects of speculative philosophies, which indulged in questions about the permanency, or transitoriness of the world. The old questions of the existence or nonexistence of a soul, of its continuation or its destruction after death were debated again and again. Hair splitting metaphysicians, logicians, pantheists, polytheists, monotheists, materialists, fatalists, eternalists, agnostics, skeptics, optimists, pessimists, nihilists, and positivists were going to and fro, each proclaiming his views as the best.  
  
The popular aspects of their theories of the origin of the world may be classified under three heads; fatalism, creationism and occasionalism. There were absolute materialists who believed in an after life, heaven or hell, giving themselves up to hedonistic ideas. On the other extreme were the ascetic philosophers who believed in a permanent soul, which transmigrated from the body of a man into that of the other beings. Believing that the soul could be freed by the annihilation of the physical sense they devised various means of self-mortification.  
  
These two types of philosophies were leading many either into immorality or to absurd and unnatural practices while superstition dominated the ignorant masses. To the Indians of the Vedas, religions consisted of the chanting of hymns in which natural powers were personified and to whom sacrifices were offered. To the Indians of the Brahmans rites or ceremonies were the crux. They lived in terror of demons and spiritual gods; the worship of the creator god, Brahma, reigned as orthodox; prayer and sacrifices had become very common, and ample blood was daily being shed in the name of religion.  
  
Amid conditions such as these when there was need for a great personality to show the true way of life, Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the future Buddha, was born.

**From Birth to the Great Renunciation**   
The word "Buddha" is not a proper name; it is a title by which Gautama best became known to his disciples. Derived from the root BUDH - to know - the word may be translated as The Perfectly Awakened One or The Enlightened One. It designates one who by his power has acquired the highest wisdom and moral perfection and has become one with the Supreme Truth.  
  
The Buddha at His birth was called Siddhartha. His family name was Gautama. His parents were King Suddhodana, ruling raja of the Sakya clan, and Queen Maya, daughter of Ankara also a Sakya raja. The Sakya belonged to the great Aryan family of people of which the European Races - Greeks, Celts, Roman, Germanic and Slavs - are also members. They had penetrated into India through the Himalayan passes and held the rich irrigated plain between the Nepalese foothills and the river Rapti northeast of the present province of Oudh.  
  
The year of His birth, according to historians, was 566 B.C. His birthplace has been traced and verified by a stone pillar which was discovered by Dr. Fuhrer of the British Archeological Society in December 1896, near the frontier between India proper and Nepal. The great Emperor Asoka erected this pillar about 300 B.C. and upon it is engraved in writing of the day: Here the Buddha, the sage of the Sakyas, was born.  
  
Legend tells us that for twenty years the Queen had not children; then after dreaming a strange dream of a white elephant entering her side, she became pregnant. According to the custom of the time, the Queen returned to her own home for the birth, and while on the way, in the beautiful spring sunshine, she rested in the flower garden of Lumbini Park. All about her were Asoka blossoms and in delight she reached out her right arm to pluck a branch and the prince was born. Everyone in the Heaven and Earth extolled the glory of the Queen and her princely child and danced in joy. This memorable day was the eighth day of April. The joy of the King was extreme as he named the child Siddhartha which means "every wish fulfilled."  
  
In the palace of the kind, however, delight was quickly followed by sorrow, for after a few days, lovely Queen Maya suddenly passed away. Fortunately, her younger sister, Prajapati, became the child's foster mother and brought him up with loving care. It is said that at his birth a hermit predicted that the Prince will become either a great spiritual teacher or a king of kings, and his father, anxious that he should be the latter, had him trained in material exercises, riding and outdoor life, and in all knightly accomplishments and statesmanship. From his birth, he was surrounded with every sensuous Eastern luxury, but his thoughts ran to other things.  
  
From his earliest childhood he exhibited an unusual compassion and keen mind towards surround conditions. The books on the Buddha tell that one spring day he went out of the castle with his father and watched a farmer at his plowing; they saw a bird flying down to the ground and carry away a little worm which had been thrown out of the ground by the farmer's plow. The Prince was deeply affected by the tragedy of the struggle for existence of these two little creatures. He sat down in the side of a tree and meditated deeply, whispering to himself; "Alas! Why do all living creatures kill each other?"  
  
**Renunciation**The spiritual wound was deepened day after day as he grew up: like a little scar on a young tree, the sufferings of life were more and more deeply carved into his mind. The kind was increasingly worried as he recalled the hermit's prophecy and tried in every possible way to cheer the Prince and to turn his thoughts in other directions. At the age of nineteen, the King arranged the marriage to the Princess Yasodhara whose beauty, according to tradition, was enhanced by all womanly grace. She was the daughter of SupraBuddha, lord of Koliya castle.  
  
For ten years the Prince was immersed in a round of music, dancing and pleasure in the different pavilions, but ever did his thoughts revert to the problem of suffering as he pensively tried to understand the true meaning of life. It is told that the accidental sight of an aged many, of a many deadly ill with fever, and of a corpse followed by seeping mourners, enlightened the future Buddha as to the miseries of the world and gave him determination to seek some law, some understanding, which would account for these seeming caprices of most pitiless gods. Life became a nightmare of injustice and horror. Neither wealth nor intellect nor human love could shut of the black riddle of the world - the sorry of man -, which pressed upon him and corroded all his joys with a bitter realization of senseless injustice and cruelty in the world.  
  
He roamed through the alls of this palace like a lion stung by some poisoned dart and in pain he roared, "The world is full of darkness and ignorance; there is no one who knows how to cure the ills of existence. Some day we may be ill, become aged, and from death we cannot escape. Luxuries of the palace, healthy bodies, rejoicing youth, what do they mean to me?"  
  
Thus the mental struggle went on in the mind of the Prince until his twenty-ninth year when his only child, Rahula, was born. This seemed to bring things to a climax and he decided to leave his palace, where he was virtually a prisoner, and to seek the solution of his mental unrest in the homeless life of a mendicant. This plan he carried out one night, by leaving the castle with only his personal servant, Channa, and his favorite horse, snow-white Kantaka, and even these he left behind him when he had crossed the river of the boundary of his father's kingdom.  
  
It is important to bear in mind the fact that this great renunciation was made, not in old age but in youth; nor from satiety of worldly pleasures but with a fuller power to enjoy them; not from poverty and therefore having no worldly loss to sustain, but with plenty and the means of satisfying all cravings, and that it was made more from sympathy with the sorrow of others than from any personal sorrow within himself.  
  
**The Great Struggle**   
From the Scriptures we learn that the Pranced on leaving home went eastward and passed on to Rajagriha, the Capital of King Bimbisara of Maghada. There dwelt in the neighborhood two noted Brahmans, Arada Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra. The former, a follower of Kapila, the reputed founder of the Sankya system of philosophy, laid great stress on the belief in an Atman, and considered the disbelief in the existence of a soul as denial of religion itself.  
  
Without the belief in an eternal soul he could see no way of salvation. "Like the munja grass when freed from its horny case, or like the wild bird when liberated from its trap, the soul when freed from its material limitations would attain perfect release. When the ego discerned its immaterial nature, it would attain true deliverance." This teaching did not satisfy Gautama and he left Arada Kalama and became a disciple of Udraka Ramaputra.  
This latter was a follower of the Vaiseshika system, which through teaching of the "I" laid greater stress on the question of Karma and the transmigration of the soul. But again, the princely renuncient could not bring himself to believe in the existence of a soul nor its transmigration. It is interesting to note that Gautama had learned and practiced these two systems and succeeded in mastering them so completely that Arada had asked him to become his associate, while Udraka was even prepared to make him the leader of his school.  
  
Neither system, however, satisfied Gautama because in his opinion the liberation taught was incomplete in both cases: the so-called liberated soul was not actually free from limitation of world existence. These spiritual trainings were good as the medicament of a sore disease, but they were not its annihilation; there was left a spot of infection, thought but a spot, by which the process of ever-recurring ignorance and consequent sorrow of world existence could occur again.  
  
These he resolved to leave them and betake himself to Uruvilva, near the present Mahabodhi temple of Buddha Gaya, there to practice a terrible asceticism, which was prevalent among the hermits of his day. Gautama practiced many varieties of it for six years, thinking that perhaps the soul might spring free from all earthly ties and become united with the God of Eternity, Brahma.  
  
He underwent the severest discipline in the mortifying of his body, sitting mute and motionless, controlling even his breath. So still he sat in meditation that birds and beasts moved about him unafraid. He took less and less food and water until, it is said, he ate scarcely more than one grain of rice or sesame seed each day. He grew thinner and thinner in body and fainter in strength.  
  
At last one day, when he could think no longer, and dumb instinct awoke in him, he crawled down to the water and lay in a warm shallow water utterly fordone, and the five ascetics with whom he had held counsel and who expected great results from this incredible suffering said, one to another: "He will die now. The ascetic Gautama will die." At last supporting himself by a bough, he crept up the bank. A little refreshed and able to think once more, he perceived that divine knowledge was not to be found by such means. He now knew that asceticism was not the means to truly noble insight and deliverance.  
  
He, therefore, decided to abandon self-mortification and began again to take regular food. When his companions saw this, they thought that he had failed from the ideal and abandoned him.  
  
**Enlightenment**   
Gautama did not for a moment despair of gaining his aim. Deserted by all, he realized that salvation could not be attained by the doctrine taught by others and he resolved to follow only his own inspiration. He wandered on alone; striving in perfect seclusion for revelation from within for the complete unfolding of is higher spiritual powers. He received some food from Sujata, the wife of a neighbouring landowner. After that he felt energy swelling up in him like a great rive in spate: he arose, bathed in the river Naranjara, and in the evening he set steadfast step towards the foot of Asvatta tree.  
  
Upon reaching the destination, he sat down cross legged and upright with his face towards the east, making a resolution "skin, sinew and bone may dry up as it will, my flesh and blood may dry in my body, but without attaining complete enlightenment I will not leave this seat." And the night came softly down and veiled him from the sight of man.  
  
Many were the nights of terror and temptation. Body and mind, singly and in unison, tried him beyond human endurance. Visions of his life of love, luxury and power beset his body. Intellectual doubts and difficulties attached his mind. All the joys and delights, which the world offers to its favorites, presented themselves to him in their most seductive form. But love and deep compassion for the sorrow of mankind held him firm, and he clung to his purpose determined to die rather than renounce his aim.  
  
And when the darkness thinned and the east became faintly gray, he received Enlightenment; ignorance was dispelled, knowledge arose; darkness was dispelled, light arose. He attained the highest consciousness, and received it with a cry of "light!" He reached the goal, the highest insight was won. He became the perfect one, a Buddha. He obtained the "pure, spotless eye of the truth" and he beheld his many former existence with their special character and details.  
  
He understood, not only the cause of suffering, but also the means of putting an end to all sufferings and to reach Deliverance, the perfect peace of Nirvana. For a while, illuminated with all wisdom sat the Buddha, lost in contemplation of the universe as it is. And at least, lifting up his voice, he cried aloud in triumph his song of victory:

*Through worldly round of many births, I ran my course unceasingly, Seeking the maker of the House; Painful is birth again and again.  
House-builder! I behold thee now.  
Again a house thou shalt not build; All the rafters are broken now, The ridgepole also is destroyed, My mind, its elements dissolved, The end of cravings has attained.*

This memorable day was the eight of December. He was thirty-five years old. The Enlightenment the Buddha attained was not the result of miraculous or mystic occurrence caused by the influence of extramundane, divine power, but was the direct apprehension of the truth; not a "revelation," but a "self-realization."  
  
**His Missionary Life and the Great Decease**   
The Buddha remained at the foot of the Bodhi tree for seven days in deep meditation. He shrank from teaching it to the people at large; the thought occurred to him: "Mankind is given to desire intent upon desire, delighting in desire. Most difficult for it to understand will be the moral constitution of the world. It will not want to hear the doctrine of the renunciation of the worldly life, of subduing of desires and passions and of the Path to deliverance." But soon compassion with erring and suffering humanity induced him to take upon himself the difficult task of heralding the Truth.  
  
He who had abandoned all selfishness could not but live for others. He saw that it was only his duty to teach what he had learned as clearly and simply as possible, and trust to the Truth impressing itself upon the people's mind in proportion to each one's individual nature and mental capacity. He went first to his late companions who had abandoned him when he broke his fast. At first they sunned him but after they had heard him, they acknowledged him as the Enlightened of the World and became his disciples, the first to be in the Brotherhood (Sangha).  
  
The first discourse of the Buddha is called "The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Law," or the "Foundation of the Kingdom of Righteousness." This sermon contains I in concise terms the fundamental points of the whole doctrine. The news spread swiftly and about him gathered many men of great fame and high cast, eager to hear of joy and the ending of sorrow. By the end of three months, the disciples numbered sixty persons, not counting the lay members. He gave them full instructions and sent them out in all directions to preach his doctrine, with the words: "Ye are delivered from all fetters, human and divine. Go forth, o Brethren, and wander about the world for the joy and happiness of man."  
  
He wondered from village to village, from town to town, from country to country in the valley of the Ganges, publishing the good tidings, always accompanied by a group of disciples, and everywhere inspiring and instructing the men and women by discourse, exhortations and parables.  
  
Seven years later, while he was living at Rajagriha, his father, King Suddhodana, sent a message to request him to come and let him see him again before he died. In all sweetness he explained to his father that Prince Siddhartha had passed out of existence, as such and was not changed into the Buddha; to whom all beings are equally akin and equally dear. Instead of ruling over one tribe or nations, like an earthly king, he, through His Dharma, would win all earths of men to be his followers.  
  
At first the Suddhodana, suffering inwardly from his son's retirement, held aloof, but afterward became his disciple; and Rahula, the Buddha's son, Mahprajapati, his stepmother, and Princess Yasodhara, his wife, and all the members of the Sakya clan, were all converted and became his disciples. Kings, merchants, laborers, men and women of all classes, who felt the fascination of his life and ideals and were eager to accept his spiritual discipline, became members of the Brotherhood. The great teachers Sariputra and Maudgalyana, and two thousand disciples came to him.  
  
His method of life was very simple; He himself begging for his food as did every member of his Sangha. It was his custom to travel and preach during the eight dry months, but during the seasons of the rains the Buddha and his disciples would stop in the pansales that had been built for them by various king and other wealthy converts. His time was divided between feeding the lamp of his own spiritual life by solitary mediations and active preaching to large audiences of his monks, instructing the more advanced in the subtle points of inner development, directing the affairs of the order, rebuking breaches of discipline, conforming the faithful in their virtue, receiving deputations, carrying on discussions with learned opponents comforting the sorrowful, visiting kings and peasants, Brahmans and outcasts, rich and poor. To one and all he preached the Dharma as the cure for all sorrows.  
  
**Decease**  
In the forty-fifth year after his attaining Buddhahood, he became ill at Veisali and predicted that after three months he would enter Parinirvana. Still he journeyed on until he reached Pava where he became critically ill by partaking food offered by Ghunda, a blacksmith and on the full moon day of February, knowing that his end was near, he came at evening to Kusinagara, a place about one hundred miles from Benares.  
  
In the Sala grove of the Mallas between two Sala trees he had his bedding spread with his head towards the north according to the ancient custom. He lay upon it and with his mind perfectly clear, gave his final instructions to his disciples and bade them farewell: "it may be, that in some of you the thought may arise, "The word of the Master is ended, we have no teacher any more!" But it is not thus that you should regard it. The truths and the rules of the order which I have set forth and laid down for you all, let them, after I am gone, be the Teacher to you. Decay is inherent in all component things! Work out your salvation with diligence." Thus passed into Parinirvana in his eightieth year, the greatest of the world's teachers and the kindest of men.  
  
Under the direction of Ananda, the Buddha's favourite disciple, the body was cremated and ashes were divided among eight kings with a stupa erected over each portion. The portion five to Kind Ajatasatru was taken, less than two centuries later by the Emperor Asoka and distributed throughout the Empire. The headquarters of the Buddhist Churches of America, at San Francisco, California has a portion of the Relics of the Buddha.  
  
**Conclusion**   
Such is a brief outline of the life of the historic Buddha, who yielded more momentous influence upon a larger proportion of the human race than that of any other man who has ever lived. There are evidences that the personality of the Buddha was one of great firmness and courage with equally great kindness and practical wisdom, immense self-confidence and great patience, tact, and love in his dealings with mankind.  
  
Perhaps the most striking thing about him is his most unique combination of cool scientific head with the devoted sympathy of a warm and loving heart. The way in which he kept that perfect balance during the forty-five years of teaching is indeed extraordinary. The Buddha's moral qualities were balanced with equally striking intellectual gifts.  
  
The Buddha was not a dry unemotional rationalist. He spoke with a knowledge and authority that baffled the wise. But other teachers have done all this. These talents along would not have given him the permanent place of power that he occupies. It is not so much because he preached the truth that his hearers believed; it is because his personality won their hearts that his words appeared to them true and salutary.  
  
More potent than his teaching and is word was the Blessed One's wonderful personality. He had something of the magnetism that induced men who had seem him only once to leave their business and follow him. It was his magnetic personality and dynamic power that captivated the affections and aroused the reverent veneration of men and women.  
  
The power of his compassion and of his determination to save the world can hardly be doubted. This consciousness of an almost cosmic mission is one of the things most certain about the Buddha. Repeatedly he is described or described himself, as "one born into the world for the good of the many; for the happiness of gods and men, out of compassion for the world."  
  
No teacher was so godless as Lord Buddha, yet none so godlike. Though the mast of all, he was the universal brother of each. While despising the follies of the world, he lived and moved among men with serenity and love. When surrounded and glorified by all his retinue of followers, he never once though that these privileges were his; but went on doing good.  
  
Though exalted and adored, he never arrogated to himself divinity. Hearing all the people singing his praise, the Blessed One called Ananda, and said: "All this is unworthy of me. No such vain homage can accomplish the word of the Dharma. They who live righteously, pay be most honour and please me most."  
  
Indeed, the Buddha is the Light of the World. No wonder that soon after He passed away, many of his followers who could not be satisfied with prosaic humanness of their Master began to think of him as more than a mortal soul, and gave him a super mundane life.