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## MAHĀPARINIBBĀNA SUTTA (IN DĪGHANIKĀYA): THE ASPECTS OF DOCTRINES

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**ABSTRACT:** THIS S THE MAHĀPARINIBBĀNA SUTTA PLAYED AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN BUDDHISM. IN THIS SUTTA, THE BUDDHA SUMMARIZED THE MOST BASIC TEACHINGS DURING FORTY-FIVE YEARS OF PREACHING FOR THE WELFARE OF BEINGS. IT GIVES THE LAST WORDS OF THE BUDDHA, THE LAST ADVICE OF THE BUDDHA, TO HIS DISCIPLES. IT IS NOT A SINGLE DISCOURSE LIKE MOST OTHERS IN THE SUTTANTA PĪṬAKA BUT A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE LAST YEAR OR SO OF THE BUDDHA'S LIFE. THE BUDDHA'S REPLY DESCRIBES THE SEVEN THINGS FOR THE PROSPERITY AND NON-DECLINE OF RULERS AND THE NON-DECLINE IN THE SAṄGHA; THE EFFECTS OF IMMORAL LIFE AND THE VALUES OF THE MORAL LIFE. THE IMAGE OF THE BUDDHA - WHO, IN FULLNESS, IS THE SUBJECT OF HUMAN ASCENSION, THE GREAT MORALIST OF HUMANITY. THE WORSHIP OF SACRED RELICS AND SACRED PLACES, THE PERSONS WORTHY OF MEMORIAL MOUNDS AND PILGRIMAGES TO THOSE HOLY PLACES, THE CONCEPT OF THE CAKRAVARTIN, ETC., HAVE EVOLVED OUT OF ORIGINAL MONETARY THOUGHTS AND WHAT IS NOW KNOWN AS THE FOUR GREAT PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE: LUMBINI, BODHGAYA, SARNATH, AND KUSHINAGAR. AS INDIVIDUALS, IF WE INTEGRATE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS INTO OUR DAILY LIVES, WE CAN SOLVE ALL OUR INNER PROBLEMS AND ATTAIN A TRULY PEACEFUL MIND. SOCIETY REQUIRES A CODE OF ETHICS TO PROVIDE ORDER, PREVENT OR MINIMIZE GENERAL OR LARGE-SCALE SOCIETAL CONFLICTS, REDUCE STRIFE BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS, AND PROVIDE A BASIS FOR SETTLING DISPUTES BETWEEN COMPETING VALUES.

**Keywords** - *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, moral life, historical sites, Cakravatin

### I. INTRODUCTION

The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* is not a single discourse like most others in the Suttanta Pīṭaka but an historical account of the last year or so of the Buddha's life. It is similar in style to the Vinaya Mahāvagga, which describes the period following the Buddha's Enlightenment, his first teaching of the Dhamma, the going forth of the first disciples, and the spreading of the Dhamma. This discourse contains the Buddha's final instructions; it is essential for the preservation of the Buddha's dispensation. Every Buddhist should know about the essential teachings contained in this Sutta.

Mike Butler has point out that Buddhism has been described as a very pragmatic religion. It does not indulge in metaphysical speculation about first causes; there is no theology, worship of a deity or dedication of the Buddha. Buddhism takes a very straightforward look at our human condition; nothing is based on wishful thinking. Everything that the Buddha taught was based on his observation of the way things are. Everything that he taught can be verified by our observation of how things are (<https://budsas.net/ebud/ebdha002.htm>). The Nikāya or Sutta Pitaka is one of the Tipitaka delivered by the Buddha on various occasion. The Nikāya is divided into five separate collections. Through the Nikāya Literature, it is seen that the Buddha paid much attention to the freedom and welfare of man in society. His heart went to the suffering people who did not have all the rights to live a dignified life of human beings and who were suppressed and exploited.

The forces that underlie and maintain human society are not the belief in God, immoral soul, and transmigration immanence and transcendence of Brahma the as the Vedantic philosophies of India speak of, nor the belief in heaven and hell as propagated by some dogmatic religious and moksha of Hindu's imagination, but the ethical norms based on justice, tolerance, liberty, equality and fraternity. In short, all that is summed up in the word Dhamma as taught by the Buddha and later on by His disciples rightly the Buddha's Dhamma foresees the well-being of man in maintaining proper relation between man and man by adopting and adhering to the principles of virtuous conduct.

The Buddha had taken upon Himself a mission of converting and guiding the multitude on the Righteous Path. In doing so, He showed boundless compassion. He never cared for His comfort, and to save others, to show them the way to salvation, the royal road to Nirvana; he was on the move for eight months in a year, except the rainy season, which He spent at any one place. And while on the move, He swept all before Him in the enthusiasm of His conviction. His message cut across all barriers of caste, colour, sex or status, and His disciples' followers came from all walks of life: the rich, the poor, the high, the holy, the low and the lowly. All had equal opportunity to enter, walk the path, and attain the blessed state of Nirvana (*D.C. Ahir (1996)*).

Though many religious thinkers, philosophers and writers have discussed the meaning and character of the philosophy of society, they have yet to find the ultimate way to lead the perfection of man and humanity. The Discourses on Turning the Wheel of the Dharma of Gautam Buddha is filled with joy and hope. It teaches us to recognize suffering as suffering and transform it into mindfulness, compassion, peace, and liberation.

The Sutta number 16 in the *Dīgha Nikāya* is a scripture belonging to the Sutta Pitaka. It begins when Vassakara visits the Buddha on the initiative of Ajatashatru, a king of the Magadha. It records the Passing Away of the Buddha, the Cremation, and the division of relics, finally ending with the erection of eight cities or monuments enshrining the relics of the Buddha. This shows the Indian origin of Buddhist funeral customs.

All the scholars who have dealt with the Pali version of the Sutta are emphatic about its importance. According to Law, the *Mahāparinibbāna Suttanta* is one of the most essential suttas as it furnishes us with a fascinating narrative of the peregrination of the Buddha during the last year of his mortal existence (B.C. Law. 2007. 98). Geiger is more precise when he refers to the Sutta as a running description of the events of the last weeks of the life of the Buddha (W. Geiger. 1999. 17). Venerable A. P. Buddhadatta while asserting the significance of the Sutta for the study of the last days of the Buddha, observed the biographical and doctrinal data embedded in the Sutta and says that "it is not a single sutta but a unified compendium of the life and teaching of the Buddha" (Ven. Polwatthe Buddhadatta Thero. 1998. 35).

However, Rhys Davids points out that only one-third of the Sutta is original. At the same time, the rest of the passages are found in identical or almost identical words elsewhere in the canon. He is convinced of the gradual growth of living traditions. He has claimed that it is well known that all the ancient sacred literature of the world has grown gradually and is a mosaic of earlier and later material. The Buddhist Pitakas form no exception. (R. Davids, 76). The Tibetan translations of the text are later than the 7th century because Buddhism was introduced to Tibet in the same century. Rockhill used the first of these texts and the other Tibetan texts to narrate the life of the Buddha as recorded in the Pali version. He has noted the differences at the relevant places. (W. W. Rockhill. 1884. 1). Warder has referred to three Chinese versions. Warder says that The vast, unwieldy text which resulted might be compared in size and its rambling organization with the longest Mahayana Sutras, or on the other hand with the contemporary Brahmanical Harivamsa (a long 'supplement' to the Mahabharata narrating the life of Krishna) or Puranas (except that Brahmanical texts are primarily in verse) (A. K. Warder. 2017. 41).

The *Mahāparinibbāna sutta* played an essential role in Buddhism. In this Sutta, the Buddha summarized the most basic teachings during forty-five years of preaching for the welfare of beings. It gives the last words of the Buddha, the last advice of the Buddha, to his disciples. Besides that, it was also a handbook of the practice of Buddhist rules as well as dhammas. Understanding this Sutta will lead us to the right way to salvation and the work of helping others to be free from suffering. The Sutta is a narrative of Akhyāna type, having five chapters of considerable length. It has been included in the Mahavagga of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, and obviously, it is the longest Sutta in any of the *Nikāya* works. The Sutta begins with a discussion between the Buddha and the minister, Vassakara, in Rajagaha just a few weeks before the rains retreat and goes on to furnish us with details as to how the Buddha had spent the succeeding three months of the rains retreat, the Great Decease, the distribution of relics and the erection of eight memorial mounds with those relics enshrined. Undoubtedly, the demise of the Buddha is the central theme of the Sutta, but it provides us

with many details that could be classified under different heads into several sutras. The Sutra is complete of narratives, episodes, and the direct utterances of the Exalted One Himself.

Undoubtedly, the list of the causes of earthquakes can be easily set aside as late material interpolated in the elucidation of the super-human qualities of the Buddha. The eight causes of earthquakes naturally depict how the redactors of the Sutta turned apologetic regarding giving up the term of life to attain Parinibbana by the Buddha. In the years following the Buddha's demise, many may have asked why the Buddha passed away despite His supernormal powers. Therefore, with these lists of eight causes of earthquakes, answers have been suggested that He could have lived if He had wanted to. Still, He would not because, on the one hand, Ananda did not beg Him to live for an aeon, and on the other hand, some natural happenings were preventing Him from living for such an extended period. The causes of earthquakes said to have been explained by the Buddha to Ananda are: (1) The great earth is established on the water, the wind water, and the wind rests upon space. As the mighty wind blows, the waters are shaken, and by the moving waters, the earth is surprised; (2) A recluse, a brahmana, a god or a fairy of great power can make the earth move and tremble and shake violently; (3) When the Bodhisatta deliberately leaving the heavenly world descends into the mother's womb, then the earthquakes and trembles; (4) When the Bodhisatta gradually quits his mother's womb then the earthquakes and trembles; (5) When a Tathagata arrives at the supreme enlightenment then the earthquakes and trembles; (6) When a Tathagata delivers his first sermon then the earthquakes and trembles; (7) When a Tathagata consciously rejects the remainder of His life term and then the earthquakes and trembles; and (8) When a Tathagata passes entirely away in that utter passing away in which nothing whatever is left behind then the earthquakes and trembles. These eight earthquake causes are absent in the Tibetan version of our text. Rhys Davids, too, observed that these passages dealing with earthquakes are 'entirely out of place.

The worship of sacred relics and sacred places, the persons worthy of memorial mounds and pilgrimages to those holy places, the concept of the Cakravartin, etc., have evolved out of original monetary thoughts. Prof. Upendra Thakur, too, indirectly vindicates this supposition, for he, while referring to the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya, a place of worship found in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta in this context, says that it is strange to note that neither in the Buddha's lifetime nor during the two centuries following His demise did any of His followers or lay admirers visit the spot as a regular place of worship (Bodhi – Rashmi. 1948. 12). According to Bhikkhu Bodhi, The Mahāparinibbāna sutta is a significant religious classic and the chief spiritual testament of Buddhism; the Mahāparinibbāna sutta cannot be gauged in its actual value by a single reading, even if that reading is done carefully and reverentially. It yields its riches only through repeated study, sustained reflection, and, most importantly, applying its principles to daily life. (Bhikkhu Bodhi. The Dhammapada: Introduction)

The image of the Mahāparinibbāna sutta is the image of a man who, by his self-effort, has achieved enlightenment and liberation. That is the image of the Buddha - who, in fullness, is the subject of human ascension, the great moralist of humanity. Every act or His words brings happiness to everyone. He has always lived in tranquillity and peace. The Dharma of the Buddha is a remedy to overcome evil and is composed of all the right things in the truth and interest. However, the Buddha was a spiritual teacher, someone with directions. Learning in His Dhamma, we must endeavour to practice, and then, as the Buddha overcomes obstacles to propagate the Dhamma, build a practical life for all humans. The Buddha has declared that no one was his guru or a teacher. Buddha is the very teacher we need to remember, that is: *Sabbābhībhū sabbavidū'ham asmi; Sabbesu dhammesu anūpalitto; Sabbañjaho taṇhakkhaye vimutto; Sayama abhiññāya kam uddiseyyam? [I have conquered all, know all, and am unstained by all phenomena. Abandoning everything, freed through destruction of craving, having fully understood myself, to whom should I point out (as a teacher)]* (K.T.S.Sarao, 2009. 438)

### OVERVIEW OF MAHĀPARINIBBĀNA SUTTA

The sixteenth of the thirty-four discourses (suttas) in the Collection of Long Discourses (*Dīgha Nikāya*) contains Buddha's last exhortations. It records the Passing Away of the Buddha, the Cremation, and the division of relics, finally ending with the erection of eight cities or monuments enshrining the relics of the Buddha. This shows the Indian origin of Buddhist funeral customs. This discourse contains the Buddha's final instructions; thus, it is essential for the preservation of the Buddha's dispensation. Every Buddhist should know about the vital teachings contained in this Sutta. The Sutta begins when the Blessed One is dwelling on Vulture's Peak near Rājagaha. At that time, King Ajātasattu wanted to wage war against the Vajjians, but he was not sure that he could defeat them. He, therefore, sent his minister, Vassakāra Brahmin, to the Buddha to find out, instructing him to listen attentively to what was said. According to Bhikkhu Nyanarama, The Buddha has preached these seven conditions of welfare to the Licchavis as found in the



Anguttara Nikāya. He preached these conditions to the Licchavis while residing at the Sarandada Shrine in Vesali. The Buddha questioned Ananda whether they were practising the seven welfare conditions while Brahmin Vassakara was facing the Buddha. He had preached to them on a previous occasion, which was mentioned in detail in the Anguttara Nikāya, but in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, the story begins with the inquiry of the Buddha.

Why was King Ajātasattu so annoyed with the Vajjians that he wanted to wage war and wipe them out? In the Commentary to this Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Buddhaghosa gives the following account. There was a port (*paṭṭanagāmaṃ*) on the Ganges, extending over one league, half of which territory belonged to Ajātasattu and the other half to the Licchavīs. Nearby was a mountain, from which goods of significant value (*mahagghabhaṇḍaṃ*) descended the river. While Ajātasattu was making preparations to claim his share, the Licchavīs would go before him and remove it all. This happened on several occasions, and Ajātasattu vowed vengeance (Bhikkhu Pesala. 1881). So, nothing unusual there - the war was waged over valuable property.

*Seven conditions of developing a nation (Factors for the Non-decline of Rulers)*

The Buddha's reply describes the seven things for the prosperity and non-decline of rulers. As long as these seven things were found in the Vajjians, they could prosper, not decline. The Vajjī kingdom lay north-east of the Ganges, at the eastern extreme of the Middle Country of India (Majjhimadesa). It seems to have been a democratic republic rather than a kingdom like most other regions of India at that time. The Buddha's advice is a conservative one: respect the elders, women, and monks, don't change regulations that are well established, and meet together frequently to discuss matters that require attention.

The same seven things will protect present-day governments, too, and should be followed by societies and organizations that want to prosper and overcome their enemies and detractors. Modern parliaments need to be more discordant and adversarial. In extreme cases, fights break out in parliaments over controversial debates. That behaviour does not augur well for the prosperity of any nation. Learning to debate and reach a consensus is vital without sowing discord and distrust. Seven Good Qualities: *They shall have faith, moral shame and fear of misconduct and be proficient in learning, resolute, mindful, and wise.* (Final Teachings and Final Days of Buddha by Rhys Davids (reference source: <http://oaks.nvg.org/final-days.html>))

*Seven conditions of developing Sangha (Factors for Non-decline of Monks)*

The advice for the monks given by the Buddha is similar to that given to the Vajjians. It is conservative, showing respect to the elders and the traditions, not establishing new regulations nor revoking the established ones. It also advises living in contentment and solitude, not craving material things, fame, or influence, which only foment discord and dissatisfaction. Nowadays, this advice is seldom heeded. Many monks advocate changing the Vinaya rules to suit modern times. Some crave wealth, fame, and influence. A few even go so far as to get involved in politics. This behaviour is remote from the ideals of a hermit or alms mendicant who depends on charity.

Accepting and using money is one of the primary causes, if not the leading cause, of the decline in the modern Saṅgha. Those forest monks who practice meditation and strive to develop morality, concentration, and wisdom have no dealings with money. If lay Buddhists want well-behaved monks to learn from, they should provide their material needs and never offer cash to bhikkhus, which is very damaging to the Buddha's dispensation and is, in fact, a demeritorious deed.

*Seven Factors of Enlightenment: They are to cultivate the main factors of enlightenment: mindfulness, investigation into phenomena, energy, bliss, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity.*

Seven Perceptions: Listen and pay heed to what I shall say. The monks are to cultivate all right dispassion. (Rhys Davids (reference source <http://oaks.nvg.org/final-days.html>)). The Commentary on the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta explains activity as searching out (*cīvaravicāraṇaṃ*) or making robes (*cīvarakaraṇaṃ*), reclining boards (*upatthambhanaṃ*), needle-cases (*sūcigharaṃ*), bowl covers (*pattatthavikaṃ*), straps (*asaṃbaddhakaṃ*), belts (*kāyabandhanaṃ*), bellows? (*dhamakaraṇaṃ*), lecterns (*ādhāraṇaṃ*), footstools (*pādakathalikaṃ*), or broom-handles (*sammajjanī-ādīnaṃ*). It says that rehearsing the texts, attending shrines, etc., is not called "delighting in activity."

Thus, there are specific duties that a Bhikkhu should perform, such as keeping his robes and dwelling place clean and in good repair, attending to senior Bhikkhus, caring for sick monks, and many other duties that are not called "delighting in activity." Here, it is appropriate to tell the story of Sammajjana Thera from the Dhammapada Commentary.

Concerning his change of attitude, the Buddha uttered this verse: Yo ca pubbed pamajjit va; pacchi so nappamajjati; so'mam lokam pabhaseti; abbha muttova candima. [And who having been negligent in the

past, afterwards does not neglect, he illuminates this world like the moon freed from clouds.] (K.T.S.Sarao., 2009. 212)

### *Fruits of the Immoral and the Moral Life*

Buddha addressed the devotees of Pataligama thus: "The immoral man, householders, by falling away from virtue, encounters five perils: (1) significant loss of wealth through heedlessness; (2) an evil reputation; (3) a timid and troubled demeanor in every society, (4) death in bewilderment; and, (5) at the breaking up of the body after death, rebirth in a realm of misery, in an unhappy state, in the nether world, in hell.

Morality is of two kinds: restraint from evil deeds and fulfilling skillful deeds. Restraint from evil deeds means the observance of the five precepts, i.e. abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, wrong speech, and taking intoxicants. Morality of good conduct is of many kinds. For householders it entails gainful employment in some form of right livelihood to provide for one's own needs, to support one's family, paying due taxes, and doing some charitable deeds for one's spiritual welfare.

While engaged in an evil deed such as stealing the evil-doer is expending a great deal of time and effort to succeed in stealing the property while avoiding detection. For example, smugglers may spend weeks digging a tunnel to smuggle contraband, only to find that their efforts have been wasted if the tunnel is discovered. Even if they evade capture, they may have to hide out for weeks or travel long distances to escape, suffering loss of their property in the process, and being unable to do any legal employment during that period. If they are captured for a crime, charged, and imprisoned, they suffer even more significant loss due to being unable to work for some years.

On the other hand, five blessings accrue to the righteous man through his practice of virtue: (1) a significant increase of wealth through his diligence; (2) a favourable reputation; (3) a confident deportment without timidity, in every society, (4) a serene death; and, (5) at the breaking up of the body after death, rebirth in a happy state, in a heavenly world."

No ordinary person is perfect in morality, but one with defective morality will have made many enemies and will always look over their shoulder to see who is present who might reveal past misdeeds. A Stream-winner is entirely free from moral defects, and is open-hearted regarding whatever misdeeds they may have done in the past. Having nothing to hide and no wish to lie to conceal any faults, they are self-confident and fearless.

### *The Benefits of Morality*

Morality is the beginning of the holy life: lay people should always observe the five precepts and undertake the eight precepts on observance days. Novices should follow ten precepts and 75 training rules. Bhikkhus should keep the fourfold morality: (1) Fundamental restraint by the 227 Pātimokkha precepts for bhikkhus; (2) Sense-faculty restraint means not looking around here and there, not listening to gossip, eating mindfully, sitting, standing, walking, and lying down with composure, and keeping the mind free from sensuality, hostility, and envy; (3) Right livelihood means avoiding astrology, bribery, flattering, deception, and asking for requisites without being invited; (4) Reflection on the use of requisites provided by the faithful. A monk should not use anything without reflecting on gratitude and suitability.

### *The Construction of Pāṭaliputta*

King Ajātasattu's minister, Vassakāra, created dissension among the Vajjians after listening to the Buddha's prediction about the likely outcome of King Ajātasattu's proposed attack on them. So the Māgadhans would get the result of their unwholesome kamma later when they would also be defeated by internal dissension. Although each individual is responsible for their actions and not those of others, if a group of people act together, they may also experience the fruit of that action together. There are several stories to illustrate this in the Dhammapada commentary: Nobody can escape the Effects of Kamma.

Sunidha and Vassakāra, the chief ministers of Māgadha, proceeded to where the Blessed One was staying. When they arrived, they exchanged greetings and compliments of friendship and civility with the Blessed One and stood respectfully on one side. So standing, the chief ministers of Māgadha, said to the Blessed One, "May the good Gotama do us the honour of taking his meal, together with the Saṅgha, at our house today." The Blessed One signified his consent by silence. Then, they perceived that he had given his approval, they returned to where both of them dwelt, and on arriving there, they prepared sweet dishes of boiled rice and cakes. Then they informed the Blessed One, saying, "The meal-time has come, friend Gotama, and all is ready."

The Blessed One robed himself early, took his bowl with him, and repaired with the brethren to the dwelling place of Sunidha and Vassakāra, and sat on the seat prepared for him. With their own hands, they set the sweet rice and the cakes before the brethren with the Buddha at their head and waited on them till they had had enough. When the Blessed One had finished his meal, the ministers took a low seat and sat respectfully at his side. When they were seated, the Blessed One gave thanks in these verses:

*“In whatever realm the wise man makes his home,  
He should feed the virtuous leaders of the holy life.  
Whatever devas there are who report this offering,  
They will pay him respect and honour for this”.* (Maurice Walshe. 1987. 238)

When he had thanked Sunidha and Vassakāra, the ministers of Māgadha, in these verses, he rose from his seat and departed.

They followed him as he went, saying, “The gate that the recluse Gotama goes out by today will be called Gotama’s gate, and the ferry at which he crosses the river will be called Gotama’s ferry.” So, the gate he went out by was called Gotama’s.

However, when the Blessed One went to the river, the Ganges were brimful and overflowing. Wishing to cross to the opposite bank, some began to seek boats, some for wood rafts, while some made rafts of reeds. Then the Blessed One instantaneously vanished from this side of the river and stood on the far bank with the Saṅgha, as a strong man would stretch forth his arm or draw it back again when he had tried it forth. The Blessed One saw the people looking for boats and rafts, and as he saw them, he spoke this verse:

*When they want to cross the sea, the lake or pond, People make a bridge or raft the wise have crossed already.* (Maurice Walshe. 1987. 238)

### **The Death of the Buddha**

Shortly before his death, the Buddha remarked to his attendant Ananda on three separate occasions that a Buddha can, if requested, extend his life span for one. Mara then appeared and reminded the Buddha of his promise to him shortly after his enlightenment to pass into nirvana when his teaching was complete. The Buddha agreed to pass away three months hence, at which point the earth quaked. When Ananda asked the reason for the tremor, the Buddha told him that there were eight occasions for an earthquake, one of which was when a Buddha relinquished the will to live. Ananda begged him not to do so, but the Buddha explained that the time for such requests had passed; had he asked earlier, the Buddha would have consented.

At age eighty, the Buddha, weak from old age and illness, accepted a meal from a smith named Cunda. The Buddha became severely ill shortly after that, and at a place called Kusinara, lay down on his right side between two trees, which immediately blossomed out of season. He instructed the monk fanning him to step to one side, explaining that he was blocking the view of the assembled deities to witness his passing. After he provided instructions for his funeral, he said that lay people should make pilgrimages to the place of his birth, the place of his enlightenment, the place of his first teaching, and the place of his passage into nirvana. Those who revere shrines erected at these places will be reborn as gods. The Buddha then explained to the monks that the dharma and the vinaya (code of monastic conduct) should be their teachers after he was gone. He also permitted the monks to abolish the minor precepts. Finally, the Buddha asked the five hundred assembled disciples whether they had any last question or doubt. When they remained silent, he asked two more times and then declared that none of them had any doubt or confusion and was destined to achieve nirvana. According to one account, he then opened his robe and instructed the monks to behold a Buddha's body, which rarely appears in the world. Finally, he declared that all conditioned things are transient and encouraged the monks to strive diligently. These were his last words. The Buddha then entered meditative absorption, passing from the lowest level to the highest, then from the highest to the lowest, before entering the fourth level of concentration, whence he passed into nirvana.

### **Four great Buddhist sites**

Across the world and throughout the ages, religious people have made pilgrimages. The Buddha urged his followers to visit what is now known as the four great places of pilgrimage: Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar. Many great teachers of the Buddhist tradition maintained the practice of pilgrimage and paying respect to the holy sites. Nagarjuna, the father of the Mahayana, restored the temple in Bodhgaya and protected the Bodhi tree. At the same time, the great Indian master Atisha, later on as crucial as Nagarjuna to the Tibetan tradition, also often visited Bodhgaya and attained many realizations there.

Of the many places in northern India associated with the Buddha, eight, in particular, have become unique objects of pilgrimage: the four great places above and four others, namely, Rajgir, Shravasti, Sankashya and Nalanda, each of which is regarded as having been blessed by the Buddha. After the Buddha's passing away and the cremation of his body, the relics were divided into eight portions and various beings erected a great stupa over each. So arose the tradition of eight places of pilgrimage.

The actions of the Buddha in each of these places, recalling which an essential aspect of making pilgrimage is, are described within the canons of the scriptures of the various traditions of his teaching, such as the sections on Vinaya, and also in multiple compendia describing his life. The sites have now been identified once more with the aid of records left by three past pilgrims. Although initially opposed to Buddhism, the



great Emperor Ashoka became a zealous follower who made a marvellous pilgrimage to numerous Buddhist shrines in the second decade of his reign. As well as other buildings, he left inscribed pillars at each site to indicate the significance of each place. Many remains of these ancient structures survive even today.

### **Division of the Buddha's Relic**

The Buddha had instructed his followers to cremate his body as the body of a universal monarch would be cremated and then to distribute the relics among various groups of his lay followers, who were to enshrine them in hemispherical reliquaries, called stupas. His body lay in a coffin for seven days before being placed on a funeral pyre and was set ablaze by the Buddha's chief disciple, Mahakashyapa, who had been absent at the time of the Buddha's death. After the Buddha's cremation, his relics were entrusted to a group of lay disciples, but armed men arrived from seven other regions and demanded the relics.

To avert bloodshed, Doṇa the Brahmin addressed the assembled group, saying:

"Listen, good sirs, to a speech from me.

Our Buddha was a teacher of patience.

It is unseemly that strife should arise over dividing

The remains of the best of beings!

"Let us all, sirs, with one accord, unite

In friendly harmony, make eight portions.

Widespread let pagodas rise in every land.

So that humanity may have faith in the Enlightened One! (Bhikkhu Pesala. 1881)

Then, Brahmin divide the remains of the Blessed One into eight equal portions. According to tradition, ten relics were enshrined: eight from pieces of the Buddha's remains, one from the pyre's ashes, and one from the bucket used to divide the remains. To Ajatasattu, king of Magadha; to the Licchavis of Vaishali; to the Sakyas of Kapilavastu; to the Bulis of Allakappa; to the Koliyas of Ramagrama; to the Brahmin of Vethadipa; to the Mallas of Pava; and the Mallas of Kushinagar. The relics were subsequently collected and enshrined in a single stupa. More than a century later, King Ashoka is said to have redistributed the relics in 84,000 stupas. The stupa would become a reference point denoting the Buddha's presence in the landscape of Asia. Early texts and archaeological records link stupa worship with Buddha's life and the key sites in his career. Eight shrines are typically recommended for pilgrimage and veneration. They are located at the place of his birth, enlightenment, the first turning of the wheel of dharma, death, and sites in four cities where he performed miracles. A stupa in Samkashya, for example, marked the site where the Buddha descended to the world after teaching the dharma to his mother (who died seven days after his birth), abiding in the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods.

The importance given to the stupa suggests the persistence of the Buddha in the world despite his apparent passage into nirvana. Two types of nirvana are commonly described. The first is called the "nirvana with remainder," which the Buddha achieved under the Bo tree when he destroyed all the seeds for future rebirth. This first nirvana is, therefore, also called the final nirvana (or passing away) of the afflictions. But the karma that had created his present life was still functioning and would do so until his death. Thus, his mind and body during the rest of his life were what was left over after he realized nirvana. The second type of nirvana occurred at his death and is called the "final nirvana of the aggregates (skandha) of mind and body" or the "nirvana without remainder" because nothing remained to be reborn after his death. Something did remain: the relics found in the ashes of the funeral pyre. A third nirvana, therefore, is sometimes mentioned. According to Buddhist belief, there will come a time in the distant future when the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha will disappear from the world, and the relics will no longer be honoured. It is then that the relics that have been enshrined in stupas around the world will break out of their shrines and magically return to Bodh Gaya, where they will assemble into the glorious body of the Buddha, seated in the lotus posture under the Bo tree, emitting rays of light that illuminate 10,000 worlds. They will be worshipped by the gods one last time and then burst into flame and disappear into the sky. This third nirvana is called the "final nirvana of the relics." Until that time, the relics of the Buddha are to be regarded as his living presence, infused with all of his marvellous qualities. Epigraphic and literary evidence from India suggests that the Buddha, in the form of his stupas, was not only bestowed with blessings but was also regarded as a legal person and an owner of property. The relics of the Buddha were, essentially, the Buddha.

## CONCLUSION

Buddhism is a pragmatic teaching that starts from certain fundamental propositions about how we experience and act in the world. The enormous literature of Buddhism is not a literature of revelation and authority. Instead, it uses ethics and meditation, philosophy and science, and art and poetry to point the way to this Wisdom. Similarly, unlike secular writings, Buddhist writing on social action makes finite proposals that must ultimately refer to this Wisdom but are also arguable in terms of our everyday experience.

Forty-nine days after the Buddha attained enlightenment, he was requested to teach. As a result of this request, the Buddha rose from meditation and introduced the first Wheel of Dharma. He explained how to attain liberation from suffering for oneself alone, and in the Mahayana teaching, he explained how to achieve full enlightenment or Buddhahood for the sake of others.

“Dharma” means “protection”. By practising Buddha’s teachings, we protect ourselves from suffering and problems. All of the issues we experience daily originate from ignorance, and the method for eliminating ignorance is to practice Dharma.

Integrating Buddha’s teachings into our daily lives can solve all our inner problems and attain a truly peaceful mind. Without inner peace, outer peace is impossible. If we first establish peace within our minds by training in spiritual paths, outer peace will come naturally, but if we do not, world peace will never be achieved, no matter how many people campaign for it.

The Eightfold Path is the Path of cultivation with many practical benefits typical of studying Buddhism. All practitioners gain from Sravakas or more saints must cultivate through the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path is beneficial to achieve the final liberation, enlightenment, and Nirvana, and for ordinary human beings to achieve the benefits of life because the Eightfold Path is all the lessons about human life.

The benefits of the Eightfold Path may include:

- \* Improving people's lives: If someone practices the Eightfold Path very seriously and adequately, it can modify all the unjust, immoral acts, thoughts and words. Life would be the Truth, the Good, and the Beauty.
- \* Improving living conditions: If everyone in society practices the Noble Eightfold Path, the society will be peaceful, without vices and wars.
- \* Obtaining perfect enlightenment: the Eightfold Path is beneficial in the present life, but you can create a bright future because the practitioners have cultivated their seeds of Bodhi to the day the results come: supreme enlightenment, Nirvana.

We cannot deny that all modern developments have nothing to offer but insecurity and competitiveness, as well as tensions and boredom associated with them. Buddhism provides a few straightforward and very productive methods to combat all those. And with this, Buddhism has a role to play in our life, and we, from the Buddhist countries, have an essential part to play. It is our responsibility to share our thinking, our knowledge, and our experience with as many as possible so that, ultimately, we all see that the message of the Buddha, which is meant for the good of humanity, continues to reach humanity in every nook and corner of the world.

Today, Buddhism remains a great civilizing force in the modern world. As a civilizing force, Buddhism awakens the self-respect and feeling of self-responsibility of countless people and stirs up the energy of many a nation. It fosters spiritual progress by appealing to the thinking powers of human beings. It promotes a sense of tolerance by remaining free from religious and national narrowness and fanaticism. It tames the wild and refines the citizens to be clear and sober. In short, Buddhism produces the feeling of self-reliance by teaching that the whole destiny of humanity lies in their own hands and that they possess the faculty of developing their energy and insight to reach the highest goal.

Today, Buddhism appeals to the West because it has no dogmas and satisfies both the reason and the heart alike. It insists on self-reliance coupled with tolerance for others. It embraces modern scientific discoveries if they are for constructive purposes. Buddhism points to man alone as the creator of his present life and the sole designer of his destiny. Such is the nature of Buddhism. This is why many modern thinkers who are not themselves Buddhist have described Buddhism as a religion of freedom and reason.

Fortunately for anyone looking and reading the Mahāparinibbāna sutta for spiritual guidance, practising the teaching of the Buddha will help society, politics, economy, and education and make our world peaceful. The Buddha said that: Yamhi saccan ca dhammo ca; Ahimsa samyamo damo; Sa ve vantamalo dhiro; "Thero" ti pavuccati. [*In whom there is truth and righteousness, non-violence, restraint, and moderation, he who has discarded impurity and Wisdom is called an elder.*] (K.T.S.Sarao. 2009. 320)

Tathagata never lies. The Buddha's Teaching is based on theories such as the Brahmavihara, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Path. To realize these Truths is to learn and penetrate the true nature of existence, including the full knowledge of one. When we recognize that all phenomenal things are transitory, are



subject to suffering and are void of any essential reality, we will be convinced that true and enduring happiness cannot be found in material possessions and worldly achievement, that true happiness must be sought only through mental purity and the cultivation of Wisdom.

The Buddha's message of peace and compassion has radiated in all directions, and the millions who came under its influence have readily adopted it as a new way of religious life. Throughout the Mahāparinibbāna sutta, the Buddha placed great emphasis on direct insight. He didn't want his listeners to believe what he said. Instead, he taught that they would realize the truth if they followed the Path.

The present dissertation brings to notice the significance of the life of Gautama Buddha, who started teaching not to debate but for the advantage of and out of compassion for human beings. All we have to do is practice, imitate and follow the Buddha.

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