



10



## Attaining Enlightenment

Accustomed to rising daily in his grand mansion to the sound of  
auspicious hymns  
Gautama woke up this day on a straw mat to the warbling of birds.

The son of the solar dynasty used to hearing its songs of praise by  
Māgadha minstrels,  
And who fancied scriptural stories orally recounted by professional bards

Now had within earshot only the sweet singing of the babbling brooks  
along with  
Wind blowing across the Malayā mountain, its zephyrs recounting  
nature's stories.

Like the maidens who once welcomed him with their clothes fluttering in  
the breeze  
The tree leaves with their branches abloom with flowers rustled for him.

Instead of seeing alluring belles blushing freely  
It was the exotic flowers he saw that now stirred his mind.

In place of holding his wife in a tight embrace  
He now had the earth itself and the grass he sat on.

Only yesterday having gone to his lofty gilded bed with a jasmine garland  
around his neck  
Now the body of Gopā's lord was garbed in plain orange cloth.

With their hair ornamented by white magnolias braided with tassels  
tipped in red cotton  
He was used to seeing the faces of his attending maidens

So once he saw the *sacika* flower blooming alongside the *mutibali* flower  
Memories of his earlier days came to disturb his mind again.

First  
Days in  
the Forest

He heaved a long sigh and said to himself, controlling his own mind,  
 “Having firmly renounced all sensuality, how can you now recall your dear  
 wife?”

For seven days he lodged in this pleasant mango grove belonging to  
 Anūpiyā,  
 As both the Brahmins also staying there, Shakya and Padma, offered him  
 food.

After seven days, he left them behind in the beautiful orchard  
 And went as far as Rājagṛha, 120 *kosha*<sup>1</sup> from there.

Finding the food he obtained by begging not so winsome  
 He who was so used to relishing the most sumptuous food  
 Said to himself, “Now you still have delicate tastes, so  
 Is it for sensual pleasure that you have come here? Now is a time to suffer!”  
 Going round the capital of Māgadha begging for food  
 One day he saw a shepherd boy leading his flock of sheep.

Rājagṛha:  
Opposing  
Animal  
Sacrifice  
and a  
Meeting  
with King  
Bimbastra

Realizing that one among them was so lame he couldn't walk  
 Yet was being dragged along with a rope fixed around its neck

The bodhisattva went to the boy and humbly asked—  
 “Older Brother! Why and to where are you leading this flock of sheep?”

Moved by his vigorous features and august appearance  
 The shepherd boy knelt down before him and said—

“For the sacrificial rite to be performed by King Bimbastra, I am  
 Driving all these sheep. Why ask? Let me bow to you, O monk. Who are  
 you?”

Having seen innumerable sheep being taken for sacrifice in the fire ritual  
 The sensitive mind of the ascetic Gautama became filled with compassion

So he picked up the limping sheep and brushed him off  
 Then turning to the shepherd he disclosed his identity thus—

“I am a Śākya, a prince who is seeking the path of understanding;  
 Please take me now to the place where the Māgadha king's sacrifice will be  
 held.”

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<sup>1</sup> An ancient Indian measure of distance equaling two miles.

Having said this, Gautama lifted the lamb to his shoulders and followed  
the shepherd,

When he soon saw a sacrificial altar gaily and thoroughly decorated.

Upon reaching there he then stood before the priest in charge and asked,  
“Why are you going to make the demerit of killing all these unfortunate  
creatures?”

If you are more attached to Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā philosophy<sup>2</sup> than other  
doctrines and

Absorbed with ritualism, how are you going to acquire wisdom?”

Hearing these words from the Shākya jewel, the head priest flew into a rage,  
Gnashing his teeth, staring at him, and holding up his hands, he then  
retorted—

“What do you know of reasons for this fire ritual, you who beg for food in  
villages

Who is not even worthy to discuss such questions with us.

Manu himself created the animals for the sacrificial fire  
Since their killing is for the well-being of the world, it is not reckoned as  
violence

Since in the name of religion,<sup>3</sup> the lives of mute animals may be taken and  
Their killing in any case justifies other ritual sacraments,<sup>4</sup> went the  
Brahmin’s answer.

Finding it to be of this sort, the bodhisattva promptly  
Placed his lamb on the ground, then gave this pronouncement—

“By the unrighteous deed of animal killing, cutting trees, or spilling blood  
If these acts lead to heaven, then what consigns people to hell?

Learned ones<sup>4</sup>—Those who ignore or do not understand this  
Will face the revenge of the now-silent animals who will later devour them.”<sup>5</sup>

Hearing the bodhisattva contradicting his argument thus  
He could not find an answer, but instead grew angry.

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<sup>2</sup> Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā is one of the six orthodox Hindu philosophical schools. Based on the authority of the early Vedas, Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā exponents argue that rituals are the sole good works that individuals should perform to ensure salvation.

<sup>3</sup> Dharma here also conveys the sense of duty, goodness, service.

<sup>4</sup> *Paṭyāñjar*.

<sup>5</sup> A common Indic description of the pattern of karmic retribution.

Then he turned to the king of Māgadha and said, "O King! See how  
Offensive he has been to me, yet I still have not punished him."<sup>6</sup>

Let him be driven away from the sacrificial sanctum, then  
All else needed for the sacrament will be done with rigor and  
promptness.<sup>7</sup>

Saying this, he stood there proudly, staring down at Gautama's face.  
The king remained silent for a few moments, fascinated by his winsome  
image.

Dumbfounded at first, he was unable to utter even one word;  
Eventually, the Māgadha king tried to strike up a conversation—

"O Powerful One! A handsome one donning the orange robe yourself...  
Which noble family have you renounced and whom have you brought to  
grief?"

Hearing the kind words of the king, Siddhārtha  
Was overcome by the desire to disclose his family identity

And said, "Your Majesty! I am a Shākya prince, Gautama is my  
name and  
I gave up royalty to wander in the earnest quest for the truth.

I arrived in this your beautiful city Rājagṛha, but  
Shocked at seeing so many animals going to be killed in the fire ritual,  
I came here."

His reference to the Shākya family reminded the king of his friend  
Shuddhodana,  
And this being his friend's son, the relationship was forged.

So Bimbisāra treated him with hospitality, addressing him as "Dearest!  
Dearest!"  
Seeing the welcome accorded him, the Brahmin was overcome with shame

And to hide his embarrassment remained there with his head hung low.  
After offering him a suitable seat, the king said—

"Dear One! What prompted you to sustain yourself only by begging?  
Aren't your hands more suited to be extended in bestowing charity?"

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<sup>6</sup> Lit. "He has not yet been given my stick."

At the time when you are young, you should enjoy your happiness;  
Only in old age should you retire from life.

If because you have been insulted by your stepmother  
Or because you have been scolded by your revered father

I will give you my own kingdom to rule over, so  
Let us go to the palace immediately; Dear One!<sup>7</sup>

Moved much by the good demeanor and graceful behavior of the  
Magadha king  
The bodhisattva replied, giving a clear explanation—

“It’s not that I have been expelled by my father, nor was I insulted by my  
stepmother;  
It was fear of death, disease, and old age that made me leave the royal palace.”

Bimbāsāra answered, “Dear Prince! May you stay with me if this  
By no means proves a humiliation for you, as this is your own house.

Your charming body is suited to be given over to the pleasures of royal  
grandeur  
So waste it not.” Having heard this, he replied animatedly—

“What is it that we can do with this royalty and worldly wealth, your  
majesty!  
Since I have come after leaving my own wife, son, and wealth,

The only ambition dear to my heart has become  
To drink the ambrosia of enlightened understanding and to realize *nirvāṇa*.

If you have deep love and affection for me within you  
You may show it by releasing these mute animals, father.”

“Son! I will certainly let loose the animals as you say  
If you in turn offer me the ambrosia of a true teaching.”

Hearing this from the Magadha king, his answer was, “I will come.”  
Having seen all the sheep released from the sacrificial grounds and having  
left there

He entered a well-renowned *śāstram* in Magadha  
Where a *guru*’s three hundred disciples were studying the sacred texts.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Sūtra*.

Meeting  
His First  
Teacher  
and  
Practicing  
Extreme  
Asceticism  
with Five  
Students

This *guru* named Ālarakālāma welcomed him there,  
But the trance meditation\* that he imparted  
Failed to help him acquire the solution to life's mystery, so he left there so on  
Then he went to another teacher named Rudraka Rāmaputra.  
He had seven hundred pupils studying in his *ashram* so  
The husband of Gopā was humbly requested to live there.

But finding the knowledge that this teacher imparted to him  
Insufficient for attaining full realization, he left there too.

In admiration for his sharp intellect and his earnest zeal for knowledge  
Five Brahmin companions including Kauḍinya followed him.

Traveling on foot, they came near Mount Gayasirsha, and  
During the sojourn he felt that the way to finding *prajñā*† must lie in  
penance.

Deciding the Uruvelā forest was suitable for this, he went to the  
Nairanjana River  
Where Sarvāthasiddha then devoted himself to penances living in a cave.

With his five companions there attending on him,  
He began the austerities by eating only unpolished rice for a set time.

Armed with fortitude and endurance he lived on sesame seeds,  
Voluntarily starving himself he took only water for six months.

In this manner, for six long years he underwent so many such penances  
That his body was reduced to a skeleton, making him look like a skinny  
she-goat.

His creamy divine complexion and handsome body  
Had lost all its luster and loveliness, his eyes were sunken in their sockets.

He grew so thin that the ribs could be counted as could his withered sinews;  
His stomach cleaved to the spine, thereby forming a pit.

As he sat still meditating, birds came and perched on his body,  
A lion with an elephant, and a tiger with deer played together nearby.

\* *Samadhi* *avastha*.

† *Prajñā* is spiritually transformative insight, or wisdom, regarded as a spiritual faculty needed  
for enlightenment, singularly central in Buddhist soteriology

Touched by the beautiful serenity radiating from his compassionate face,  
These beings who were violent-natured from birth ceased to be aggressive.

He had first taken to breath control<sup>19</sup> and then trance meditation  
But in the end he collapsed to the ground in a stupor!

When a shepherd boy with a herd of frisky goats appeared there  
Who saw that the ascetic Gautama had fallen to the ground, unconscious.

His tender mind became filled with compassionate thoughts, so  
He caused milk to flow from the udder of one she-goat right into his  
mouth.

Gautama then had a dream: "His mother from heaven came down  
Smoothed his hair with her hands, and said, 'Son, why do you play with  
your life?

Evil death may snatch your life away from you!  
What am I to do now!' Having said this, she breast-fed him."<sup>20</sup>

With the nourishment of the fresh milk, he regained consciousness, and  
Lifting his eyes, he saw the shepherd boy standing on the ground before  
him.

When the bodhisattva said, "Give me some more milk,"  
He replied—"As I am an untouchable, how can I give you milk from my  
pot?"

"I am an untouchable." After these ear-splitting words resonated in his  
ears,  
"Untouchable one!" he mumbled, repeating the words under his  
breath.

"Untouchable!" Having heard this word, his heart seemed to answer,  
"Why untouchable!  
If this compassionate boy is not worthy for touching, who else on this  
earth is worthy?"

Thinking thus, he fixed his eyes on the boy's face and said,  
"Dear Boy! Give me milk to drink." Saying this, he felt affection for him  
and continued—

Success  
from  
Goat's  
Milk and  
a Dream  
of His  
Mother

<sup>20</sup> *Pratyutpanna*.



Revived by a dream of his mother, Siddhārtha succored by a goatherd after extreme asceticism.

“Merely by birth no one is rated high or low  
Only by noble, righteous actions is one judged high-born or low-  
born;

In this world, one doing good for others is the greatest,  
Only one afflicted with malice or violence is low indeed.”<sup>11</sup>

After stating this, he drank up all the milk in the pot  
With the thought, “An ascetic has been treated rightly.”

The shepherd boy was elated and bowed in reverence  
And away he went counting different beads of thought in his mind.<sup>12</sup>

Then there appeared in the distance three singers holding hands;  
At the sound of their anklets, doubt arose momentarily in Gautama’s  
mind.

What they mumbled while they walked along the forest trail  
He caught amidst the blowing breeze that mingled with the birds’  
warblings—

<sup>11</sup> These verses seem to be based on chapter 26 of the *Dharmasūtra*.

<sup>12</sup> The images in this verse refer to the use of a rosary for repeating mantras.

“If the harp string is not tightly stretched, the sound made will not be melodious,  
But if it is over-tight, we cannot sing with it, either;

But when it is strung just so in the middle, the sweetness of the melody  
Will coil around our hearts in the manner of a creeper entwining a tree.”

Just this much of their talking roused a noble thought in his mind,  
“Austerity or self-mortification as well as self-indulgence are both equally wrong,

Austerity tortures the body’s senses, sensual indulgence submerges us in delusion:  
Only a middle path leads one to pure insight.”<sup>13</sup> Thinking about this

He arose from his seat and his rotted clothes fell off  
Just like withered leaves fall off their branches.

A Gift by  
Sujātā

Thinking, “What clothes am I to put on now?” he looked around and  
Saw nearby a cremation ground with a shroud cloth cast aside

Upon seeing it what flashed through his mind was this—  
“This is something laid abandoned, needed by none, belonging to none.”

He washed the cloth in a nearby pond, wrapped it around him  
And then obtained his food by begging for it in a village.

Finding the bodhisattva having abandoned rigorous asceticism and meditation  
“If after six years of austerities he is unawakened, what will become of him after taking food now?”

The five companion disciples having discussed his actions straightaway  
Abandoned him and hastened off to the Deer Park,<sup>14</sup> some seventy-two *kośha* away.

In the renowned small town called Senānī, some time before  
A lovely maiden Sujātā had made a vow to a god under a fig tree,

“If I am wedded to a suitable groom of noble birth  
And if I give birth to an attractive baby boy

<sup>13</sup> *Pravṛtta*

<sup>14</sup> *Mṛgadāvana*, a forest preserve outside Benares, where the Buddha will go to preach his first sermon to these five.

I will offer you a wealth of rice pudding," she had said and once it came  
to pass  
For the satisfaction of this vow, she brought out from her cow sheds

One thousand cows all free from any sort of disease  
And tended them in a forest that abounded in anise, then

Five hundred cows were fed all the milk from these one thousand cows,  
Who were in turn milked and the milk was given to half the number of  
cows.

In this way, eight cows were finally given to drink the milk of sixteen  
Then she cooked rice pudding using the milk obtained from the eight  
cows.

She then sent her personal attendant Pūrṇa to sweep clean the ground  
beneath the fig tree,  
Who saw the son of lady Māyā as brilliant as the morning sun and

Returned running to say, "The Fig Tree God has appeared in person  
today,  
My Lady! Your great fortune! Quickly place in a golden alms bowl some  
rice pudding."

Having placed it within, she covered the bowl with a silken cloth  
Then together with her servant and adorned with fine jewelry went there  
and asked,

"Where is he?" While placing her golden bowl on the ground.  
After washing his hands and feet, she bowed to him in reverence, then

Holding the rice pudding in hand, Sujāta stood before him.  
Having been told of the bodhisattva's goal, she felt devotion for him so

When he outstretched his right hand to accept the gift  
She handed him the alms bowl and uttered these kind words—

"By your grace, Lord! The ambition dear to my heart has been realized,  
Your Holiness! Let it be that you attain the supreme goal you have sought  
for so long."

The pious woman instead of asking for a boon, thus granted him one  
and  
Left there, her mind filled with ineffable joy. Blessed be such a female  
heart!

The bodhisattva smiled gently as if he were open to accepting the boon  
 then  
 Circled the fig tree taking in his hand the alms bowl filled with rice  
 pudding

After stepping down to the bottom of the white marble steps on the  
 Nairañjanā riverbank,  
 He placed his bowl on a circular platform there and bathed in the crystal  
 waters.

He took forty-nine bites from the rice pudding portion.  
 Then tossed the golden alms bowl into the water like a leaf.

He returned to the nearby dense *sal* forest, where for a whole day  
 He wandered in the shade of the flowering trees and creepers.

Shocked at her husband's death at noon,<sup>15</sup> evening prepared to immolate  
 herself on his pyre  
 Perhaps the lingering fire there can set the pile ablaze and consign the  
 couple to ashes

See how the cremation ground of the western skyline was aglow  
 With the sun's last glimmerings, making the leaves of the trees pale in the  
 fading sunlight.

Upon hearing the cries of their young ones, in haste  
 The birds returned to their nests, riding on zephyr chariots.

As the wild beasts made pitiful cries as if they were following behind a  
 corpse,  
 The recluse wandering in this way the whole day found nature itself  
 uncontrolled

And searched far and wide for a place favorable for meditation.  
 Then there appeared a Brahmin named Svastika carrying a bundle of  
 straw.

After seeing him, he extended his hands and requested, "Give me a  
 handful of straw,"  
 So the Brahmin laid his bundle to one side and asked, "Of what use is this  
 straw to you?"

Māra's  
 Attack at  
 the Bodhi  
 Tree

<sup>15</sup> The dark shadows that disappear at high noon are equated by the poet with the darkness of evening.

Replied the bodhisattva, "I will attain enlightenment sitting on it!"<sup>16</sup>  
 The Brahmin laughed and replied, "How? Such knowledge has not come  
 to us even though we sit on it daily!"

"For attaining supreme insight, aligning everything toward that end is  
 needed,  
 And only a few self-possessed persons can attain it, Brahmin!"

"O Recluse! Tell me as well the way to find it," Svastika requested.  
 "All right, once I discover the ambrosia, I will give a share to you also."

Having said so, he took the straw and went under a fig tree  
 He spread out the straw and after sitting down upon it made a firm vow—

"Now seated upon it, let my flesh and body dry up  
 Let my sinews, bones, and skin shrivel and wither

But until I have attained supreme insight  
 I will not let my body stir from this very place."

After the bodhisattva sat cross-legged under the tree thus  
 The evil disturber Māra came with the king of seasons<sup>17</sup> as his  
 commander.

Once the full moon illumined the battlefield with its light,  
 The conch shell that sounded in the battlefield came from the warbling of  
 songbirds.

The gentle breeze redolent with sandalwood fragrance beat the battle  
 drums  
 Thus making the sky resonant with heartfelt praise of sensual pleasures.

Jasmine, lotus, and blue lotus, and trees such as the mango and the  
 Ashoka  
 Made arrows of cool refreshing flowing fragrances that hit his body.

His mind was first ensnared by sensuality and gradually his whole body  
 was seized,  
 With concentration<sup>18</sup> dissipated by such burning heat, he almost lost his  
 equanimity.

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<sup>16</sup> Text's question mark amended to exclamation point.

<sup>17</sup> That is, spring.

<sup>18</sup> *Jñāna*.

Māra then summoned his sons Pride, Ecstatic Delight, Sensuality<sup>19</sup> and in  
turn

Each came to the battlefield, as gallant warriors in shining armor.

Pride came to wield his weapon first, “You are surely a Shākya prince but  
For what end are you enduring all this physical torture under this tree?”

What of Ecstatic Delight? He also did not lag behind in showering him  
with arrows—

“Go back to the life of royalty, where your happiness will be full and secure.”

Yet on another side Sensuality sent a stinging dart at his heart,

“Are you not weary of sitting down uncomfortably? Just seek worldly  
enjoyment.”

Yet Gautama with forbearance and patience endured all their weapons in  
battle

And placed his own arrow of mental restraint on the bowstring of his  
stern resolve.

Then seeing this, Māra and his army were filled with fright and fled the  
battlefield

Yet Māra again sent Doubt and False Imaginings<sup>20</sup> to ensnare him.

As Doubt and False Imaginings in turn sent hailstorms and raving  
thunderstorms,

He made their attempts futile by holding aloft the umbrella of spiritual  
intelligence.<sup>21</sup>

Summoning her companions Carnal Lust and Pleasure, Craving<sup>22</sup>

Came to allure him, harboring the ambition of making their father Māra  
victorious.

First they danced before him to music, as Carnal Lust exposed her nude  
body

To incite past memories, conveying the complete satisfaction of sensual  
pleasure.

Pleasure also came wearing a flimsy garment of faint past memories

That trail along with everyone from creation until our demise.

<sup>19</sup> *Darpa, harsa, vilāsa.*

<sup>20</sup> *Shakṣat, kalpanā.*

<sup>21</sup> *Buddhi.*

<sup>22</sup> *Rati, preta, rāga.*

Craving flickered again like a flame that burns bright just before going out  
Then said to him, "Let us go back and seek after heavenly pleasure,

If you do as I say nothing will prove impossible here so look!"  
After saying this, she showed him a harem of beautiful maidens,

A rich trove of jewelry of myriad hues, and wealth.  
Shākyasiṃha<sup>23</sup> sat still, called the earth to bear witness<sup>24</sup> by touching the  
ground, then spoke—

"Let Mount Meru crumble and bury me, let the world become void  
Let the galaxy of stars together with Indra fall from blue heaven,

Let all living beings be of one accord, let the oceans dry up  
But nothing can stir me from my seat at the root of this Bodhi Tree."

Having said this, he meditated to penetrate their real nature and  
Saw within the bodies of these beautiful maidens only a mass of  
loathsome filth.

Beautiful to behold, they were dressed up with a covering of good skin  
But within their bodies they were mere skeletons joined by sinews.

He glimpsed their old age and thought their bodies to be houses of mortal  
maladies,  
He saw all wealth, palatial buildings, temples, wooded groves as mire.

In this way he realized all sensual pleasures to be ephemeral things dying  
in time,  
So carnal lust, will-to-live, attachment, and all these streams of craving  
departed from him.

"Since fear of death and craving for existence lingers,  
It is on account of craving for life that all beings are reborn again."

All cravings and desires of different sorts for life then fell away from  
him and  
He submerged in a pool of deep concentration filled with the water of  
serene peace.

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<sup>23</sup> Lit. "Shākya-lion," another often-used classical epithet of the Buddha.

<sup>24</sup> Buddha images showing this pose, the *śūlāvatīparśva mudrā*, are very common in Buddhist  
monasteries throughout Asia. The poet uses the Sanskrit term here.

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monasteries throughout Asia. The poet uses the Sanskrit term here.

After a little while, when the morning breeze braced him up and he  
 opened his eyes  
 With his hand held aloft, the Buddha chanted this hymn before the rising  
 sun—<sup>28</sup>

“Circling and circling in *samsāra*,<sup>29</sup> I have taken birth often but  
 Finished am I with the suffering of birth, House Builder! Do as you like

House Builder!<sup>30</sup> I see you now. You need build no house for me again as  
 The tower of the building has crumbled and with all fetters shaken off,

And with all the mental defilements having been extinguished within me,  
 The three kinds of desire which cause suffering<sup>31</sup> have now been  
 extinguished.”

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<sup>28</sup> The words that follow are found in several places in the Pali Canon e.g., in chapter 11 of the *Dhammapadam*.

<sup>29</sup> The world of continued existence, through rebirth and re-death, determined by karma.

<sup>30</sup> Meaning the cause of birth, the house referring to the body. In the next line, the Newari is not “ridge-pole” as in the Pali version.

<sup>31</sup> *Tṛṣṇā*. There are three forms of this in the formulation of Buddhist thought, craving for *āstava* (pleasure), *bhava* (existence), *vibhava* (annihilation). This doctrinal reference will recur in later chapters.