



Entry into Nirvāṇa

Highest in Shrāvastī, a city full of tall buildings, was
Jeta and Pūrva, and in these two monasteries for twenty-five years

The Blessed Buddha mainly resided but once he went to the city of the
Shākya,
Where devoted king Prasenajita also came, leaving his army of soldiers
behind.

After he respectfully greeted Sugata in many ways, bowing to his feet,
The sage asked, “O King! Why have you been so very devoted to me?”

He put his palms together and replied—“You are the Awakened One,
Your teaching has gained popularity and your *saṅgha* follows a noble path.

I am a king, but you are the emperor of *dharma*, and as we are both
kṣatriyas,
And now about eighty years old, why wouldn’t I revere you?”

In this way the old king spoke in sincere praise of the ‘advocate of religion’
Then the king departed, turning his mind back to state business.

Traveling in the region, the Awakened One reached the Malla town called
Pāvāpura.
There he resided in a monastery in the mango orchard of Cunda.

The Mallas completed the construction work of a pleasant assembly hall,
So to do the establishment ritual for the new building, they summoned
the Blessed One—

“Lord! For our good, let us have the privilege of taking you into this new
building
As yet unoccupied by anyone, so please render it blessed by your visit.”

- The Buddha together with his *bhikkhu saṅgha* went there and
- When he took his seat and turned to the east, the Mallas entered.

There they bowed to the Buddha and took their seats, turning to the west,
And heard the Buddha preach to them on many religious themes,

When he finished, they returned to their homes with their minds cleared.
The Buddha then had Upatiṣya deliver a sermon in the form of a *Sangīta*¹

After this distinguished recitation, the Buddha went to Shrāvastī,
Where he resided in the monastery built by benefactor Anāthapiṇḍaka.

While there, Śāriputra turned to the Teacher of the World and said,
“Blessed One! My life force now wanes and since death into *nirvāṇa*
approaches

I will go to my native village once more and see my old mother who is
still there.”

“Śāriputra! You may go if the time is right,” the sage said in reply.

He held the feet of the pre-eminent Sage and said, “I have for a long time
waited to take *darśana* at your feet, so now that this wish is fulfilled I will
set off.”

Having said this, he left with a group of venerable monks for Nālaka
village,
Met his mother on the road, and entered *nirvāṇa* soon thereafter.

The monk Cunda took his earthly remains, relics, alms bowl, and robes
To Jeta monastery, where he broke the news to the Lord.

Nonbelievers² who saw Maudgalāyana’s supernormal powers believed that
“Gautama’s high esteem among the people is not due to himself alone.”³

Thinking this, they hired a gang of robbers to assault him, who for a
thousand coins
Blindly followed their greed for wealth and beat him to death.

Hearing this sad news, the faces of Ānanda and the other monks
darkened.

Death of
Śāriputra
and
Maudgalā-
yana

¹ This form of composition that was composed to be sung or chanted together is popular with Buddhist writers. *Sangīta* are classed as *Buddhāvastava*, words spoken by the Buddha.

² *Tirokṣas*, including Jains and other *śramanas*.

³ In other words, they thought Maudgalāyana’s supernormal powers inflated the Buddha’s reputation, and popular following.

But the Lord comforted them, “You have abandoned your mindfulness practice, monks!

Have I not told you before ‘one day we must be separated from all this.’
So you must always must be single lamps unto yourselves and self-reliant.”

Advice to
the King on
Society

From there, when the Buddha went to Vulture Peak near Rājagṛha
Baṛsakāra, the Prime Minister of Magadha, came there.

He asked artfully whether Sugata was well and fine,
Then relayed the message he had from the King of Magadha—

“Ajātashatru, King of Magadha, respectfully greets you and
Wishes your good health, requesting your advice in another matter—

He asks, ‘Will he or will he not be able to conquer the Bajjis?’⁴
The Omniscient One replied, addressing his answer to Ānanda,

“As long as the Bajjis discuss problems in a council when occasions arise,
As long as they do their work united and do not fall into petty disputes,

As long as they live up to their code of moral conduct with heart and soul,
And remain reverential and serve those people who deserve respect,

As long as they protect and preserve their temples and *caityas*
Make offerings to the Arhats and ascetics who live in their country,

As long as they show courtesy and respect for their chaste women
And shun carrying off the women of others:

If these are fulfilled, no one will ever be able to subdue them;
On the contrary, their glory and happiness will multiply abundantly, Ānanda!”

“O Brahmin! You may go and tell this carefully to the king of Magadha,
‘As long as they live up to these seven principles, their happiness will be
insured.’”

Baṛsakāra replied—“Blessed One! Living up to these seven is too much!
Living up to even one among them may suffice to enhance their eminence.”

He bowed to the Lord and returned from Vulture Peak to the palace,
Then after a short pause, the Sage gave a command to Ānanda—

———
———
———
⁴ Vṛjji's in Pāli, made famous in the *Mahāparanibbāna Sutta*, this people followed a republic form of self-government, a group that some scholars feel influenced the rules for the Buddha's saṅgha.

“Let the monks here gather in the assembly hall.”⁵

“All right,” monk Ānanda said and convened the *saṅgha* there.

The Lord went there and said, “Listen to me carefully all of you,
As I will give you the seven conditions of welfare,⁶ monks!

As long as you do not turn to useless talk, excess sleep, or idle amusements,
As long as you give up wicked friends before being overwhelmed by their
evil desires,

As long as you make constant effort to realize the goal of *nirvāṇa*
You will not lose anything, but instead gain twice what you already have.

Moreover, monks! As long as you have full faith in the Dharma
Shame for evil, firm conviction in the Vinaya, and broad knowledge of
the scriptures,⁷

As long as you diligently practice mindfulness and cultivate insight
You will never lose anything but rather gain twice what you already have.

Further again, as long as you diligently recall my teachings daily, meditate
mindfully,
Investigate the Dharma, cultivate energy, bliss, tranquility, and equanimity.

Living thoroughly in accord with these seven factors leading to enlightenment⁸
You will not lose anything, but rather gain twice what you already have.

Further again, as long as you regard all worldly goods and thoughts to be
Inauspicious, momentary, not your self, unpleasant, and thereby keep
them distant

And strive hard for the extinction of the three cravings⁹
You will not lose anything, but rather gain twice what you already have.

Further, as for the sixth [maxim] I say: as long as you distribute and
Eat whatever you obtain by begging in a righteous and virtuous manner

⁵ *Uparikkāma-sikkhā*.

⁶ *Aparikkāmitā dhammā*, a term found in Pali and Sanskrit sources that refers to the benefits of undertaking the spiritual life. See Edgerton 1993, 45.

⁷ The poet uses the term *dhammā* (“treatise”) and not *sūtra*, a direct account of the Buddha’s teaching, as one might expect when highlighting the need to safeguard his teachings.

⁸ *Sambodhi āhāra* (in order): *saṃpā* (“mindfulness”), *abhinna-vicaya* (“investigation of the dharma”), *virya* (“vigor”), *prīti* (“joyous rest”), *passava-bodhi* (“tranquility”), *saṃtappi* (“trance”), *upekṣā* (“equanimity”).

⁹ *Tṛṣṇā*. There are three forms of this in the formulation of Buddhist thought, craving for *kāma* (“pleasure”), *bhava* (“existence”), *vibhava* (“annihilation”).

Forging friendly relations with one another in body, speech, mind, and action
You will not lose anything, but rather gain twice what you already have.”

As many days as the Blessed One stayed on the top of Vulture Peak
He busied himself explaining the true religious law to the monks staying there.

From there, the Omniscient One went to Ambalathikā in route to Nālanda and
From Nālanda he headed to Pātālī village where to many *upāsakas*

He preached discourses on the *dharma*, then stayed in a guest house.
Having come to know this, one morning there came to him

Two secretaries from Magadha who were planing to build a fort there,
Who bowed to the Lord and requested, “Please come to have a meal with us today!”

After eating, he preached *dharma* stories to them¹⁰
Then departed for Koti village accompanied by his fellow monks.

The gateway by which he left there came to be known as “Gautama Gate”
and
The bathing spot he used likewise became known as “Gautama *Tirtha*.”

Sugata arrived in Gangapāra and found shelter in Koti village for a few days;

Meeting
with
Āmrāpālī
and Her
Gift of the
Mango
Grove

Soon thereafter he spent some days in Nādikā and from there reached beloved Vaishālī.

There in that city, he stayed in the mango grove of Āmrāpālī
How the impartial Lord never discriminated between people!¹¹

Āmrāpālī was the greatest beauty of all at that time in the city,
Unrivaled for her surpassing youth, loveliness, and refined and stylish movements.

Since she caused all the young men there to be enchanted by her beauty,
On whomever her glance fell, that one would feel, “How fortunate that she looked at me!”

_____ ¹⁰ This again refers to the popular textual stories known as *assadāras* and *stambas*.

_____ ¹¹ This comment is due to the fact that Āmrāpālī is a courtesan.

This beauty, finding the Tathāgata staying in her estate, came to see him:
Like a daughter-in-law from a noble family out to worship the gods, she
came in her carriage.

That she wore no ornaments diminished her beauty not one iota
What difference does it make to a beautiful lotus if two drops of water fall
from it!

No sooner did she alight from the carriage like a floating cloud
Than her radiant loveliness flashed like lightning throughout the garden.

From the carriage, this beauty descended like a cascading waterfall
Her skirt tails fluttering like a river rushing toward the ocean of disciples.

The pre-eminent Sage saw her and her sparkling eyes from a distance
And came to know why the noble women there envied her eyes so.

Therefore as he pointed her out to the monks as she approached
The leader of the sangha preached a sermon standing amid the monks—

“Amrapāli, source of torment for weak-minded ones, has now arrived
If you do not practice mindfulness diligently, your mind will be
undone.

Whether one is sleeping, sitting, walking, or one is standing or
Even if merely drawn on a paper, a woman can enthrall a man’s heart.

Therefore, monks, protect your hearts with the armor of mindfulness
So that the arrow of longing may not pierce it.

Rather than gaze into a woman’s eyes when lacking mindfulness
It would be better to poke a red-hot iron rod into your own eyes.”

Just then, the one ornamented only with her devotion approached the
Buddha
Like a new green mango tree shoot, Amrapāli bowed her head down.

Having prostrated to Sugata, she then squatted on the ground to one side,
Then the Dharma King then gave simple teachings that could be grasped
by her—

“The sick, learned men, and suffering women
Do not become attracted to religious matters

Just as those blessed with youthfulness and beauty
Rarely feel drawn to religious observances!

Yet when the mind is drawn toward religion, this is truly a treasure
For in the material world, every last thing is transitory.

Health is subject to sickness, and nothing can be done as
Death eats away at our life and youth.

In this world, people lust after every happiness but cannot avoid
Living with those they don't like and being separated from those
they love.

Those living the religious life suffer not from such distress or these
misfortunes
Therefore, keep this in mind now and forever.”

Hearing such counsel by Shākyamuni that directed her mind toward the
true teachings
Āmrapāli was established in the faith and immediately asked him—

“Please accept an invitation for you and your *sangha* to eat a meal in my
house tomorrow,
Blessed One! Grant me the satisfaction of having done something
significant in this life.”

After her request was accepted by a silent gesture, she departed.
Elated Āmrapāli began making extensive mental preparations for the
meal.

Elsewhere, once the Licchavi inhabitants in the town of Vaishāli learned this
They came in their many lovely carriages to have *darshan* of Sugata.

Some wore blue clothes embellished with ornaments set with blue gems,
Others had outfits all in red, many were clad in yellow clothes, too.

For unclear reasons, their carriages collided and this angered the Licchavis,
Who asked, “Why did you run into our carriage? Do you have eyes in
your head or not?”

Āmrapāli called to them—“Noble Ones! Please do not lose your tempers,
It is just a matter of carelessness that caused our carriages to bump.

I have hastened here because tomorrow the *sangha* and the Tathāgata will
Eat a meal at my invitation so I am going to make extensive preparations.”

Upon hearing her statement, they were moved to envy and responded—
—— “We will give you one *labh* of rupees if you allow us to prepare that meal,
—— Beauty!”

She gave this answer—“Noble Ones! I implore you not to ask for this.
What is one *laḅb*, even if you gave me the entire country, I would not
abandon this wish.”

Upon hearing her say this, the Licchavis became troubled at heart and
Muttering “Āmrāpālī has really outwitted us,” they continued on.

Upon reaching the mango grove, they got down from their carriages and
Went to prostrate before the King of Sages and greet those from Vaishālī
gathered there.

Then after the Great Orator¹² told them many religious stories,
Doing so with propriety after feeling very delighted by these they asked—

“Can you please visit our home accompanied by all your fellow monks, Lord!”
Replied the Blessed One—“Tomorrow we are going to Āmrāpālī.”

Then they all returned after bowing respectfully to the Buddha.
The next day, when Āmrāpālī had the Buddha and his fellow monks

Visit her house and served them their meal,
She made a donation of the whole of her mango grove to the *saṅgha*.

Having accepted her gift, and after he told *abharma* stories,
The Blessed Buddha stayed for a few days in her mango grove

Wandering on in that area with the *saṅgha*, he eventually reached
Beluḅḅā village.

“I will spend my time here in rain retreat with Ānanda, *Bhikkhus!*

You stay in Vaishālī in places you find convenient.”
After saying just this, all the monks took their leave of Sugata that year

He spent the monsoon retreat there, but now the sage felt very aged
Since his body had become quite thin and subject to diseases,

He thought to himself, “Without once more seeing the monks
I will not pass into *nirvāṇa* before telling them something more,

So therefore I will now restore my vitality by ending these diseases.”
As he vowed, the Great Sage cured his illnesses and restored his life force!

¹² *Mahāvastava*, yet another epithet of the Buddha coined by the poet. “Mahāvādin” meaning
the same is attested by Edgerton (1993, 426).

Realizing that Sugata had recovered, Ānanda was delighted and said—
 “Thank you, Lord! I am able to breathe a sigh of relief now.”

To him, the Lord replied—“Once again, what is it you are hoping for?
 Whatever I had to say, I have already preached, so no more remains;

As my body seems like a rickety chariot only held together by ropes,¹³
 No more should you place your hope in it, so be self-reliant.”

One morning, soon after his daily alms round and eating his meal
 Shākyamuni went together with Ānanda to the Cāpala shrine.¹⁴

Upon reaching it, he told Ānanda, “With their supernormal powers¹⁵
 Buddhas well-endowed by their own will-power can live for an aeon.”¹⁶

The monk Ānanda remained silent and after the Blessed One smiled and said,
 “You go out now and do what is needful,” he departed from there
 quietly.¹⁷

After a short time passed, it occurred to the Tathāgata when alone—
 “The whole monastic order is now well-organized in the correct teaching;

The Dharma, too, has now gained popularity and widespread acceptance;
 So three months from now it will be favorable for me to enter *nirvāṇa*.”

Hearing this and learning of his intention, Ānanda humbly begged him—
 “For the good of the world and for popular benefit and happiness,

Please delay your passing into *nirvāṇa*, Tathāgata!”
 The Blessed One gave his answer—“It cannot be otherwise now,

As I have explained to you, association is always followed by separation,
 So how can I change my decision to extend this petty life?”

¹³ To the Newar reader, “a chariot (*rathā*) held together by ropes” would evoke the image of the large 4-wheel chariots used for the yearly Buddhist festivals dedicated to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in Patan and Kathmandu. After being pulled through the streets for several weeks or longer, the 6-storey structure can tilt precariously and even topple over.

¹⁴ *Cāpala*.

¹⁵ *Balāhita*.

¹⁶ A fabulous period of time, the term for aeon, *kalpa*, is reckoned as 330,000,000 years.

¹⁷ In the Pali Canon, accounts of the first council that convened soon after the Buddha's death criticized Ānanda for not responding to this statement by asking the Buddha to, in actual fact, use those powers to stay alive. The canonical accounts actually have the Buddha hint in this manner three times before renouncing further effort to prolong his life. The poet here merely has one occasion when Ānanda failed to respond.

Let all the monks be gathered in the top floor of the monastery there.”
 “All right, we’ll go there,” said Ānanda, and both proceeded to that place.

With all the monks assembled forthwith in the assembly hall
 The Buddha preached discourses on the thirty-seven *bodhipakṣa*
dharmas.¹⁸

Sugata again explained to them—“As my life will soon come to an end,
 I am about to leave you all forever, as I have already done what is needed.

Do not be lazy, curb your minds through right resolve and virtue.
 One who follows this teaching will surely reach an end to all suffering.”

Such teachings having been given, Sugata started off for Vaiśālī and
 After collecting alms as needed and casting a long look around, he said,

“Know this here, Ānanda! Take it that this is the Buddha’s last tour,
 So gather everyone and let us all go from here to the village of Maṇḍa.”

Traveling in the area, passing through many villages including Āmrā,
 Upon reaching the city of Bhoga, the Tathāgata preached a sermon—

“If any monk claims that on the subject of the *dharmas*, ‘this was said by
 the Buddha’

Do not condemn or ridicule him, yet do not believe all you hear either,

But verify by comparing it with the established discourses preached or the
Vinaya.

And if it tallies with them, readily accept it but if it disagrees with them,
 discard it.

Again, if a certain monk regarding a doctrine says ‘I heard it in the
 assembly of monks,’

Or ‘This is the code of conduct formulated in the *Vinaya*,’ to verify it

Look in *sūtras* I have preached or in the *Vinaya* rules to see if this is so or
 not so.

If it tallies with them, readily accept it but if it disagrees with them,
 discard it.

¹⁸ The thirty-seven “Factors leading to Enlightenment”: four applications of mindfulness (to body, feelings, thought, *dharmas*), four right efforts (prevent evil, forsake existing evil, promote good, develop goodness), four bases of psychic power, five cardinal virtues (faith, vigor, mindfulness, concentration, insight), five powers, seven limbs of enlightenment (mindfulness, investigation, vigor, energy, tranquility, concentration, equanimity), Eightfold Path.

Or if another says, ‘The righteous monks who follow Dharma and Vinaya said this,

Yes, yes, certainly! This is certainly the Buddha’s tradition,’ do as I have said before.

Or if still another says, ‘So I have heard from a Buddhist elder

It is so that this is a statement by the Buddha,’¹⁹ do the same as I have said.”

Going from there, the revered Tathāgata with the *sangha* reached Pāvāpur. Upon arrival, he stopped for a rest in Cunda’s mango orchard.

Informed of this, Cunda came at a run and after giving thanks for his good fortune,

Invited the Sage for a meal and left, having gotten his consent.

Next day at the appointed time and together with his monks,

The Buddha at Cunda’s home ate a meal that included pork.

Although the Lord of Sages suffered from dysentery due to that meal, He left there and went toward Kushināra, accompanied by Ānanda and other monks.

After plodding along the road, he soon was fatigued, “Ānanda! Spread a blanket for me,

I’m tired and want to rest.” After the King of Sages said this, all stopped there.

After they relaxed there and drank some water to quench their thirst

All went on and crossed the Kakuthā River and bathed there.

Eventually as they reached a mango grove, the Buddha²⁰ said, “Again Cundaka!

I want to stop here for rest so please spread out a ground cloth for me.”

Cundaka rushed to make a bed improvised from a robe folded four times,

So after reclining there and once he recouped his energy, the Preeminent Sage said—

“Say this Ānanda! If people say ‘Cunda! After eating a meal in your house that You prepared, the Lord died,’ you must cheer him up by saying this—

¹⁹ The canonical technical term *Buddha-vaṅṅa* (“word, speech, or statement of the Buddha”).

²⁰ The poet uses another new term here, Jinendra, “King of [Spiritual] Conquerors.”

‘Cunda! There were two important meals known in the Blessed One’s lifetime:
First the one before my attaining enlightenment, the other before my entering *nirvāṇa*.’²⁰

After the Lord slowly went across the Hiraṇyavati stream there,
He reached the Mallas’ *śāl* grove in Kushīnagara.

Standing there, the Buddha gave this command to Ānanda,
“Prepare a bed for me there, between the two trees, Ānanda! There.”

“Fine,” assented the monk Ānanda who made the bed just there,
Covering a cot with a thick yellow robe of good quality.

Reposing his head on his right arm and looking toward the west
Sugata reclined there on his last bed, lying on his right side.

After a short while, Ānanda wiped away his tears and said,
“These days, the senior monks keep coming here due to the Lord’s presence,

But since they won’t be coming for *darśhan* once you are no more,
Where else will we ever meet all of them again in such great numbers!”

The Great Sage was aggrieved to hear these sad words and replied,
“Fear not! Even after my death, you will meet them all elsewhere

At where the Buddha took his birth, where he attained enlightenment,
Where he preached his first sermon, and where he passed into *nirvāṇa*.²¹

Again Ānanda the monk turned to the Lord and asked—
“Honorable One!²² How shall we deal with women?”

The Lord saw, “Do not look at their faces.”
“But if they come before us?” The Lord said—“Do not talk to them.”

“If talking to them is necessary, what shall we do?” Sugata replied,
“Speak no more than required, and that, too, with scrupulous care.”

Somewhat later, after Ānanda’s heart became very troubled again,
He went to a corner, crying *sukṣusukṣ* when he saw that his Master was
about to die.

²¹ Here, the poet adds the instructions found in the *sūtra* by indicating where the first Buddhist pilgrimage locations, and hence monasteries, should be.

²² *Aṅgārava* is yet another Sanskrit neologism for the Buddha coined by the poet.

The Lord saw this and called out to him in order to correct him gently,
 “It is not appropriate to cry like this now, Ananda! You are again giving in
 to grief.

Time and again, I have told you ‘we must eventually part one day’ and
 Since all who exist are but momentary, how can those who are born not
 die!

Go now to Kushināra and give the news to the Mallas there.”
 So he hastened to a meeting house where the Mallas assembled.

Having reached there, he said—“Alas Gentlemen! Come quickly;
 Since the Lord is certainly passing into *nirvāṇa* early in the morning today,

You will surely repent, saying, ‘We missed having our last *darshan*.’”
 So they soon arrived there, blowing trumpets they used on the battlefield.

Some of them wore no hats and left their hair unruly, some had no shawls,
 Some had not found time to put on shoes, and not one was not crying.

Some of the Malla ladies had no ribbons tying up their plaited hair
 As those who came were so perturbed they let their shawls drag in the
 dirt.

Once they saw Sugata reclining there on the bed, they prostrated
 Respectfully beside him, their faces touching the ground.

They were speechless, with expressions as empty as their choked-up
 throats.
 The God of gods²³ then spoke this, feeling compassion for them—

“When you should be expressing delight, why are you already mourning:
 I am reaching my destination, escaping a house afire.”

Having heard the Buddha’s weighty words of ambrosial worth
 Their devotion²⁴ was firm, but grief had descended to the depths of their
 hearts—

“We grieve because your light is going out before we have found our own
 way out,
 And no longer can we ever again have *darshan* of the Tathāgata.”

²³ *Devadeva* is an epithet coined by the poet not attested in any Buddhist text. Its use in the
 last scene of the Buddha’s life implies the Buddha’s divinity.

²⁴ *Āśrīti*.

“By merely looking at the face of the doctor
How can one be cured of sickness if the medicine is not taken?

One who lacks faith and moral observance, and merely looks on
Know that he can never attain *nirvāṇa*.

One who wants to grasp the *dharmā* with the fullest understanding
Can attain *nirvāṇa* even without ever having seen me.

Since I will tell you now what *nirvāṇa* is like
Listen attentively now while keeping your minds clear—

Just as a light is extinguished when it runs out of oil
Similarly, one purged of defilements attains *nirvāṇa*,

It is not found on earth, in the sky, in any of the directions or sub-
directions.
Unmoved and uncompounded, it is ultimate peace.”

After the Buddha said this, his face glistened like a flickering lamp;
All there sat still, stunned and silent, staring at him.

Forgetting that they would not have *darśan* of Sugata in the future,
But showing reverence by saying repeatedly, “Thank you, Lord, thank
you!

O Lord! If there is no sun here, how can we have day and night!
Further, if we have no food to eat, how can we live our lives!

So as you are the Lord of the World, Great Protector,
Please give us your compassionate support unceasingly.”