

INTRODUCTION

The idea of writing an illustrated life story of the Buddha came from Mr. Handaka Vijjānanda about two years ago. He requested me to prepare the text and approached U Kyaw Phyu San, the well-known Myanmarese water colour artist, for the illustrations. Since then, we have worked hand in hand for this project.

Today, one can find many books on the Buddha's life story. Some narrate the birth of Prince Siddhattha up to the attainment of His Buddhahood, while others up to His passing away, etc. However, none of them narrates the story in full exposition. If you expect this book to be an all-in account of the Buddha's life story, you will only meet disappointment. The most complete authority on the Buddha's life is none other than the Buddhist Sacred Text (the Tipiṭaka) itself.

In Myanmar, the country where I spent my days to write this book, one can find an extensive treatise on the Buddha's life story written by the great scholar monk Bhaddanta Vicittasārābhivamsa—better known as Mingun Sayadaw. He could completely memorize the whole Tipiṭaka, which consists of forty massive books. Moreover, he was also well-versed in the Aṭṭhakathā (Commentaries) and the Ṭīkā (Sub-commentaries), earning him the title of Tipiṭakadhara Dhammabhaṇḍāgārika, the highest honourary title in proficiency on the Buddha's Teachings.

His treatise has been translated into English under the title The Great Chronicle of Buddhas. It consists of six volumes in ten books. Without relegating my great respect to him, I may say that even this extensive treatise is yet to be considered a complete one. One cannot find the story of the Venerable Sunīta, Sopāka, Aṅgulimāla, etc. But then, you may ask: "Can't we find the complete life story of the Buddha?" Surely, we can. But, we can only find it in the Tipiṭaka itself, together with the Commentaries and Sub-commentaries.

The problem is that all the available materials are scattered in those voluminous books that we need to collect and rearrange them in order to get the complete story in chronological order.

I have selected the sixty-nine stories which represent the life story of the Buddha. The narration starts from the Buddha's past existence as Sumedha, the last birth in His existence as the Bodhisatta Prince Siddhattha, His forty-five years of ministry after becoming a Buddha, until His Parinibbāna. It also includes the way that His disciples have been preserving, promoting and propagating His Teachings, from generation to generation, up to the twenty-first century. By reading this book, chapter by chapter, you will get the complete picture of the Buddha's life. You will find many aspects of His life, His disciples and His 'enemies'. You will also find how the Buddha handled, advised and solved life problems which have been facing man more than 2,500 years ago, but which we still find even today.

You will meet the young mother Kisāgotamī, who was deranged by the sudden death of her little son. Being afraid that her parents-in-law and husband would despise her, she did not want to accept the fact of her son's death. Convincing herself that her son was only sick, she went around house to house, trying to find medicine for her son, a reminiscence of those depressed mothers who lose their beloved children today. Just as Paṭācārā became mad, finding her husband, children, and families dead one after another on one single day, even so, today we find people becoming mad being bereaved of their beloved parents, husbands, wives, children, girlfriends, boyfriends, or by losing their properties.

You will come to know that even the Blessed One, the Omniscient One, could not escape the fruits of His past actions. His disciple betrayed and tried to assassinate Him while other jealous religious teachers tried many ways to calumniate, disgrace, or debate with Him before the multitude. On the other hand, He is also a teacher who was loved, praised, honoured, venerated and respected by many. But, how the Blessed One dealt with the ups and downs of life proved Him to be the greatest spiritual teacher who ever lived.

Furthermore, you will find the Blessed One's attitude towards His parents, son, disciples, 'enemies', other religious teachers, etc. But, the greatest of all is how the Blessed One shows us the way to the highest happiness, which is unique to Buddhism, and which does not exist in other religious views. The way to the highest happiness is universal to all sentient beings, without any discrimination of race, caste, gender, nationality, economic status, social position, or other attributes. It is even applicable to celestial beings and woeful beings.

Points of Controversy

Here, I would like to mention some points of controversy and the ambiguity which I have found during the process of writing this book. As mentioned previously, the life story of the Buddha and His Teachings are spread over the many volumes of the Tipiṭaka, the Aṭṭhakathā and the Tīkā. We cannot get the complete story from the Tipiṭaka alone. For example, the Pāḷi Dhammapada of the Tipiṭaka consists of 423 beautiful verses uttered by the Blessed One. However, we can find the circumstances under which the Blessed One uttered those verses only in its Aṭṭhakathā; so is it with the other stories. Thus, the Aṭṭhakathā not only gives an explanation of the Pāḷi words and grammar; it also provides related stories.

1. Ānanda or a Royal Elephant?

Among the seven birth-mates of the Bodhisatta, Ānanda is mentioned in the Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā and the Buddhavaṃsa Aṭṭhakathā, but the Manorathapūraṇī (Commentary to the Aṅguttara Nikāya) mentioned the royal elephant Ārohaniya instead of Ānanda, with the other six birth-mates being the same. Facing this ambiguity, I have decided to put Ānanda in this book, with the consideration that the Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā and the Buddhavaṃsa Aṭṭhakathā are more concerned with the explanation of the life story, while the Manorathapūraṇī is more inclined to the explanation of discourses.

2. Senānigama?

In the morning before the Bodhisatta attained Enlightenment, Sujātā offered him a bowl of milk-rice. In *The Buddha and His Teachings*, Sujātā was the daughter of a rich man in the market town of Senāni. But in *The Great Chronicle of Buddhas*, Sujātā was the daughter of a rich man named Senāni, living in the market town of Sena. The *Papañcasūdanī* (Commentary to the *Majjhima Nikāya*) mentioned that Senānigama means “the market town of Sena” as the place was once resided by armies. The book also gives another explanation that Senānigama also means “Senāni-gāma” or the “Village of Senāni”, where Senāni, Sujātā’s father, dwelt. The *Sāratthappakāsinī* (Commentary to the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*) explained that Senānigama was a place once resided by armies, and that afterwards Senāni, Sujātā’s father, dwelt in that market town (nigama). Out of these different interpretations, I prefer to use the explanation within the *Sāratthappakāsinī*, considering that Senāni was a rich man who typically stayed in a quite developed village, i.e. a market town (nigama), rather than in an ordinary village (gāma).

3. The Simile of Tuning a Lute

The *Bodhisatta* plunged himself into the practice of severe austerities (*dukkaracariya*) for six years in the Uruvelā Forest. At the end of the six years, he was on the verge of death when he heard a group of girls passing nearby his place, singing the verse that a lute would produce a sweet sound only if its strings were tuned neither too loose nor too tight. This simile can be found in some of the books on the Buddha’s life story. However, I cannot find it in the Pāḷi Canon. As a note, the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* does contain a simile of a similar kind whereby the Blessed One advised the Venerable *Soṇa Koḷivisa*, who put in too much effort in walking meditation.

4. The Attainment of *Sotāpatti* by the *Pañcavaggiyā Bhikkhū*

I find that some information in the *Aṭṭhakathā* is different from that in the Pāḷi Canon. One instance is the *Pañcavaggiyā Bhikkhūs’* attainment to the stage of *Sotāpatti*. The *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* mentions that the Venerable Vappa and the Venerable Bhaddiya attained

the stage of *Sotāpatti* on the first day of the waning moon of Sāvana, and the Venerable Mahānāma and the Venerable Assaji on the second day of the same month. But according to the *Samantapāsādikā* (Commentary to the Vinaya *Piṭaka*), *Vappa* attained the stage of *Sotāpatti* on the first day of the waning moon of Sāvana, *Bhaddiya* on the second day, *Mahānāma* on the third day, and *Assaji* on the fourth day. Through this example, we find that the Commentary is indispensable, but it needs to be analysed carefully.

5. The Death of King Suddhodana

In the story of *The Buddha's First Visit to His Homeland* (Chapter 30), when King Suddhodana was seriously sick, the Blessed One came and preached to him the *Dhamma*, which led him to the attainment of Arahantship. However due to his illness and old age, he passed away as a lay Arahant. Here, I would like to disclose another opinion: in (1) *The Buddha and His Teachings*, (2) *Buddha: His Life & Historical Survey of Early Buddhism*, and (3) *Buddha and His Disciples*, King Suddhodana passed away after experiencing the bliss of Arahantship for seven days.

In *Milinda Pañhā: the Questions of King Milinda*, the Venerable *Nāgasena* explains to King Milinda that there are two possibilities for a householder who has attained Arahantship: either he goes forth into homelessness on that very day, or he attains final Nibbāna. But such a statement is not found in the *Pāḷi* Canon. On this particular point, *The Great Chronicle of Buddhas*, written similarly to the *Manorathapūraṇī* (Commentary to the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*), mentioned briefly that King Suddhodana reached final Nibbāna after attaining Arahantship under a white umbrella in his golden palace.

6. Index Fingers or Thumbs?

In the story of *Aṅgulimāla*, *The Finger Garland* (Chapter 53), I came to another controversy whether *Aṅgulimāla* cut the thumbs or the index fingers of his victims. According to Acharya Buddharakkhita in his book *Halo'd Triumph*, *Aṅgulimāla* cut the thumbs of his victims and made them a garland. According to the generally accepted story in Myanmar, as written in *Life of the Buddha and His Teachings*, *Aṅgulimāla* cut the index fingers of his victims. However, if we peruse the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta*,

Majjhima Nikāya, we do not find whether Aṅgulimāla cut their thumbs or their index fingers. It is only mentioned that Aṅgulimāla cut the fingers of his victims. Furthermore, the Aṭṭhakathā and the Ṭīkā do not give precise information thereof. Facing this controversy, I have decided to simply follow the Pāḷi Canon, leaving aside the confusion as to which fingers Aṅgulimāla had actually cut.

7. When Did Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī Ask for Ordination from the Buddha?

Nārada Mahāthera in his book *The Buddha and His Teachings* narrates that when the Blessed One was residing at the Nigrodha Park to settle a dispute between the Sākyans and the Koliyans, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī approached and begged Him to allow women to enter the Saṃgha. It occurred nearly before the Buddha's fifth rains-residence.

But in the course of my research, I have found that it was nearly before the fifth rains-residence that the Sākyans and the Koliyans were in great dispute and ready to fight for the water of the Rohiṇī River. The Blessed One came to the fighting field around the river and pacified both parties. After that, the Blessed One went to Mahāvana, near Kapilavatthu, and stayed there together with five hundred Sākyan and Koliyan princes who were later ordained as bhikkhus. Later, the Blessed One went to Mahāvana, near Vesālī, where He observed His fifth rains-residence.

Here, I would like to clarify that during the Blessed One's second visit to Kapilavatthu to settle the dispute, He did not stay at the Nigrodha Park, but at Mahāvana, near Kapilavatthu. Therefore, during this period Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī did not come to the Blessed One. It is true that she approached the Blessed One at the Nigrodha Park while He was residing there, but it occurred during His first visit to Kapilavatthu, not in His second visit. It is accordingly clear that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had actually asked for ordination during the Blessed One's first visit, and that she had to wait for about four years until the Blessed One finally allowed her and the five hundred Sākyan and Koliyan princesses to enter the Order of Bhikkhunīs during the fifth rains-residence at Mahāvana, near Vesālī.

Here, may the wise reader know and not be confused that there were actually two great forests under the same name of Mahāvana. The first is the Mahāvana Forest, near Kapilavatthu, where the Blessed One

stayed after settling the dispute between the Sākyans and the Koliyans, and where He preached the Mahāsamaya Sutta. The second one is the Mahāvana Forest, near Vesālī, where the Blessed One spent His fifth rains-residence and allowed women to enter the Saṃgha.

8. Untraceability of Time of Occurrence

For some of the stories, I was unable to trace the time of their occurrence. These include the stories of Sopāka, Sunāta, Pātigatta Tissa, Kisāgotamā, Pañcārā, Saccaka, Upālī, the *Maṅgala Sutta* and the *Mettā Sutta*. The *Pāṭi* Canon always indicates the place of occurrence. However, somehow it does not seem too concerned with the time of occurrence. Nevertheless, we can sometimes obtain additional information from the *Aññhakathā* to enable us to link one story to another in a correct sequence.

I have tried to resolve this issue by taking into account the place where an event happened and trying to relate it to the possible years of the Blessed One's ministry, and by considering the related before- and after-events before lining it among other stories. It is true that, for example, albeit the Blessed One spent His rains-residence in Rājagaha, it does not mean that He stayed there the whole year. According to the Disciplinary Rules (*Vinaya*), a *bhikkhu* must stay at a certain place for three months during the rainy season, and he is only allowed to wander from place to place for the rest nine months. Considering this, my approach cannot be said to be completely accurate, nor will it solve the problem entirely. However, what I have offered is a way to solve such problems and to open space for the wise reader to analyse or make his/her own deeper research.

Let me cite two examples. The first story, *The All-Embracing Loving-kindness* (Chapter 48), occurred at the Jetavana Monastery in Sāvatthi, when it was near the time of entering the residence for the rains. And when a problem happened to the five hundred *bhikkhus* in the forest where they observed their rains-residence, they left the place and came to the Blessed One in Sāvatthi for advice. Here, we know that at that time the Blessed One was residing for the rains at the Jetavana Monastery in Sāvatthi. And according to the chronology, the Blessed One observed His rains-residence there as early as the fourteenth year of His ministry, or even later, i.e. from the twenty-first up to forty-fourth year.

In this context, I conclude that the story occurred in His fourteenth rains-residence by assuming that the *Mettà Sutta* was preached by the Blessed One in one of the periods during the first twenty years of His ministry (*Pañhama Bodhi Kàla*).

The second story, *The Highest Auspiciousness* (Chapter 47), is about a *sutta* preached by the Blessed One at the Jetavana Monastery in Sàvatthi in the middle watch of the night to a *deva* messenger—who was followed by a great congregation of *devas* and *brahmàs* coming from ten thousand world systems. This *sutta* does not give additional information, nor does the *Aññhakathà*. Here, we do not know whether it occurred during a rains-residence. If it were, we can resolve this problem in the same manner as with the *Mettà Sutta*. Else, it would be more difficult to estimate the time correctly as the Blessed One might have stayed temporarily at the Jetavana Monastery at any time during His wandering months, starting from the time when the Jetavana Monastery had been constructed until the forty-fifth year of His ministry. Here, by considering that the auspiciousness tumult (*Maṅgala kolàhala*) continued for twelve years, I also assume that the Blessed One preached this *sutta* in one of the periods during the first twenty years of His ministry.

Chronological Order of the Buddha's Ministry

Prince Siddhattha attained Enlightenment and became a Buddha at the age of thirty-five. Since then, the Buddha taught the *Dhamma* tirelessly for forty-five years. During the first twenty years of His ministry, the Buddha spent His rains-residence in different places. But during the last twenty-five years, the Buddha mostly observed His rains-residence in Sàvatthi.

The following is the chronological order of the Buddha's ministry, the place of His rains-residence, and the prominent events that occurred during each whole year.

The First Year (588 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Migadāya (the Deer Park), Isipatana, near

Bārāṇasī. Prominent events: preaching the first sermon the Dhammacakkkappavattana Sutta, the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta and the Ādittapariyāya Sutta; converting the five ascetics (Pañcavaggiyā); establishing the Order of Bhikkhus (Saṅgha) and the Triple Refuge; converting Yasa and his fifty-four friends; sending-out the first missionaries; converting the thirty Bhaddavaggiyā princes; converting the three Kassapa brothers and their one thousand followers.

The Second–Fourth Years (587 – 585 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Veḷuvanārāma (the Bamboo Grove Monastery), near Rājagaha. Prominent events: fulfilling His promise to King Bimbisāra; accepting the Veḷuvana Monastery; proclaiming the Ovāda Pātimokkha; appointing Sāriputta and Moggallāna as chief bhikkhu disciples (agga sāvaka); visiting Kapilavatthu; performing the twin miracle (yamaka Pāṭihāriya); initiating Prince Rāhula and Prince Nanda; establishing King Suddhodana, Queen Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and Yasodharā into the stream of nobility; ordaining the six Sākyan princes; meeting with Anāthapiṇḍika; accepting the Jetavana Monastery; meeting with King Pasenadi Kosala; pacifying the quarrel between the Sākyans and the Koliyans; preaching the Mahāsamaya Sutta.

The Fifth Year (584 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Kūṭāgārasālā (the Pinnacle Hall), Mahāvana, near Vesālī. Prominent events: the demise of King Suddhodana; allowing Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī to become a bhikkhunī together with the five hundred princesses; establishing the Order of Bhikkhunīs; preaching the Dakkhiṇavibhaṅga Sutta.

The Sixth Year (583 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Maṅkulapabbata (Maṅkula Hill), near Kosambī. Prominent events: preaching the Mahānidāna Sutta; Queen Khemā becoming a bhikkhunī and being appointed later as one of the two chief bhikkhunī disciples together with Uppalavaṇṇā; prohibiting His disciples from performing miracles for their personal benefits and prestige; performing the twin miracle.

The Seventh Year (582 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Tāvatiṃsa Heaven.

Prominent events: performing the twin miracle; teaching the *Abhidhamma* in the Tāvatiṃsa Heaven; the calumny of Ciñcamāṇavikā.

The Eighth Year (581 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Bhesakalāvana (Bhesakalā Forest), near Suṃsumāragiri, the Bhaggā District. **Prominent events:** Prince Bodhirājakumāra inviting the Buddha to Kokanada—his new palace—for accepting alms; preaching the Puṇṇovāda Sutta; the Venerable Puṇṇa visiting Sunāparanta.

The Ninth Year (580 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Ghositārāma (Ghosita Monastery), Kosambī. **Prominent events:** the revenge of Māgandiyā; the quarrel of the Kosambī bhikkhus.

The Tenth Year (579 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: the Rakkhita Forest, near the Pārileyyaka Village. **Prominent events:** finding the prolonged dispute between bhikkhus of Kosambī, the Buddha retired alone in the Rakkhita Forest, near the Pārileyyaka village, accompanied by the elephant Pārileyyaka. At the end of the rains-residence, Ānanda, on behalf of the citizens of Sāvatti, invited the Buddha to proceed to Sāvatti. The quarrelsome bhikkhus of Kosambī later apologised to the Buddha and settled their dispute.

The Eleventh Year (578 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Dakkhiṇāgiri, the brahmin village of Ekaṇālā. **Prominent events:** converting the brahmin Kasi Bhāradvāja; going to Kammāsaddamma in the Kuru Country and preaching the Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta and the Mahānidāna Sutta.

The Twelfth Year (577 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Verañjā. **Prominent events:** fulfilling the invitation of a brahmin in Verañjā to spend the rains-residence there.

Unfortunately, this time there was a famine at Verañjā. The Buddha and His disciples were compelled to live on coarse food—normally fed to horses—offered by a group of horse merchants.

The Thirteenth Year (576 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Cāliyapabbata (Cāliya Rock). **Prominent events:** after the rains-residence, the Buddha went to Bhaddiya converting the millionaire Meṇḍaka, his wife Candapadumā, his son Dhanañjaya, his daughter-in-law Sumanadevī, his servant Puṇṇa and his seven-year-old grand-daughter Visākhā; converting Siha, an army general of Vesālī and follower of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta; preaching the Mahā Rāhulovāda Sutta.

The Fourteenth Year (575 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Jetavana Monastery, Sāvatthi. **Prominent events:** the Buddha's son, Rāhula, receiving higher ordination; preaching the Cūḷa Rāhulovāda Sutta, the Vammika Sutta and the Sūciloma Sutta.

The Fifteenth Year (574 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Nigrodhārāma (the Nigrodha Park), Kapilavatthu. **Prominent events:** the demise of King Suppabuddha, the Buddha's father-in-law.

The Sixteenth Year (573 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: the City of Āḷavī. **Prominent events:** converting the yakkha Āḷavaka.

The Seventeenth Year (572 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Veḷuvanārāma, Kalandakanivāpa (the sanctuary where black squirrels were fed), near Rājagaha. **Prominent events:** preaching the Siṅgālovāda Sutta to the young householder Siṅgālaka; the demise of the courtesan Sirimā; preaching the Vijaya Sutta.

The Eighteenth – Nineteenth Years (571 – 570 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Cāliyapabbata (the Cāliya Rock). **Prominent events:** the story of a weaver's daughter; the story of the hunter Kukkuṭamitta.

The Twentieth Year (569 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Veḷuvanārāma, near Rājagaha. **Prominent events:** laying down the Pārājika rules; appointing Ānanda as permanent attendant; the first meeting with Jīvaka; converting Aṅgulimāla; accusation of the killing of Sundarī, straightening Brahmā Baka's wrong views; taming Nandopananda.

The Twenty-First – Forty-Fourth Years (568 - 545 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: the Jetavana Monastery and the Pubbārāma Monastery, Sāvatti. **Prominent events:** story of King Pukkusāti; preaching the Ambaṭṭha Sutta; donation of the Pubbārāma Monastery, the demise of King Bimbisāra; Devadatta attempting to assassinate the Buddha; taming Nāḷāgiri; Devadatta creating a schism within the Saṃgha; the demise of Devadatta; converting King Ajātasattu; the demise of King Pasenadi Kosala; preaching the Sakka Pañhā Sutta.

The Forty-Fifth Year (544 B.C.)

Place of rains-residence: Beluvagāmaka, near Vesālī. **Prominent events:** converting Upāli, the prominent disciple of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta; teaching the seven conditions of prosperity for rulers and bhikkhus; the Mirror of Dhamma; accepting Ambapālī's offering of her mango grove; the passing away of Sāriputta and Moggallāna; teaching the four great authorities (Mahāpadesa); eating sūkara maddava; accepting the wandering ascetic Subhadda as the last disciple; the Buddha's Mahāparinibbāna.

The sixty-nine illustrations in this book have been designed by considering the following: the postures, hand gestures, and age of the Buddha and His counterparts, as well as the place and time dimension of the events. Mr. Handaka Vijjānanda has made the illustration framework meticulously, capturing the dominant event that happened in each and every story, while Kyaw Phyu San manifested the concept into beautiful work of art with his amazing skill.

Eventually, I hope all readers may be inspired by the great examples that the Buddha has shown throughout His life. May this work serve as a small contribution to the vast Buddhist literature in the world. Enjoy the stories! Enjoy the illustrations!

Be Good. Be Happy.

Bhikkhu Kusaladhammo

Yangon, 21 November 2004