

Lesson 9 – GRATITUDE – The First Seven Weeks After Enlightenment

After the Buddha became enlightened, he stayed where he was, sitting under the Bodhi Tree, for one week. He was feeling the ultimate happiness and peace of enlightenment.

After that week, he concentrated on the causes and effects of all things. He saw that everything that exists arises from something else. Nothing just pops into existence from nowhere. Every single thing arises from causes and conditions. That means that each thing exists because of many situations, that arose from other situations, which arose from yet countless other situations, on and on endlessly back through time. He knew why there is birth, aging and death. He knew exactly how suffering arises, and exactly how it can come to an end.

He looked around with the eyes of an Enlightened One, and saw all the people and other beings full of desire, hatred, ignorance, who want to stay as they are, and don't know that what they like actually brings fear and pain, and is always changing. When they stop clinging to what they like, they can escape suffering and become enlightened.

The second week after his enlightenment, he got up and stood near the Bodhi Tree for seven days, looking at it without moving his eyes, meditating with gratitude to the tree, thankful that it sheltered him during his enlightenment.

The third week, the Buddha became aware that beings in heaven-worlds did not know whether he was completely enlightened. To show them that he was, he created instantly a golden bridge with jewels on it, and he walked on the bridge for one week so they would see that he had the powers of being fully enlightened.

The fourth week, the Buddha instantly created a jeweled chamber with a seat in it, near the Bodhi Tree. He meditated in it for one week, understanding the highest wisdom.

There were rays of light surrounding him, forming a halo, with blue light the closest around him, then yellow light a little further out, then red light a bit further, then white, then orange, and then a mix of all of the colors.

The fifth week after his enlightenment, the Buddha finally walked away from the Bodhi Tree. He walked to a banyan tree, which has long, widely-spread branches supported by additional roots that hang down from the branches to the ground. He sat there for seven days in deep, peaceful meditation.

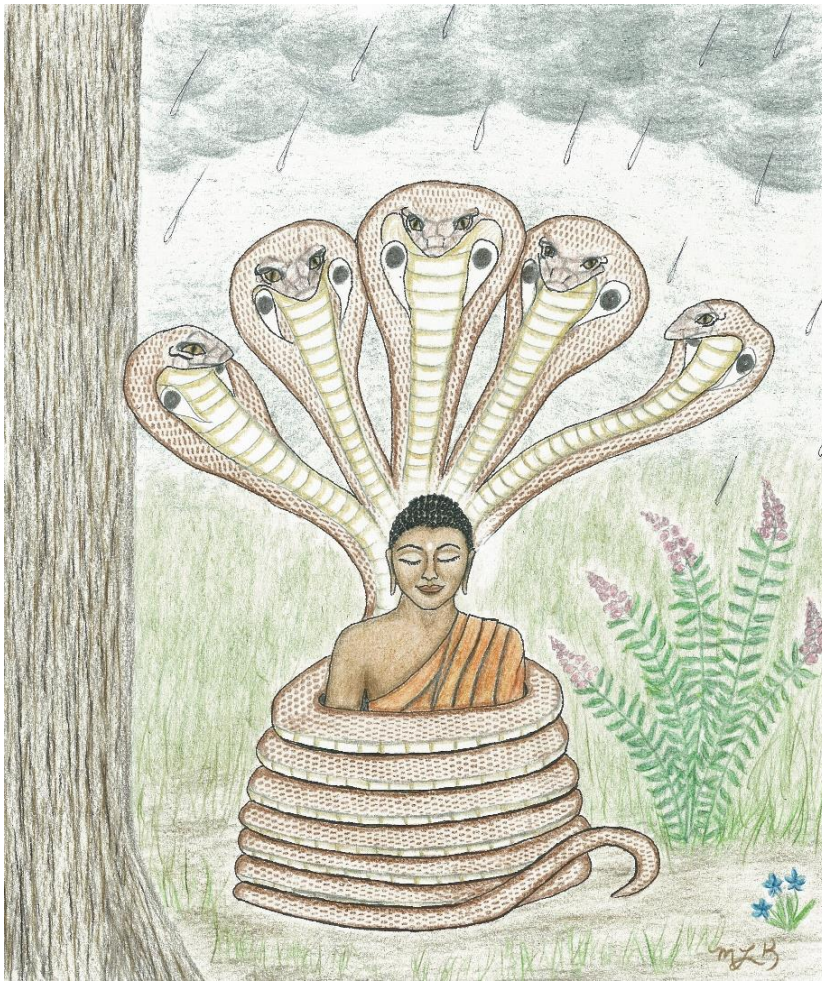
Then, a man who was a brahmin—a priest, a person of the most respected, highest level of society—walked up to the Buddha and greeted him, and they had a polite conversation. But the brahmin was very arrogant. He asked,

“What is a brahmin, Master Gautama? What things make a person a brahmin?”

The Buddha replied, “A brahmin has no evil about him and is not arrogant. He is pure and self-controlled, perfect in knowledge and living a moral life. He does not want to show off.”

The brahmin was not pleased to hear this. He wanted confirmation that he was a great brahmin. Instead, questions and doubts arose in his mind, “Do I have evil thoughts? Am I arrogant? Am I pure? Am I self-controlled? Am I perfect in knowledge? Am I living a moral life? Do I try to show off my knowledge and intelligence?” He hated to think about this, so he decided to leave the Buddha.

The sixth week after enlightenment, the Buddha walked to another tree. A big storm came, with huge dark clouds, cold wind and rain. A great royal naga named Mucalinda, a spirit who usually appears in the form of a huge cobra snake with five heads, came from his celestial world and wrapped his body around the Buddha. Mucalinda coiled his body around the Buddha’s body seven times and spread his five great cobra hoods over the Buddha to protect him, thinking,



“Let the Buddha not feel any cold, heat, insects, wind, sun or creeping things on his body.”

The storm lasted seven days, and Mucalinda remained coiled around the Buddha, protecting him the storm.

Then the sun came out and the clouds disappeared, so the sky became blue and clear. Mucalinda unwrapped his coils from the Buddha’s body and changed his form into a brahmin boy, standing in front of the Buddha with his palms together in devotion.

Grateful for protecting him from the storm, the Buddha taught him Dharma by saying,

“Being alone is happiness for a person who is contented, who has learned and understood the Dharma. Friendliness to everyone in the world is happiness for a person who does not harm any living beings. Detachment from the world is happiness for a person who has overcome desires of the five senses. But to get rid of clinging to thoughts of your self, the ‘I,’ is the greatest happiness of all.”

The seventh week after enlightenment, the Buddha went from the Mucalinda Tree to the Rajayatana Tree and stayed there for seven days, meditating and feeling the peace of enlightenment.

At the end of the seventh week after his enlightenment, two traders, named Tapussa and Bhalluka, were traveling along a road to sell their goods. A relative of theirs who had passed away and been born in a heaven-world appeared to them and said,

“Good sirs, there is this Blessed One living at the root of the Rajayatana Tree who has just become enlightened. Go and honor him with an offering of rice cake and honey so that we may be well and happy for a long time.”

So, they went to the Buddha, sitting under the tree, bowed to him and said, “Lord let the Blessed One accept this rice cake and honey so that we may be blessed with well-being and happiness.”

The Buddha thought, “The Buddhas do not accept food into their hands. In what should I accept the rice cake and honey?”

In a heaven-world, the four kings of the four directions heard his question and rushed to help him. They brought four crystal bowls, and offered them to the Buddha, saying,

“Lord, let the Blessed One accept the rice cake and honey in these.”

The Buddha then accepted the rice cake and honey into the bowls and ate.

Then Tapussa and Bhalluka, happy that the Buddha had accepted their offering and blessed them, said, “We go for refuge to the Buddha and to the Dharma. Beginning from today may the Buddha consider us as his followers for as long as we live.”

These traders were the first followers of the Buddha.

Meanwhile, Mara had not forgotten the Buddha, and had not given up on trying to prevent him from becoming enlightened. He didn’t know the Buddha was now enlightened. He appeared to the Buddha, and said,

“You are all alone in the woods—aren’t you sad and lonely? Why don’t you make friends among the people? Isn’t there anyone that you can call a friend?”

The Buddha replied, "I have gotten rid of the cause of suffering, so I have no sadness, no attachments. I am peaceful in meditation."

Mara said, "If you have any thoughts like 'it is mine' then you cannot escape me, monk."

The Buddha replied, "I don't call anything 'mine.' Hear this, Evil One, the path I know you cannot even see."

Mara said, "If you have truly found a path that leads safely to the end of birth and death, then leave. But go alone. What need is there for anyone else to know?"

The Buddha told him, "People who want to be liberated ask me how they can attain the state where there is no death. When asked, I tell them about the end of all suffering, where there is no cause for rebirth."

Mara was very disappointed, and left. He sat down on the ground not far away from the Buddha, his shoulders drooping and head down, feeling depressed, with nothing to say. His three daughters, named Tanha (which means craving), Arati (which means dislike) and Raga (which means attachment), saw their father looking upset. They asked,

"Oh father, why are you upset? Who are you upset with? We can catch him and bring him back again into your power!"

Mara was not so confident that they could do so. He said, "There is an arahant in the world, and when a man escapes from Mara there are no temptations to lure him back again. That is why I grieve so much."

The daughters went to the Buddha, and bowed to him, and said, "Oh Monk, we worship you."

The Buddha ignored them. They created magical appearances of hundreds of all kinds of beautiful women who danced to tempt him to look at them. But he didn't pay any attention to them. The daughters of Mara realized that the Buddha had absolutely no desire or craving, so they went back to their father.

Seeing them coming, he said, "Fools! You tried to split a rock by poking it with lily stems, and so you come from Gautama frustrated."

Questions:

1. What was the Buddha feeling toward the Bodhi Tree while he stood meditating, looking at it for a week without moving his eyes? (he was feeling gratitude to the tree)

2. Why did the Buddha create the golden bridge and walk on it for a week? (because some beings in heaven-worlds didn't know whether he was completely enlightened)
3. What are the colors of the halo light rays that came from the Buddha (blue, yellow, red, white, orange and a mix of colors)
4. How did the Buddha show gratitude to Mucalinda? (he taught him Dharma)
5. Who were the first followers of the Buddha? (the two traders)
6. Why was Mara so upset? (he knew the Buddha had become enlightened, and Mara had no power over him)

What the Buddha said:

“Gāraṇaṃ ca nivāto ca, santhutṭhī ca kataññutā, kālena dhammasavanaṃ, etaṃ mangalamuttamaṃ.”

“Reverence, humility, contentment, gratitude and listening to the Dharma, this is the best way.”

- Mahamangala Sutta

Dharma Discussion - Gratitude:

We heard the words gratitude, grateful and thankful in the story. They mean the same thing.

Who in the story was grateful, what were they grateful for, and how did they show their gratitude?

The Buddha was grateful toward the Bodhi Tree and Mucalinda, for sheltering and protecting him.

He showed his gratitude to the tree by meditating with gratitude toward it while looking at it for a week.

He showed his gratitude toward Mucalinda by teaching him Dharma.

Was there anyone else who seemed grateful? The traders seemed happy and grateful for the blessing, when they promised to be the Buddha's followers for the rest of their lives.

Was there anyone in the story who seemed ungrateful?

The brahmin. Why didn't he like what the Buddha said, and why wasn't he grateful for his guidance? It threatened his ego. He was arrogant, and couldn't stand to see weaknesses in himself. He couldn't see the good in others as he was always trying to make himself seem better than everyone else.

Who else was ungrateful? Mara.

He called his daughters “fools” and although they weren't successful in tempting the Buddha, he didn't appreciate that they at least tried to help him.

We know it's good to be thankful. How is it good for us? What happens to our mood when we're thankful?

It uplifts our mood. While you are thinking of all the things you are grateful for, you naturally feel happy about them.

It also helps up bond with others, to exchange lovingkindness, when we express our gratitude to them, when we say or do something to show that we're thankful.

But sometimes it's hard to be grateful.

For example, Mara wasn't feeling grateful toward his daughters when he was very depressed. His mind was dwelling on his failure to overpower the Buddha.

Similarly, when we feel upset, our mind often keeps thinking about our failure, our loss, what we didn't get, what we don't have, or what harmed us.

Then, when someone tells us to appreciate what we have, it's difficult.

We might feel angry or resentful. We might think things are unfair.

Then we are stuck in unhappy thoughts. We all feel this way sometimes.

It's also hard to feel grateful when we think we are unlucky compared to our friends or classmates, or a brother or sister, or other people.

We feel that something is unfair.

We might try to find ways to make things fair or better for ourselves. As long as we aren't harming others or ourselves, that's okay.

But it's also important to find ways to calm your mind so you can stay healthy and balanced, able to do your best and succeed, and not be weighed down by too many negative thoughts.

How can we do that? How can we feel grateful and uplift our mood?

Is there a way to lift our minds out of those unhappy thoughts?

It helps to have a habit of being grateful. Why do you think that might help us?

When we often think about how lucky we are to have the things we have, then we are more likely to remember those thoughts when we are upset.

We also notice more and more things to be grateful for, so we have more and more happy thoughts.

What are some basic examples of things we can be thankful for?

A healthy body

Nice family, friends

Enough good food and clothes

Good teachers

People who have helped us, given things to us, been kind to us

A nice home, a safe community to live in

Our talents and skills

Being able to learn the Dharma.

This is just a start. There are are countless things, even small things that give us a little relief, that we can be grateful for every day.

For example, like the Buddha, we can be thankful for the comfortable shade of a tree that protects us from the heat of the sun.

Activities:

1. Sitting in a circle, students toss a ball to another student while saying any event, person, thing, experience or circumstance for which he or she is grateful.
2. Write “I am grateful for . . .” and then write a list of things, people, events, experiences and circumstances for which you are grateful. Keep the list to look at when you are feeling unhappy.