

Hilliker-whgc

*Buddha-Carita*, Asvaghosa

Introduction:

[www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com) - **Buddha**, ( Sanskrit: “awakened one”) clan name (Sanskrit) **Gautama** or (Pali) **Gotama**, personal name (Sanskrit) **Siddhartha** or (Pali) **Siddhatta** (born c. 6th–4th century bce, Lumbini, near Kapilavastu, Shakya republic, Kosala kingdom [now in Nepal]—died, Kusinara, Malla republic, Magadha kingdom [now Kasia, India]), the founder of **Buddhism**, one of the major religions and philosophical systems of southern and eastern Asia. *Buddha* is one of the many epithets of a teacher who lived in northern **India** sometime between the 6th and 4th centuries before the Common Era.

His followers, known as Buddhists, propagated the **religion** that is known today as Buddhism. The title *buddha* was used by a number of religious groups in ancient India and had a range of meanings, but it came to be associated most strongly with the tradition of Buddhism and to mean an enlightened being, one who has awakened from the sleep of ignorance and achieved freedom from suffering. According to the various traditions of Buddhism, there have been buddhas in the past and there will be buddhas in the future. Some forms of Buddhism hold that there is only one buddha for each historical age; others hold that all beings will eventually become buddhas because they possess the buddha nature (*tathagatagarbha*).

All forms of Buddhism celebrate various events in the life of the Buddha Gautama, including his birth, **enlightenment**, and passage into **nirvana**. In some countries, where the older and more conservative **Theravada** tradition predominates, the three events are observed on the same day, which is called **Wesak**. In regions adhering to the other major form of Buddhism, the **Mahayana** tradition, the festivals are held on different days and incorporate a variety of rituals and practices. The birth of the Buddha is celebrated in April or May, depending upon the lunar date, in these countries. In Japan, which does not use a **lunar calendar**, the Buddha’s birth is celebrated on April 8. The celebration there has merged with a native **Shintō** ceremony into the flower festival known as Hanamatsuri.

**Buddhacarita**, in full **Buddhacarita-kāvya-sūtra**, (Sanskrit: “Poetic Discourse on the Acts of the **Buddha**”), poetic narrative of the life of Buddha by the Sanskrit poet **Aśvaghōṣa**, one of the finest examples of **Buddhist literature**. The author, who lived in northern India in the 1st–2nd century ad, created a loving account of the Buddha’s life and teachings, one that—in contrast to other treatments such as the *Mahāvastu* (“Great Story”) and *Lalitavistara* (“Full Description of the Play [of the Buddha]”)—is both artistically arranged and restrained in its description of miracles. His work also reflects a vast knowledge of Indian mythology and of pre-Buddhist philosophies, plus a court poet’s interest in love, battle, and statecraft. Only the first half of the *Buddhacarita* remains intact in Sanskrit, but all 28 chapters are preserved in Chinese (5th century) and Tibetan translations.

**Ashvaghosha**, (born 80 ce?, Ayodhya, India—died 150?, Peshawar), philosopher and poet who is considered India’s greatest poet before **Kalidasa** (5th century) and the father of **Sanskrit drama**; he popularized the style of Sanskrit **poetry** known as *kavya*.

Ashvaghosha was born a **Brahman**. Legend obscures the man, but it is known that he was an outspoken opponent of **Buddhism** until, after a heated debate with a noted Buddhist scholar on the relative merits of **Hinduism** and Buddhism, he accepted the value of Buddhism and became a disciple of his erstwhile opponent.

While in Varanasi (Benares), where the **Buddha** had preached his first sermon, Ashvaghosha

saw the city conquered by the Kushan (Kushana) emperor **Kanishka**, a devout Buddhist. A huge war indemnity was demanded, and the ruler of Varanasi handed over instead a symbolic tribute, a begging bowl said to have been used by both the Buddha and Ashvaghosha. Apparently the philosopher rose to the position of spiritual counsellor in Kanishka's court at Peshawar.

A brilliant orator, Ashvaghosha spoke at length on **Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) Buddhist doctrine** at the fourth **Buddhist council**, which he helped organize. His fame lay largely in his ability to explain the intricate concepts of Mahayana Buddhism. Among the works attributed to him are the *Mahayana-shraddhotpada-shastra* ("The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana"), the *Buddhacarita* ("The Life of Buddha"), in verse, and the *Mahalankara* ("Book of Glory").

**dharma**, Sanskrit **Dharma**, Pali **Dhamma**, key concept with multiple meanings in **Hinduism**, **Buddhism**, and **Jainism**. In Hinduism **dharma** is the religious and moral law governing individual conduct and one of the four ends of life, to be followed according to one's class, status, and station in life. It constitutes the subject matter of the **dharmasutras**, religious manuals that are the earliest source of **Hindu law**, and in the course of time has been extended into lengthy compilations of law, the **dharmashastra**.

In Buddhism, **dharma** is the doctrine, the universal truth common to all individuals at all times, proclaimed by the **Buddha**. **Dharma**, the Buddha, and the **sangha** (community of believers) make up the triratna, or "three jewels," to which Buddhists go for refuge. In Buddhist metaphysics the term in the plural (**dharmas**) is used to describe the interrelated elements that make up the empirical world.

In Jaina philosophy, **dharma**, in addition to being commonly understood as moral virtue, also has the meaning—unique to Jainism—of an eternal "substance" (*dravya*) the medium that allows beings to move.

**www.dhammadata.net** - *External refuge*: For all discourses that you read or listen here, you need to reflect for yourself as follows: If the words concerned are traceable in the Discourses (Sutta) and verifiable by the Discipline (Vinaya), then one must conclude thus: 'Certainly, this is the Blessed One's utterance; this has been well understood by that bhikkhu, or by that community, or by those elders, or by that elder. And in that way, you may accept it. Otherwise, you should reject it.' [Mahaparinibbana Sutta, DN 16]

**From whgc website**, Profs. Meyer and Fernandez: **The Buddha's Teachings:**

The Buddha saw the path that leads to the end of all suffering and to liberation, or to Nirvana.

This path is rooted in reason, not faith. The main ingredients are:

**1. The Middle Way:** avoid extremes of pleasure or hardship to achieve clear vision.

**2. The Four Noble Truths** (given by the Buddha in his first sermon):

- Pain/suffering: Life is full of pain, sorrow, suffering (dukkha) ;
- The cause of pain is craving, or suffering due to attachment (tanha) ;
- To cease pain. cease craving; attachment can be overcome ;
- To cease craving/attachment, or to achieve non-attachment, follow the Noble Truths

**3. Eight- fold Path** (*dharmas*) to *Nirvana* (which literally means "blowing out")

- Right views    · Right intention    · Right speech    · Right action    · Right livelihood
- Right effort    · Right mindfulness    · Right concentration

**Day 1 (Friday): Books V and VI, 68-80:** (worth reading aloud; note the use of adjectives and superlatives, the description of objects, clothes, jewels, the comparisons)

**V: 1 - 7:** How does Buddha differ from other humans?; where does he decide to go and why? ; what does he see that brings him sorrow and to what does this lead?

8-22: What is the nature of Buddha's meditation, what does he learn and what state does he attain? who visits him and what does B. realize about this being?

23-38; B. returns home - what are the King's objections to B.'s quest? how does B. answer (see esp. 38);

39-65; what does the King decide to do to convince B. to stay? how does B. react to the scene in the morning? (women become the example and focus of desire, "impure and monstrous" (64) );

66-87; what does B. decide to do and to whom does he speak? why the lavish description of the "best of steeds"? what does he swear to do before he reenters the city? (compare *Gilgamesh*); who chimes in? (note the descriptions, compare *Ramayana*; note also 77, most of Kerouac's American Beat-Buddhism can be read out of this "companions . . . seeking for Dharma")

**VI: 1- 17;** what does B. give the groom, and why the attention lavished on B.'s speech to Chamda? - note B.'s commentary on unselfishness (10);

18-24; what are B.'s thoughts on mourning, wealth, duty, determination and memory?

25-41; what are Chamda's arguments for returning?

42-53; how does B answer him?

54-68; describe B's signs (hand 54) and the symbolic actions that take place; compare the paths taken by, and the reactions of, B and Chamda (compare B in the cloud with *Exodus*);

**Day 2 (Monday): Books VII and XIII, 81-91:**

**VII: 1-11** what is the reaction to B's arrival at the hermitage, both human and animal? to what is B compared ?; in what is B wise, how is he gentle?

12-18; what does B wish to learn from the ascetics? what are the different types?

19- 44; what does B think of the idea of penance, what does it lack? (22; compare *Kabir*); why do the hermits wish him to stay? (43)

44-49; what are B's thoughts on asceticism? what is his goal and why does he not stay? (48, 49);

50-58; where does the Brahman send him?

**XIII:** 1- 17; who is the enemy, who are his sons and daughters? why does Mara worry? what is his weapon? how does B react? (compare *Ramayana*);

18-29; what does Mara's army consist of? (note the lavish descriptions of demons);

30- 55; who is on B's side, who honors the law?; how does B react to the relentless attacks? what other assaults are attempted?;

56-70; who addresses Mara - who is this being "of invisible shape, but of preeminent glory"?; how does this being describe B?; at what point does B sit? what is Mara's reaction?

71-73; how does the world change with B's triumph?