

Title

**THE LIFE
of
BUDDHA**

According to the Legends of Ancient India

By

Andre Ferdinand Herold

Translated from the French by

Paul C. Blum

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Foreword

This Life of Buddha is not a work of fiction, and I think it would be well to mention the books, both ancient and modern, which I have most frequently consulted.

I have, for the most part, relied upon the Lalita-Vistara. This book is a jumbled collection of legends and scholastic dissertations, and yet in these pages are preserved many precious traditions regarding the Buddha's origin, his childhood and his youth, and here, likewise, we are told of his early education and of his first deeds.

I have also made great use of an excellent poem, the Buddhacarita of Asvaghosa. In a few of the chapters I have repeated the lines almost word for word. The text of the Buddhacarita was edited by E. B. Cowell.

In the Life, I have interpolated several Jatakas. These are stories in which the Buddha recalls his former lives. Some of them will be found in a vast collection, the Avadanasataka.

Two modern books: Le Buddha, by H. Oldenberg, translated by A. Foucher, and the Histoire du Bouddhisme Dans L'Inde, by H. Kern, translated by Gedeon Huet, have also been very useful to me; as well as other works that have appeared in scientific reviews. Thus, for the touching story of Visvantara, I am indebted to a sogdian version published by R. Gauthiot in the Journal Asiatique.

Finally, I would be guilty of the deepest ingratitude if I did not publicly thank my old friend Sylvain Levi for his generous and kindly advice.

And may the reader find of interest this marvellous story of Prince Siddhartha who, through meditation, was able to attain supreme wisdom.

A. F. Herold

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Part One

1. King Siddhodana And Queen Maya

Serene and magnificent was this city where once had dwelt the great hermit Kapila. It seemed to be built out of some fragment of the sky: the walls were like clouds of light, and the houses and gardens radiated a divine splendor. Precious stones glistened everywhere. Within its gates darkness was as little known as poverty. At night, when silver moonbeams fingered each turret, the city was like a pond of lilies; by day, when the terraces were bathed in golden sunshine, the city was like a river of lotuses.

King Siddhodana reigned in Kapilavastu; he was its brightest ornament. He was kindly and generous, modest and just. He pursued his bravest enemies, and they fell before him in battle like elephants struck down by Indra; and as darkness is dissipated by the sharp rays of the sun, even so were the wicked vanquished by his radiant glory. He brought light into the world, and he pointed out the true path to those who were close to him. His great wisdom gained for him many friends, many courageous, discerning friends, and as starlight intensifies the brightness of the moon, so did their brilliance enhance his splendor.

Siddhodana, king of the Sakya race, had wed many queens. His favorite among these was Maya.

She was very beautiful. It was as if the Goddess Lakshmi herself had strayed into the world. When she spoke, it was like the song of birds in the spring, and her words were sweet and pleasant. Her hair was the color of the black bee; her forehead was as chaste as a diamond; her eyes as cool as a young blue-lotus leaf; and no frown ever marred the exquisite curve of her brows.

She was virtuous. She desired the happiness of her subjects; she was attentive to the pious precepts of her teachers. She was truthful, and her conduct was exemplary.

King Siddhodana and Queen Maya lived quietly and happily in Kapilavastu.

One day, the queen bathed and perfumed her body, then attired herself in a delicate, colourful robe and covered her arms with jewels. Golden bangles tinkled about her ankles, and her face was radiant with happiness as she sought the king's presence.

Siddhodana was seated in a great hall. Sweet music was lulling his tranquil reverie. Maya took the seat on his right, and she said to him:

"Deign to listen, my lord. Deign to grant the favor I have to ask of you, O protector of the earth."

"Speak, my queen," replied Siddhodana. "What is this favor?"

"My lord, there is great suffering in the world, and I look with compassion on all who suffer. I would be helpful to my fellow-creatures; I would close my mind to evil thoughts. And since I shall forbear doing and thinking evil, since I am thus kind to myself, I would be helpful, I would be kind to others, too. I will put aside pride, O king, and I will not listen to

the voice of evil desire. I will never utter a vain or dishonorable word. My lord, henceforth I will lead a life of austerity; I will fast; and I will never bear ill will or commit wickedness, suffer anxiety or hatred, know anger or covetousness. I will be satisfied with my lot; I will forswear deceit and envy; I will be pure; I will walk in the straight path; and I will practise virtue. And because of these things my eyes are now smiling, because of these things my lips are now joyous."

She paused a moment. The king gazed at her in tender admiration. She continued:

"My lord, I ask you to respect my austere life. Do not enter the dim forest of desire; allow me to observe the holy law of abstinence. I shall repair to those apartments that are in the lofty reached of the palace, and there, where the swans build their nests, have prepared for me a couch strewn with flowers, a soft, perfumed couch. My maidens shall attend to my wants, and you may dismiss the eunuchs, the guards and all vulgar servants. I would be spared the sight of ugliness, the sound of revelry and the odor of things unpleasant."

She said no more. The king replied:

"So let it be! The favor you ask, I grant." And he commanded:

"Up there, in the lofty reaches of the palace, where the air throbs with the song of the swans, let the queen, resplendent in gold and precious stones, rest on a couch of rare flowers; and let there be music. And to her maidens, gathered about her, she will be like a daughter of the Gods in some celestial garden!"

The queen rose.

"It is well, my lord," said she. "But hear me further. Free your prisoners. Give generously to the poor. Let men and women and children be happy! Be merciful, O king, and, that the world may be joyous, be a father to all living creatures!"

She then left the hall and went to the top of the royal palace.

It was the advent of spring. Birds darted and wheeled above the terraces; birds sang in the trees. The gardens were in flower; on the surface of the ponds, the lotus buds were unfolding. And, as the queen sought her bower, the piping note of flutes and the deeper harmony of strings resounded of their own accord, and a refulgent glory appeared over the palace, a glory so perfect that the sunlight turned to shadow.

2. Maya's Dream

The same hour that spring was born, a dream came to Maya as she slept. She saw a young elephant descending from the sky. It had six great tusks; it was as white as the snow on mountain-tops. Maya saw it enter her womb, and thousands of Gods suddenly appeared before her. They praised her with immortal songs, and Maya understood that nevermore would she know disquietude or hatred or anger.

Then she awoke. She was happy; it was a happiness she had never felt before. Arising, she arrayed herself in bright colors, and, followed by her most beautiful maidens, she passed through the palace-gates. She walked in the gardens until she came to a little wood, where she found a shaded seat. Then she sent two of her maidens to King Suddhodana with this message: "That the king should come to the wood; Queen Maya wishes to see him and will await him there."

The king promptly complied. He left the hall where, with the help of his counsellors, he had been administering justice to the inhabitants of the city. He walked toward the wood, but, as he was about to enter, a strange feeling came over him. His limbs faltered, his hands trembled and tears welled from his eyes. And he thought:

"Never, not even in the heat of battle when fighting my bravest enemies, have I felt as profoundly disturbed as at this moment. Why is it I cannot enter the wood where the queen awaits me? Can anyone explain my agitation?"

Whereupon a great voice thundered in the sky:

"Be happy, King Suddhodana, worthiest of the Sakyas! He who seeks supreme knowledge is about to come into the world. He has chosen your family to be his family because of its fame, good fortune and virtue, and for mother he has chosen the noblest of all women, your wife, Queen Maya. Be happy, King Suddhodana! He who seeks supreme knowledge would fain be your son!"

The king knew that the Gods were speaking, and he rejoiced. Regaining his serenity, he entered the wood where Maya awaited him.

He saw her; quietly, without arrogance, he asked:

"Why did you send for me? What do you wish?" The queen told him of the dream she had had; then added:

"My lord, there are brahmans who are clever at interpreting dreams. Send for them. They will know if the palace has been visited by good or evil, and if we should rejoice or mourn."

The king agreed, and brahmans familiar with the mystery of dreams were summoned to the palace. When they had heard Maya's story they spoke in this manner:

"A great joy is to be yours, O king, O queen. A son will be born to you, distinguished by the favour of the Gods. If, one day, he should renounce royalty, leave the palace, cast love aside; if, seized with compassion for the worlds, he should live the wandering life of a monk, he will deserve marvellous praise, he will richly deserve magnificent gifts. He will be adored by the worlds, for he will give them that which they hunger after. O master, O mistress, your son will be a Buddha!"

The brahmans withdrew. The king and queen looked at each other, and their faces were radiant with happiness and peace. Suddhodana then ordered that alms be distributed to the poor in Kapilavastu; and food was given to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, and the women received flowers and perfume. Maya became the object of their veneration; the sick crowded

her path, and when she extended her right hand they were cured. The blind saw, the deaf heard, the dumb spoke, and when the dying touched a blade of grass she had gathered they recovered at once their health and their strength. And above the city a ceaseless melody was borne on the wind, exquisite flowers rained from the sky, and songs of gratitude rose on the air around the palace walls.

3. The Birth of Siddhartha

Months passed. Then, one day, the queen knew that the time was approaching for her son to be born. She went to King Suddhodana, and she said to him:

"My lord, I would wander through the happy gardens. Birds are singing in the trees, and the air is bright with flower-dust. I would wander through the happy gardens."

"But it will weary you, O queen," replied Suddhodana. "Are you not afraid?"

"The innocent being that I carry in my womb must be born amid the innocence of budding flowers. No, I will go, O master, I will go into the flower-gardens."

The king yielded to Maya's wish. He said to his servants:

"Go into the gardens and deck them out in silver and in gold. Drape the trees with precious hangings. Let everything be magnificent, for the queen will pass."

Then he addressed Maya:

"Array yourself, to-day, in great splendor, O Maya. Ride in a gorgeous palanquin; let your most beautiful maidens carry you. Order your servants to use rare perfumes; have them wear ropes of pearls and bracelets of precious stones; have them carry lutes and drums and flutes, and sing sweet songs that would delight the Gods themselves."

Suddhodana was obeyed, and when the queen reached the palace-gates the guards greeted her with joyous cries. Bells pealed gaily, peacocks spread their gorgeous tail-feathers, and the song of swans throbbed in the air.

They came to a wood where the trees were in bloom, and Maya ordered them to set down the palanquin. She stepped out and began wandering about, aimlessly. She was happy. And behold! She found a rare tree, the branches drooping under their burden of blossoms. She went up to it; gracefully extending her hand, she drew down a branch. Suddenly, she stood very still. She smiled, and the maidens who were near her received a lovely child into their arms.

At that same moment all that was alive in the world trembled with joy. The earth quivered. Songs and the patter of dancing feet echoed in the sky. Trees of all seasons burst into flower, and ripe fruit hung from the branches. A pure, serene light appeared in the sky. The sick were rid of their suffering. The hungry were satisfied. Those to whom wine had played false became sober. Madmen recovered their reason, the weak their strength, the poor their wealth. Prisons opened their gates. The wicked were cleansed of all evil.

One of Maya's maidens hastened to King Suddhodana and joyously exclaimed:

"My lord, my lord, a son is born to you, a son who will bring great glory to your house!"

He was speechless. But his face was radiant with joy, and he knew great happiness.

Presently he summoned all the Sakyas, and he commanded them to accompany him into the garden where the child had been born. They obeyed, and, with a host of brahmins in attendance, they formed a noble retinue as they gravely followed the king.

When he came near the child, the king made a deep obeisance, and he said:

"Do you bow as I bow before the prince, to whom I give the name Siddhartha."

They all bowed, and the brahmins, inspired by the Gods, then sang:

"All creatures are happy, and they are no longer rough, those roads travelled by men, for he is born, he who gives happiness: he will bring happiness into the world. In the darkness a great light has dawned, the sun and the moon are like dying embers, for he is born, he who gives light: he will bring light into the world. The blind see, the deaf hear, the foolish have recovered their reason, for he is born, he who restores sight, and restores hearing, and restores the mind: he will bring sight, he will bring hearing, he will bring reason into the world. Perfumed zephyrs ease the suffering of mankind, for he is born, he who heals: he will bring health into the world. Flames are no longer pitiless, the flow of rivers has been stayed, the earth has trembled gently: he will be the one to see the truth."

4. Asita's Prediction

The great hermit Asita, whose austerities were pleasing to the Gods, heard of the birth of him who was to save mankind from the torment of rebirth. In his thirst for the true law, he came to the palace of King Suddhodana and gravely approached the women's quarters. His years and his learning lent him great dignity.

The king showed him the courtesies that custom prescribed and addressed him in a seemly manner:

"Happy, indeed, am I! Truly, this child of mine will enjoy distinguished favor, for the venerable Asita has come purposely to see me. Command me. What must I do? I am your disciple, your servant."

The hermit, his eyes shining with the light of joy, gravely spoke these words:

"This has happened to you, O noble, generous and hospitable king, because you love duty and because you are ever kind to those who are wise and to those who are full of years. This has happened to you because your ancestors, though rich in land and rich in gold, were above all rich in virtue. Know the reason for my coming, O king, and rejoice. In the air I heard a divine voice speaking and it said: 'A son has been born to the king of the Sakyas, a

son who will have the true knowledge.' I heard these words, and I came, and my eyes shall now behold the glory of the Sakyas."

Overwhelmed with joy, the king went to fetch the child. Taking him from his nurse's breast, he showed him to the aged Asita.

The hermit noticed that the king's son bore the marks of omnipotence. His gaze hovered over the child, and presently his lashes were wet with tears. Then he sighed and turned his eyes to the sky.

The king saw that Asita was weeping, and he began to fear for his son. He questioned the old man:

"You say, O venerable man, that my son's body differs little from that of a God. You say that his birth was a wondrous thing, that in the future his glory will be supreme, yet you look at him with eyes that are filled with tears. Is his life, then, to be a fragile thing? Was he born only to bring me sorrow? Must this new branch wither before it has burst into flower? Speak, O saintly man, speak quickly; you know the great love a father bears his son."

"Be not distressed, O king," replied the hermit. "What I have told you is true: this child will know great glory. If I weep, it is for myself. My life draws to a close and he is born, he who will destroy the evil of rebirth. He will surrender sovereign power, he will master his passions, he will understand truth, and error will disappear in the world before the light of his knowledge, even as night flees before the spears of the sun. From the sea of evil, from the stinging spray of sickness, from the surge and swell of old age, from the angry waves of death, from these will he rescue the suffering world, and together they will sail away in the great ship of knowledge. He will know where it takes its rise, that swift, wonderful, beneficent river, the river of duty; he will reveal its course, and those who are tortured by thirst will come and drink of its waters. To those tormented by sorrow, to those enslaved by the senses, to those wandering in the forest of existences like travellers who have lost their way, he will point out the road to salvation. To those burning with the fire of passion, he will be the cloud that brings refreshing rain; armed with the true law, he will go to the prison of desires where all creatures languish, and he will break down the evil gates. For he who will have perfect understanding will set the world free. Therefore do not grieve, O king. He alone is to be pitied who will not hear the voice of your son, and that is why I weep, I who, in spite of my austerities, in spite of my meditations, will never know his message and his law. Yes, even he is to be pitied who ascends to the loftiest gardens of the sky."

5. Siddhartha at the Temple

They pleased Suddhodana at first, these words of Asita's, and he pondered them. "So my son will live, and live gloriously," he thought, but then he became anxious. For it had been said that the prince would renounce royalty, that he would lead the life of a hermit, and did that not mean that at his death Suddhodana's family would cease?

But his anxiety was short-lived, for since the birth of Siddhartha the king could undertake nothing that did not prosper. Like a great river whose waters are swollen by many tributaries, each day new riches poured into his treasury; the stables were too small to hold the horses and