



Buddha

a poem by

A. Christina Albers

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from a Volume in Honour of B.C. Law,
Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute

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PREFACE TO THIS EDITION

I found this short and memorable poem retelling the Buddha story in an obscure Volume in Honour of B.C. Law that was published by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Poona, India in 1946.

I applied for copyright release from the Institute but had no reply. If anyone is claiming copyright on the work and doesn't want it published here please let me know and I will take it down immediately.

Ms. Albers was the author of numerous books and articles on both Buddhist and Hindu subjects. Amongst her other works I have found: Buddhist tales for children; Ancient tales of Hindustan; Ram-Sita, the Ramayana in verse; Yogmaya and other dramatic poems; and an article on Vaisakha.

I have made some very small corrections to the printed edition, mainly by way of punctuation which wasn't always clear, and one or two spellings mistakes. I also added a chapter title no 8: The Awakening as it seemed to be needed, and added in chapter numbering.

Ms. Albers used a mixture of Sanskrit and Pali spellings with no clear line between them, I have therefore left them as they stand in the original.

Ānandajoti Bhikkhu

January, 2011

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THE YOUNG PRINCE

MURAL PAINTING AT PO WIN DAUNG, MYANMAR

1: KAPILAVASTU

A sylvan summer night, the pine trees swayed
Their emerald arms gently in sighing cadence
Mellow, diaphanous, the moonlit air
Now waved its element in gentle breezes
Laden with mingled perfumes, wafted sweet
By jasmin, lilac, rose and violet.
And on the garden and the palace walls
A silver moonlit peace guarded the slumber;
And rested the fair queen in royal hall
On silken cushions, white, lavender scented,
White silver moonlight played upon her bed,
Virgin and holy, and into her dreaming
A mystic ray of rosy vision stole:
A starlit elephant, shining in glory,
Thrice trumpeted and vanished in her heart.
Then came an untold peace upon her being
And an all hallowed bliss filled all the air.
Sweetly soft, whispering voices holy anthems
Foretold the coming of a great event.
And knew the Queen she was a chosen mother
A glorious being would descend to earth.

2: LUMBINĪ

A garden, where in silver melody
Soft spirit voices whispered amid branches,
Laden with bloom of lavender and pearl,
Where lithe gazelles brouzed upon emerald grasses
And violet bordered brooklets joined their lay,
With carols of soft-throated plumed musicians
While humming birds with topaz wing outspread
Whirled love-charmed round a honey laden lotus.
All, all was peace and spirit harmony.
Here neath a tree, which bore a lightsome burden
Of chrysophrase and lilac-rose-hued love,
There stood a lady, graceful, tall and slender.
The lovelight of her soulful midnight eyes
Outshone in splendour all that garden-beauty,
Held all the mystery of suns and stars.
And the fond branches, deep in worship bending
Formed over her a shading canopy.
And on her form, in mellifluous showers
Rained fragrant bloom of lilac and of rose,
While neath her feet gold waves of flowers burgeoned.
And stood the Queen erect in majesty;
Nor felt a pang or pain that holy moment.

Thus came He forth, Buddha, the holy child.
But could the world not hold her; her life's mission
Being fulfilled, upon the seventh day
That marked the advent of the Heaven hero
Queen Māyā closed her eyes to earthly scenes.
The infant Prince received the name, Siddhārtha,
His mother's sister took Him in her care.
Upon the child's form were the signs of Lordship
Which marked Him Master over men and gods.
And wondrous things foretold divining sages:
He would leave home and wander lonely forth
To find the path that leads unto salvation
For men and gods and for all living kind.
Which hearing, King Śuddhodana, the father
Felt sore at heart, sought to outgo stern fate.
Gave orders that before the Prince be uttered,
As he grew up, no single word of woe.
He should not know that in the world is sorrow.
For him was but the happiness of life,
Built gorgeous palaces and pleasure gardens
Where the young Prince should spend His childhood's days.

3: CHILDHOOD

Then grew the child from babe to sunny boyhood,
Full ripe in mind, and mastered He the lore
Of books and scroll, and all that wise instructors
Could place before Him, and it soon was found
The teachers were the pupils of their pupil.
Yet was He ever meek and courteous
But was it seen that with advancing years
He courted loneliness and silent places
And once while sitting thus in fond dream state
In still repose in sylvan garden bower,
He did, behold on high a fleecy cloud
Swift moving and of scintillating whiteness:
A flock of noble swans on northward flight
Steered towards Himalayan height; their snowy plumage,
The lovenotes that they sent through the still air,
The slender grace of their soft swaying movement,
All these touched deeply the young boy's full soul
And looked he long upon that scene of beauty.
When lo, from that white cloud of winged love
A still form dropped, its pure snow stained with crimson.
Then stirred deep anguish young Siddhārtha's heart.
He took the bird, loosened the deadly arrow

And stemmed the crimson flood with skilful hand.
But now appeared his kinsman, Devadatta,
With haughty mien and speaking angry words,
‘Give me the bird: the prey goes to the hunter,
My arrow brought the swan unto the ground.’
But spake Siddhārtha gently, ‘Nay, my cousin.
You killed, but I restored his gasping breath.
Greater than death is life, and he who giveth
Life to a dying form does better deed
Than does the black hand of the wanton slayer.’
Then nursed the bird back unto health and strength
Till it could join its tribe in the free ether.

4: THE BRIDE

Śuddhodana, remembering prophecies
Liked not the brooding mind of young Siddhārtha,
And on advice of the State Ministers
Arranged for the young Prince His early nuptials.
Then went the royal mandate through the land:
The youthful maidens of the Princely houses
Were told to come to Śuddhodana's Court;
And they appeared, a glorious procession:
The golden dew of budding maidenhood
The rosy buds of young life's glowing spring time.
Each was to get a present from the Prince.
And robed in garments bright and iridescent,
That vied with rose beauty of each face,
They passed the Throne shyly their lashes lifting
And then moved on, blushing with timid smile,
Till came the last flower of that golden garland,
The fairest of the Princely maidens all,
Yaśodharā, a spring of laughing water,
Not timid she, but frankly stepped she forth.
The deep look of her eye, her very presence
Awakened memories in Siddhārtha's mind
Of a great love in long forgotten ages,

And each saw in the other's soul revealed
Its own pure higher self, its greater being.
And was Yaśodharā the chosen bride.
But in those days, when princes wooed a maiden
They had to win the prize by feat of arms.
Then were the heralds sent through all the kingdom
And came the young Knights for the tournament.
But none surpassed the Prince in manly vigour,
In courage and in military skill.
And now the bridal of unequalled splendour,
And then fond home days in the palace walls.
In time a child was born, a son, Rāhula.
The good king's father-heart at last felt peace.
'My son has found His own, His heart is happy.'
He knew not the great soul of his own son.

5: THE FOUR SIGNS

Siddhārtha felt anew His life's great mission,
Expressed a wish to see the world outside,
Then were the roads made bright by royal mandate,
Garlands and waving flags welcomed the Prince.
But in celestial hall the gods held counsel,
And well disguised appeared upon the road
An aged man feeble and palsy stricken
He cried in agony, held trembling hand,
Pleading for alms to still his gnawing hunger,
Scarce could he speak, his voice was choked by cough.
Then driving on beneath the swaying garlands,
They saw beside the road a writhing form
In pain and agony, weeping and groaning.
'Help', cried he feebly, 'help me, Oh good Prince,
Or I shall die ere dawns another morning.'
Shuddered the Prince at the woe-stricken sights,
And ever more felt all the world's deep sorrow
And asked He sadly of His charioteer,
'When ills and weakness can hold out no longer,
What follows then?' 'Then follows death, my Lord.
The final which awaits all living beings.
'And what is death? I never heard that word.'

But soon He saw, a group of weeping mourners,
Lamenting and bemoaning bitter fate,
Came down the country road in slow procession.
And at their head walked four, with solemn step
Bearing a cot decked with a snow-white cover.
‘And who lies there so still that sheet beneath?’
‘That is a corpse, my Lord, stiff, cold and lifeless,
An empty shell from which the soul has fled.’
A ghastly flame, that gleamed by the near river
Soon told the tale: the end, the end of all.
The Lord looked at the gruesome scene and questioned,
‘Is there no way then out of all this woe?’
‘Ah, no my Lord, from this there is no rescue.’
Then driving home, they met upon the road,
One, calm and stately, peace upon his features.
‘And Channa, who is this,’ thus asked the Prince
‘Upon whose face rests such a deep contentment?’
‘That is a monk, who did forsake the world,
And found his peace within the realm of silence.’
Then knew the Prince of men His time was ripe.
The great world called Him and He could not linger.



THE RENUNCIATION

MURAL PAINTING AT PO WIN DAUNG, MYANMAR

6: THE FAREWELL

And as He went to leave parental halls,
His strong heart felt its manly pulses throbbing.
Then hushed and solemnly with noiseless step
He walked the long porphyry pillared passage
That led into a hallowed sanctuary,
Well sentinelled by gold-edged samite curtains.
And pushing with light hand the folds aside
He gazed upon that star-blessed scene before Him.
Here lay the Pearl, that His heart's inmost core
Had cherished through unnumbered passing ages,
A love that bore the test of centuries.
And He beheld again, with inward vision
Fond golden days of long forgotten lives.
So calm she lay, her waving hair half hiding
The mystic, occult beauty of her face.
And resting on her heaving, ivory bosom,
Clasped in the lily softness of her arms,
His only child, eye-lids in slumber drooping.
And heaved the pulses of His manly heart.
But heard His soul beneath this fond love-vision
A low voiced whining, weeping, burning sobs,

Saw wringing hands and ghastly, gore-stained faces
Curses and tears upon the sougning wind:
The bleeding soul-cry of all vast creation.
Then burned His heart in anguish and He went,
Kingdom and power and wealth and love forsaking.
And tarried He no more, but with firm step
Took the bleak roadway of the homeless wanderer.

7: BUDDHA GAYĀ

Now onward wandering from place to place
Met many sā dhus, each holding a doctrine.
Among these were five pious mendicants,
In a sequestered grove near Uruvelā.
Their lives were pure, but their austerities
Extreme and stringent beyond human reason.
Here stayed the Lord sometime, but soon He found
Not here could He accomplish His life's mission,
And grew His frame so weak that in the end
He fainted, lay exhausted by the wayside.
A herdsman came that way, driving his flock.
He saw that noble form all prostrate lying.
Then from the teeming udder of a ewe,
He pressed into His mouth its milky substance,
And lo, the Lord revived and opened His eyes.
Still felt He weak and neath the sylvan verdure
The cooling foliage of a shading tree
He found a seat. Here deep in meditation
Sujātā saw Him, pious herdsman's wife,
Unto whose mother-heart the gods had granted
The longed for precious gift of a son-child.
She sought a holy man, to whom to offer

A gift prepared by her own pious hand:
A bowl of milk-rice, served in golden basin.
She saw the Lord in glory neath that tree,
Thought Him a god and prostrating in worship,
She placed the bowl of milk-rice at His feet.
The Lord partook and felt His body stronger.

8: THE AWAKENING

And now comes the great moment of His life!
Behold ye suns and moons the Śākyamuni:
The time has come, He sits beneath the tree.
Behold the tree, laden with glowing clusters
Of vivid bloom, brilliant in soft-tinged rose,
Veiled in a lustrous chrysophrase, and blending
Its hue and fragrance with young spring's full lite.
Bend the green branches down in fond obeisance.
A hallowed murmur runs from star to star,
And stand the gods hushed in mute expectation,
While through the land of downfall and black sin
Strange whispers pass of hope and coming freedom,
And undulating waves of occult force
Flow through all throbbing hearts from brute to human.
Now Māra, seeing, comes with his mad hosts
On the winged wind of an unbridled fury,
And opens all the flood-gates of his hate.
But fire and curses, all hell's gruesome torrents
Cannot subdue the Prince of gods and men.
The victory shines on His imperious features
And from the wellspring His valiant heart



THE AWAKENED ONE

MURAL PAINTING AT PO WIN DAUNG, MYANMAR

An unquenched fire of love and peace is flaming.
All Māra's hosts of lurid screaming ghouls
Cannot do harm e'en to his spotless garment.
Now turns in tenfold wrath the evil one,
'You have not made the five great gifts Siddhārtha,
My teeming hosts bear witness unto me.
Speak now you, Śākya-prince, who is your witness?'
Then rose ten million voices from the soil,
And spake the mighty earth in roaring thunder,
'We bear Thee witness, dauntless Śākya-prince.'
Now fled all hell's wild hosts in dread confusion.
The morning dawns, the victory is won.
And oh, the glory of that love-charmed morning
O'er all creation hung the silver veil
Of a great dream, where rosy beacons glimmered
Inviting to a world of mellow rest,
Where pain is put to sleep pearl oases,
The wind filled sails of all unquenched desire
Are furled. The craft playing on waveless ocean
Will find its harbour on a starlit shore,
That tranquil land of dew-kissed lustrous silence,
The morning isle of a perennial dawn.

9: THE DEER PARK

Now in the fulness of His Buddhahood
He walked the road that led unto Benares
Where the five comrades of His former days
Were keeping rest. Seeing His form approaching,
They whispering spake, 'Behold He has come back!
But we will not now greet Him as Preceptor.'
But when they saw His soul's full majesty,
Upon His noble brow wisdom's bright splendour,
Those deep eyes with unfathomed glory filled,
They bowed their heads in reverent obeisance,
And fell in adoration at His feet.
And here, near Kāshī, in the sylvan deer park
He set in motion the great 'Wheel of Law',
That Wheel that sent its beacon through the ages
And left its golden stamp on many lands.
The pebbly desert bears eternal witness,
The sages of the South and northern Lakes
Live by the Law, tell morbid world-tired seekers
Of an effulgent Life that cannot die.
Calmly He sat, His hand elate in blessing.
Drawn by the magic of those towering words,
The flaming devas from supernal regions,

The groaning dwellers of the lampless pit,
And all the speechless dwellers of the forest
Assembled at that grove in harmony,
Joining the five, all listening in mute rapture,
The sylvan harpstring of this rhythmic speech
The mellifluent notes of silver cadence
That from the wellspring of His diamond soul
Gave hope to man and beast and sobbing spirits
And sent its echo over worlds in space.
That was the night of a world stirring rapture
That filled the heaving air with cosmic force,
A spring from which flowed forth an eightfold river,
Which waters still a thirsty world today.

10: KUŚINĀRĀ

Near Kuśinārā in sequestered grove
Four Sāl trees stand, their crowns in rhythm swaying,
A mystic murmur passes through the air.
The young twigs weep and sigh their rosy blossoms,
The melancholy crowns wave doleful dirge,
Mingled with the soft sobbing of the leaves,
The falling tears of foliage laden branches,
The sighing lutestrings of the sougning wind
Adding a sad refrain in soulful cadence.
Nature is stirred unto its inmost core.
The heaving earth, the waves of distant oceans
Call forth mysterious voices from the deep,
And unknown mysteries rise from dark caverns;
Strange occult forces, unknown all to man,
Join in one mighty world encircling anthem,
And blend their voices in a requiem,
While o'er the earth the pall of death is hanging.
But is the ground a carpet of gold bloom
That fall from vivid height in gorgeous showers,
Laden with scent of lavender and myrrh;
And fragrance wafted from celestial gardens
Send waves of light in a transcendent stream.

The air is kindled with love-blazing beauty.
The gods are sending from their unseen realms
A glorious welcome to a world-tired pilgrim,
Who soon will travel through their sunny land,
Into Vastness of unconquered Silence.
And under these four sāl trees stands a couch,
Around which stand in pale and stricken anguish
A multitude, who turn their tear-stained eyes
Upon that couch in poignant adoration.
There in serene, unstricken majesty,
Solemn and calm the conqueror is resting.
Halos of glory from His body shine,
Still speaks His voice, the love-notes gently flowing
In mellifluent cadence, golden stream,
Bidding farewell in those fond, tender accents
That, ah, so oft have made their hearts rejoice.
But now, on every word hang silver teardrops.
‘Weep not for me, my friends, the Law, the Doctrine
That I have given you, shall be your guide,
Be steadfast on the path that I have shown you,
And be ye each a lamp unto himself.
I now go to my final home, Nirvāna,
The weary pathway in Saṃsāra's round
My searching aching feet no more shall wander,

And you awaits the same great Destiny.’
Then came the moment of majestic stillness,
Hushed was the hour, His great heart beat no more.
The conqueror had gone to His Dominions,
That land of bliss beyond all time and space,
Where only love and unchecked thought can follow,
Where change and weeping sorrow are no more,
Where in perennial cosmic silence shrouded
Eternal life rests in transcendent bliss.
Now quaked the earth, the rivers swelled in torrents,
And mystic forces filled the atmosphere.
Down from supernal heights rained flaming garlands
In golden showers on that holy bier.
Now they who mourned turned to their last-love-duty
With weeping hearts and bitter burning tears.
But spake the voice within, that roused to action!
‘Forward, go carry on the flaming torch,
O’er land and seas shall flow the fiery banner,
The world shall know the Lovelight of the Law.’
And thus the Wheel of the great Law is rolling
And will roll on as long as time does last.

**A short but memorable poem retelling the Buddha story by
Ms. A. Christina Albers.**

<http://www.ancient-buddhist-texts.net>

