

Bodh Gaya (Buddha Gaya)

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Welcome to Bodh Gaya (Buddha Gaya) Historical Background

Bodh Gaya (Buddha Gaya) is located at 115 km south of Patna, Bihar in India. It is one of the most sacred places for Buddhists, since it is the only place where Sakyamuni or Shakyamuni ("sage of the Shakyas") could have become a Buddha. Many inscriptions found at Bodh Gaya refer to the pilgrimages from Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and China in the historical past and patronized repairing and installing images of the Buddha. "Then being a quester for the good, searching for the incomparable, matchless path of peace, while wandering through Magadha, the Siddhartha Gautama (Sanskrit; Pali: Siddhattha Gotama) arrived at Uruvela. There he saw a beautiful spot of ground, a charming forest grove, a pleasant clear flowing river with sandy fords, and a village where food could be obtained. He claimed it was a suitable place for spiritual exertion for those noble scions who desire to strive. {Mijjihima Nikaya, Ariya-Pariyesana Sutta, No26, Vol 1, 166}"

Here, more than 2550 years ago (528 BCE), after six years of learning from different teachers, a young ascetic, Prince Siddhartha Gotama, having renounced royal heritage, moved to a place in the mountain called Pragbodhi (prior to Enlightenment) or Dukkara-cariya (practicing strenuous and austere meditation) for first three months alone.

During the fourth month, Siddhartha was joined by his old friend Kondanna and his four colleagues, and all of them further practiced with self-mortification. Ascetic Gotama realized that the enlightenment could not be gained with such utterly exhausted body, and physical fitness was essential for spiritual progress.

He left this place at the end of six months, and decided to nourish the body sparingly and took some coarse food both hard and soft. He stayed and meditated under a tree-shrine on the outskirts of a small village of Uruvela in Magadha. The five disciples, who were attending on Gotama with great hopes thinking whatever truth he would comprehend which would he impart to them, felt disappointed at this unexpected change of method, and leaving to the place - Isipatana, in search of good teacher.

Siddhartha Gotama regained his physical strength with some food, and easily developed the Jhanas. His mind was purified, tranquillized, disciplined, cleansed, free from lust and impurity, pliable, alert, steady and unshakable. He continued meditating and exerted himself one final time to overcome the last traces of doubt, ignorance and desire, under the Bodhi tree (Pipal tree, botanical name, ficus religiosa). On the memorable forenoon, immediately preceding the morn of His Enlightenment, the ascetic Gotama was seated under the Ajapala banyan tree, in close proximity to the Bodhi tree, a generous lady, the daughter of the village chief of Senani, Sujata, expectedly offered the starved Gotama a bowl of keer (sweet thickened milk with rice), specially prepared by her with great care. This was the place where Gotama put the bowl to the river, Nerañjara, which moved upstream. The substantial meal offered by Sujata lasted for seven weeks. Ascetic Gotama got eight handful of grass from a local farmer and spread them beneath the Bodhi tree. From that day evening, Gotama sat cross-legged facing the east with vow to get up only if he attained supreme knowledge. For the next 49 days, the ascetic Gotama was assaulted by the Mara, the tempter, with all sorts of weapons of flood, thunder and lightning. Mara's three beautiful daughters also tried to allure him, but in vain. Ascetic Gotama entered deep states of contemplation and finally attained Samma Sambodhi (the perfectly enlightened) at dawn on Vaisakha Poornima, the full moon day of the spring (April/May) in 528 BCE. Gotama became the Buddha, "the Awakened One"; and later also known as Tathagata (the Perfect One), Sugata (the Accomplished One), Bhagava (the Blessed One) and Shakyamuni.

Seven Sacred Places Seven spots in and around Bodhi tree are also sacred because Gotama Buddha spent a week each at these places for meditating after enlightenment. (1) Bodhi tree: it is the tree where Gotama spent his first week of intense meditation and deeper contemplation. (2) Animeshalochana: It is a small hilly place spent by Gotama Buddha for the whole second week, remained standing and gazing uninterruptedly at the Bodhi tree from the north-east side, for

having helped him in attaining his quest. (3) Chankramana: or the jewel walk is the spot where Gotama Buddha spent the third week in meditation, walking back and forth, from the Bodhi tree to the unblinking spot, where the lotus flowers are said to be sprung up. (4) Ratanaghara: It is situated at the north-west of the Bodhi tree, where Gotama Buddha sat for deeper meditation for the fourth week and attained higher modes of exposition, i.e., Abhidharma Nyaya. It is the place where the Buddha made further analysis of the law of cause and effect, and the blue, yellow, red, white and orange rays emanated from the body of the Buddha as he meditated. (5) Ajapala Nigrodha: It is another type of Banyan tree, called Ajapala, where Gotama Buddha spent the fifth week after enlightenment, and a place where Gotama made a response to a question raised by a Brahman, that good karma but not birth made a Brahman. Some says this is a place where Sujāta had offered the Buddha a meal of rice-pudding. (6) Muchalinda Lake: It is a pond/lake where Gotama Buddha spent his sixth week of meditation after the enlightenment, which is situated about 50 meters south of the Bodhi tree. It is a place where the serpent king (Naga) Muchalinda rose up from the water to protect the Buddha from a severe storm created by Mara (the god of chaos) who wanted to disturb the meditation. (7) Rajaratana: It is another type of Banyan tree called Rajaratna (Rajyatna), under which Gotama Buddha spent the seventh and last week after the enlightenment, and preached to the passersby. It is here two merchants, Tapassu and Bliallika of Utkala (Note: Myanmar people believes the place Utkala or Okkala as Yangon, Myanmar and some says that it is Orissa, India), offered the Buddha cakes of barley and honey, and the Buddha gave them sermons with two gems "Buddham saranam gacchami and Dhammam saranam gacchami".

After these seven weeks (49 days) of meditation spent under and around the Bodhi tree, Gotama Buddha left Bodh Gaya to Sarnath (Isipatana) to meet the five ascetics who had left him at Pragbodhi or Dugesvari (Dukkhasariya). He decided to deliver his doctrines in order to turn the First Wheel of Dharma (Dhamma).