

Lesson 1 – REVERENCE

Opening chants & meditation.

Question to think about before the story:

What are some special things about the Buddha that are different from most people?

Story: Birth of Prince Siddhartha

About 2500 years ago, in Kapilavasthu at the base of the Himalayan mountains in a place now called Nepal, lived the Sakya clan, ruled by King Suddhōdana. He had two wives, Queen Mahamaya and her younger sister, Gautami. King Suddhōdana and his wives were very kind, good people, but they had no children. One night, Queen Mahamaya dreamed that she was carried by four heavenly beings to the Himalaya Mountains, where she bathed in a lake and wore heavenly clothes and was adorned with flowers. She lay on a couch, with a silver mountain nearby. A white elephant appeared, holding in its trunk a white flower, and he trumpeted and went around the Queen's couch three times, and then disappeared inside her. When she awoke, she told the King about the dream. At the time of that dream, the Boddhisattwa (one who will become a Buddha) came from a heaven-world (Devaloka) and became Queen Mahamaya's child.

Ten months later, she was riding in a golden palanquin with friends on her way to her parents' home to give birth, and at Lumbini Park there was a garden, and the Queen wanted to stop and relax. She walked to a huge Sala tree and reached for a branch, which moved toward her and formed a curtain, and as she stood she gave birth to the Boddhisattwa. Four deities held the new baby and presented him to the Queen, saying, "Rejoice, O Queen, a son of great power has been born to you!" The newborn Boddhisattwa stood on the ground and took seven steps toward the North, and at each step, a lotus bloom appeared under his foot. With a white umbrella held over him, he looked in the four directions and said, "I am the Highest in the world, I am the best in the world, I am the foremost in the world. This is the last birth, there will be no more births for me." A powerful light went through the whole universe, the heaven-worlds and even to the darkest areas of the universe.

Asita, a great sage (which means a wise holy man), was a friend of King Suddhōdana. Asita heard about the birth of the King's son and came immediately from the Himalaya Mountains to visit. When he arrived at the palace, Queen Mahamaya held the baby Prince with his head toward the great sage so the baby could bow to him. Bowing to the feet is a way of showing reverence. But the baby Prince turned his feet toward Asita. The King then held the baby to bow toward Asita, but again the Prince turned his feet toward Asita. The King tried three times, but the baby did the same thing each time. But Asita was full of joy and saw the 32 signs of a great being on the baby Prince, including long earlobes, long arms, long fingers and toes, golden color skin, long thick eyelashes, very dark eyes, and the shape of a wheel on his feet. Asita told the King not to stop the baby

from turning, but to allow him to worship the baby's feet. Then Asita had tears in his eyes and looked very sad. The royal family became worried, seeing the great sage's tears, and asked, "is there any danger to the Prince?" Asita said, "No harm will touch the Prince, but he is not an ordinary person. He will become enlightened and with great compassion he will be a great teacher of Dharma. My life will end before that, so I will not hear his teaching, so I feel sad."

A few days later, the King invited some astrologers to the palace to tell the Prince's future. They looked at the baby Prince, and said that if he has a family, then he will be king of the world, but if he chooses not to have a family but to be a renunciant, which is a holy man who gives up all worldly things, then he will become the Enlightened One, and will teach truth to the world. The baby Prince was named Siddhartha, and his family name was Gautama.

When Prince Siddhartha was seven days old, his mother Queen Mahamaya died and went to a heaven world, and her sister Gautami took care of him as a mother.

Questions after the story:

1. What does "Bodhisattva" mean?
2. What happened during Queen Mahamaya's dream?
3. What loka (world) did the Bodhisattva come from?
4. What unusual things happened when the baby was born?
5. Why do you think the baby turned his feet toward Asita?
6. How did Asita show reverence to the baby?
7. Why did Asita feel sad?
8. What did the astrologers predict about the baby's future?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

"Pūjārahe pūjayato, Buddhē yadi va sāvake, papañcha samatikkante, tiṇṇa sokapariddave. Te tādise pūjayato, nibbute akutobhaye, nasakkā puññaṃ sankhātum, imettam iti kena ci."

"He who reveres the worthy ones, the Buddhas and their disciples, who have overcome all challenges and unhappiness, he who reveres such peaceful and fearless ones has more merit than can be measured."

Dhammapada 195-196 (14:17-18)

Application of the moral(s) in the story to our daily lives:

What does it mean, to "revere" the Buddha, or to have "reverence"? We might say it means to "respect" the Buddha. When we "respect" someone, we usually mean that we act in a proper manner and do not do anything that is disrespectful. For example, we respect our teachers and other students. The word "revere" means something more than just "respect." To understand the word "reverence," we can remember how Asita felt toward the baby Bodhisattva. How do you think he felt when he first saw the baby Prince? He felt great joy and admiration, knowing how great this baby is - that he will become enlightened and be a great teacher of Dharma. He also felt sad about not living long enough to see him teach

the Dharma. So, he felt that the baby Boddhisattwa was very precious, very valuable to be with.

The word “reverence” or to “revere” means admiring the person’s great qualities, understanding and appreciating the value of that person, how important he is to us, and feeling happiness to see or know about that person. When we revere the Buddha, we think of his special qualities - not the unusual marks that he had on the body, but his personality and the way that he behaved. What are some of these qualities of the Buddha’s personality? He had a virtuous character, self control, great teaching, compassion, and many other qualities that we will learn about in future lessons.

Also, when we revere the Buddha, we feel happiness and gratitude that he has helped the whole world by teaching the Dharma, and that we can learn the Dharma. So, when we bow to the Buddha, we should not bow artificially just because it is proper to bow. Instead, what should we think about? We should carefully think about the good qualities of the Buddha, how special he is, and how fortunate we are to have the Dharma.

Activity to reinforce the lesson:

Word Search - Find and circle 10 words from the story:

R	A	M	F	E	E	T	K	L	U	N
A	D	A	S	I	T	A	I	P	N	E
B	N	H	J	W	R	A	L	H	I	P
H	S	A	K	Y	A	P	K	L	V	A
L	U	M	B	I	N	I	O	R	I	L
O	W	A	G	Y	S	D	A	L	R	Y
T	P	Y	S	R	A	Q	U	E	S	A
U	D	A	V	H	L	Y	O	T	E	L
S	I	D	D	H	A	R	T	H	A	P

Closing chant: Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā! May all beings have happy minds!