THE 12 DEEDS OF A BUDDHA

The twelve deeds show the activities of each Buddha who appears in this world. The Buddha Shakyamuni was the fourth enlightened being to display these deeds. As human beings, the Buddhas go through a worldly and a spiritual training in which they develop extraordinary qualities. They attain enlightenment and pass on their teachings to many people.

One can summarize the life of a historical Buddha in the so-called twelve deeds. These teachings were given by Buddha himself in the Lalitavistara Sutra, which is translated into English under the title “The Voice of the Buddha”. This is a description of the deeds of a Buddha. They are based on the decision of his enlightened mind to re-enter an illusory human body/emanation state (skt.: Nirmanakaya), to spend a lifetime first learning and then working for the benefit of living beings.

The decision to be born in a human form at a particular time depends on three conditions: the wishes he himself has made on the path to Buddhahood, the power of his realization, and the absence of Buddhist teachings at that particular time. At the same time beings in an existing culture must have attained a general maturity or openness that enables a Buddha to set the wheel of teaching in motion.

Furthermore, if there are suitable parents and a suitable environment, a Buddha appears in a human body as a state of emanation so that others can perceive him in his external form and learn from him.

First, according to the traditional explanation, the enlightened mind of a Buddha descends from the so-called "Tushita Heaven," the realm of "Full of Joy," to connect its consciousness with the sperm and egg of its future parents. The mother has strong and impressive dreams in the process.

The historical Buddha was born in Lumbini, on the border between present-day Nepal and India. At the birth itself and shortly thereafter, extraordinary circumstances occur, which show the special nature of this person to those present at an early stage. In the time after that the future Buddha grows up under especially sheltered and protected circumstances. He learns the skills of the respective culture, such as reading, writing, mathematics, art, science and sports, excelling in all areas. Because of his human warmth, his worldly accomplishments already serve as a model for others at this time.

But not only his intellect and body receive good training, but also his feelings. He gives pleasure and enjoys noble companions, to unite male and female qualities.

After the worldly training is completed, his spiritual development begins. He renounces the worldly life out of a deep compassionate desire to overcome the suffering of beings.

He does this first in the form of ascetic practice. He learns from teachers who, in times of spiritual openness and tolerance, are also searching for enlightenment but have not yet found it. The future Buddha very quickly realizes the level of his respective teacher and then looks for a new one.

His path leads him through great obstacles that bring him close to the physical threshold of death. This eventually leads him to the deep realization that the way to overcome all suffering is beyond extremes. From this understanding, he seeks a place where he decides for himself to remain until enlightenment occurs as a full experience.

The future Buddha settles down under a fig tree, the famous Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, northern India, and meditates. His motive is the deep desire to overcome suffering for all lifetimes and thus to share his experience with all beings who desire it. Of course, the ego resists. Its last disturbing feelings, traditionally called Mara, appear in the mind and try to disturb the meditation of the Buddha by cajoling or frightening him. But the future Buddha is no longer impressed by these appearances in the mind.
He thus overcomes the last subtle veils and reaches full enlightenment, the state of omniscience, at the dawn of the full moon day in May, at the age of 35. Now he can call himself Buddha "the awakened one", and begins to "turn the wheel of enlightened teaching." This means that he shows people the way

to liberation from suffering and to enlightenment. In his teachings, he addresses all beings. He gives them what they need and can understand, according to their ability and situation in life. Buddha does not discriminate according to origin or social status. After a total of 45 years of teaching, Buddha dies of food poisoning in Kushinagara.
He "enters parinirvana," showing the impermanence of conditioned existence.

This general course of Buddha's life is not unique; rather, these Buddha deeds repeat themselves as long as there are worlds in which Buddhas show themselves and suffering has not yet ended for all beings.

Here again is an overview of the Twelve Deeds:

1. Descent from the realm of "Full of Joy".
2. Entry into the womb
3. Birth
4. Study of crafts and arts
5. Enjoying life in the palace
6. Renunciation
7. Asceticism
8. Going to Bodhgaya
9. Conquering the obstacle forces
10. Enlightenment
11. Turning the dharma wheel
12. Entering parinirvana