

Contemporary Mystic Christianity **Bible Self-Study Supplement**

The Lord Gautama Buddha

He who seeth me everywhere and seeth everything in me, of him will I never lose hold and he shall never lose hold of me.

— *Bhagavad-Gita.*

From approximately 650 to 450 B.C. a new mental and spiritual impulse traveled round the globe. With it came a number of illumined messengers who took up the Christ Light laid down by their predecessors and again directed people's attention to the One who was to come before the Age had run its course.

Gautama the Buddha in India, Lao-Tze and Confucius in China, Zoroaster in Persia and Pythagoras in Greece were, perhaps, the outstanding messengers of this midpoint of the Arian Age. At a corresponding point the Hebrews entered upon their Exilic Period, from which they emerged with a Bible and a messianic program that originated with the Exile prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. Through them the Christ Impulse came to a focus in the land of Palestine.

The onward march of materialism was temporarily stayed as interest was intensified in matters pertaining to life and death, to soul and body, to the visible and the invisible. The

harvest was white and the Illumined came forth to labor in the field.

It has been said that the messenger to India at this crucial time embodied the highest type of intelligence the human race could produce; that in Gautama Buddha the human brain achieved the utmost of which it was capable; that higher thoughts than his could not express through a human brain, for in him the Aryan pattern was brought to perfection. The fact that the messenger stood upon the shoulders of mental giants does not in the least diminish his own stature. India's greatest were his pedestal, but he himself was a living monument to ancient Aryan wisdom.

Nowhere in English literature is the Buddha's life more beautifully described than in Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* — a work that transmits the soul-essence of Buddhism, as no scholarly discussion could ever do, by preserving the glamor of holy legend which speaks a language all its own. Hence, this story of Gautama's life is taken from Sir Edwin Arnold's poem in preference to more erudite biographies by scholars and historians. In either case the main events are much the same.

The poet opens his narrative with a prologue in heaven. There, in company with the Illumined, the Lord Buddha consecrates and dedicates his successor, the Lord Maitreya, who is made ready against the time when once more the

Golden Age is to descend with him out of heaven. After this, he observes the Rite of the Four Scrutinies: where to be born, of whom to be born, choice of mission, and where to perform it. The remainder of the action takes place upon the earth.

The Holy Birth

On the day of the Full Moon at the Midsummer Festival, Queen Maya arises early, bathes in perfumed water as is her custom and performs her devotions. Then, resting upon the royal couch, she is transported into a dream realm where she learns that she is to become the mother of one who will remove veils of ignorance and sin from the world.

Sir Edwin Arnold claims that "The Sun stood by the Crab" when the Buddha was born, and that "The Moon shone by the Crab" when he made his great renunciation — a most interesting sidelight.

The Burmese story tells how Queen Maia desired in her heart that her son be born in Dewah, the country of her own people. She persuaded the King, her husband, to let her go and he sent her forth in a golden palanquin, escorted by a splendid retinue. About midway was a beautiful pleasure garden shaded by huge Engyin trees. This grove was a glorious mass of flowers and fruit from the roots to the topmost branches of the trees. Swarms of vari-

colored bees flew in and out among the blossoms and multitudes of gaily plumaged birds filled the air with their song. Here the Queen paused and attendants bore her into the quiet of the wood, where four Brahmins appeared and received the new-born infant into their hands, saying, "Give yourself up, O Queen, to joy and rejoicing, here is the precious and wonderful fruit of your womb."

The Gita tells us that from the garden went messengers to the Kapilavastu palace of the King, accompanied by hosts of Angels, singing: "A Son is born to thee who will become a Buddha."

Strong and firm of purpose, pure in mind as the water lily, was Maya, mother of Gautama Buddha. Her child came unaccompanied by suffering, for she was without the tormenting beliefs of illusory mind. His birth was another joy added to the many of the preceding months when she spent her time in silence and in meditation on holy things. She thus observed rules of pure discipline and the Bodhisattva was born "from her right side" without causing pain. "Not falling headlong was he born," the poet sings, "but calm, collected, gloriously manifested, perfectly adorned, sparkling with light he came from the womb, as when the Sun first rises in the East."

He allowed his brightness to be concealed so men could regard his exceeding great glory with unimpaired vision. Yet

those of clear-seeing knew him as the Illumined One he was, for they saw the effulgence of his radiation. The golden light that signals the Bodhisattva shone forth from him and was everywhere diffused. Then upright, firm and unconfused in mind, he took seven steps in four directions, the soles of his feet resting evenly upon the ground as he went, his footmarks bright as seven stars and formed like lotus blossoms. Moving with the majesty of a lion, king of beasts, and looking earnestly toward the four quarters, relates the poet, the princely child spoke with fullest assurance: "This birth is in the condition of a Buddha; after this I have done with renewed birth; now only am I born this once, for the purpose of saving all the world."

From the midst of heaven descended two streams of pure water, one warm and the other cold, to baptize the newborn's head. A jeweled couch was placed in the palace hall for him to sleep upon. Heavenly Kings held fast in their flower-like hands the four feet of the bed, while hosts of Devas raised their voices in heavenly harmony to encourage him in his task of delivering the world from the four human calamities: age, disease, poverty and death. They scattered before him mandara flowers because creation, engulfed in an ocean of pain, was not at once to obtain complete release. Faintest aroma of sandalwood and the delicate fragrance of lilies floated on the air; then, rising through space and commingling, the new scent was wafted back to

earth. Sun and Moon redoubled their light whilst a fire-gleam prevailed without the use of fuel. Stagnant water flowed afresh and polluted streams ran clear, Cloudless the heavens, and all cruel creatures showed a loving heart. Mystic silence descended over nature, and the world hung breathless in the midst of universal tranquility.

Thus has the poet described the coming of this Master Ego, whose love brought a rush of joy to earth from the moment of his birth. A "twice-born" Brahmin famed for wisdom rejoiced, saying "He will bring deliverance to the world."

Observing the rejoicing of the Angels, the holy Sage Asita inquired as to its cause and was told of the hallowed birth. At the palace he blessed the child, adding with tears: "It will not be my good fortune to behold this glorious being when he hath become a Buddha; great indeed is my loss."

On the momentous day of the name-giving ceremony there was a festival in the palace. One hundred and eight Brahmins were invited, eight of whom were interpreters of the infants body marks (spiritual centers). On examining the child, those holy men prophesied that he would become either a universal king or a Buddha. The Brahmins also warned the King that his son would leave the world after seeing the four signs: an old man, a sick man, a corpse and a beggar. The King at once stationed four guards at the four

corners of the palace grounds to prevent any of these tragic conditions from coming to the attention of the young prince.

In later years the Buddha thus described to his disciples the luxurious environment in which he was reared: "I had three palaces, one for the cold season, one for the hot, and one for the rainy season. I was delicate, O monks, extremely delicate. In my dwelling lotus pools had been made, in one blue lotuses, in another red, in another white, all for my sake. I used no sandalwood that was not of Benares, my dress was of Benares cloth, my tunic, my under robe and cloak. Night and day a white parasol was held over me so that I should not be touched by cold or heat, by dust or weeds or dew."

Grown to young manhood, he chose as his wife a refined and gentle maiden named Yasodhara, as beautiful of mind as of body. "She established in the palace purity and quiet, was full of dignity and exceeding grace, like a lofty hill rising up in space or a white autumn cloud, cool and quiet."

For the sake of his noble son, Siddartha's Father lived a pure and holy life, sacrificing to the Moon and performing ritual ablutions in the waters of the Ganges.

When the young Prince rode out in his jewel-emblazoned chariot drawn by four white -horses draped in flowers, he

was not to see anything ugly, suffering or sorrowful. By order of his royal father, no sickness, old age or death was to come into his path. Where he passed the streets were lined with youth and gladness, with happiness and beauty. In such wise the King hoped to avert the destiny foretold by the Sages: that his son would renounce the throne and the world to become a Buddha.

But the Gods were not so easily thwarted. One day as Gautama rode through the city in his chariot, a shriveled old man struggling for breath crossed before him. Horrified, the Prince returned to the palace. On another day, after the King had commanded that the way be adorned with greater beauty than before, Gautama saw a man whose body was swollen and disfigured by disease. A third time, despite exacting precautions, the Prince was halted by a beggar in rags. And a fourth time by a procession of mourners carrying a corpse. According to the legend, a Great One took upon himself these four types to awaken Gautama to his life mission.

Esoterically, this is a way of saying that all mankind is one and that wherever there is suffering, the Most High suffers also. The Vishnu-Purana says that to look upon all beings as equal to oneself, and to love them all as one would love himself, is service to God, for God is incarnate in all forms. This is another phrasing of the grand hypothesis

underlying the highest form of metaphysical healing and salvation: that inasmuch as all men are one in spirit, the suffering of one is the suffering of all, and the glorification of one is the glorification of all. When a Buddha or a Christ attains enlightenment the whole world is enlightened with him. The Buddhist plane of consciousness, the place of cosmic illumination, is the World of Life Spirit — the same as the World of the Cosmic Christ in the Western Wisdom Teachings.

With the superlative intelligence of his Aryan birthright, the Prince pondered on the "Four Calamities" he had seen for the first time and that filled him with sadness and horror. Within his soul stirred the impulse of the great Race Spirit, Manu the Thinker, purposing to carry to its ultimate expression the divine power of reason bestowed upon the Aryan race.

The Prince looked about him but found no consolation in beauty which, to his wondering eyes, appeared but the covering of a charnel pit. He found no peace in wealth, luxury and ease builded on misery, corruption and death. He determined to discover the cause of world sorrow even though it meant renunciation of everything that spelled happiness to him. He would not stop at death if that were necessary, for non-existence was preferable to life as he now beheld it.

Having determined upon the great renunciation, he ordered his charioteer, Channa, to bring Kanlaka, his horse, then went to take his leave of his beautiful young wife and their beloved son. He opened the door of her chamber, where a scented lamp was burning. On the bed strewn with jasmine and other fragrant blossoms lay the sleeping mother of his young son, her hand on the child's head. "If I awaken her," the Prince thought, "her tears and entreaties will only be an obstacle to my going. When I have become a Buddha I will return."

The Temptation

On the day of the Full Moon in the Sign of the Crab, the Gautama departed. As he rode through the city gates, Mara, the tempter, hovered above him in midair and counselled: "Sir, depart not. Upon the seventh day from now the jewel wheel of empire will appear and thou shalt rule over the four great islands and the two hundred small islands that surround them. Sir, turn back."

The Bodhisattva turned not back but continued on his way. Then Mara warned: "Henceforth, whenever thou hast a thought of lust, malice or cruelty, I shall know." And always, like a shadow, the tempter pursued him.

At the borders of the wilderness — a spot still venerated by Buddhists — he parted from Channa and his beloved

Kanlaka, and passed into the forest alone. There he practiced austerities and won renown as a holy ascetic. Soon disciples came to him. For six years he and his five disciples continued practicing austerities, gaining powers which doubtless seemed desirable to others but fell short of Gautama's goal — for he sought the meaning of life and how to conquer sorrow and suffering.

Not having gained what he sought, he finally abandoned austerities; whereupon his five disciples deserted him, saying: "The Gautama has given up striving and has now turned to live the life of abundance."

— ***Corinne Heline***