Dashavatar – Buddha

(Part 1)

The list of Dashavatara varies across sects and regions. The standard list is – Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and Kalki. In other versions, Buddha may be dropped from the list and substituted by regional deities like Vithoba or Jagannatha or Balarama.

Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, from the Kali Yuga, is generally included as an avatar of Vishnu in Hinduism. Buddha was depicted as a compassionate teacher who preached the path of ahimsa.

There lived a King named Shuddhodana in the 6th Century B.C. He was the King of Kapilavastu - a kingdom in the Himalayan plains of what is now Nepal. Shuddhodana and his wife Mahamaya did not have children for many years and longed for an heir. One night, the queen dreamed of a six tusked white elephant, holding a lotus, entering her womb. The next day, the Queen told the King about the dream. They sent for the wise men and asked them about the meaning of the dream. The wise seers predicted that a son would be born to the Queen. Learning of this, the entire kingdom rejoiced.

As was the custom of the day, when the time came near for Queen Mahamaya to have her child, she traveled to her father's kingdom for the birth. While on her way, she rested in the Lumbini garden. There she gave birth to a baby boy.

When the Queen returned to Kapilavastu with the baby, King Shuddhodana was overjoyed and called for a lavish celebration. They named their son Siddhartha - "one who has attained his goals."

In those days the famous sage Asita lived in the Himalayan forests. At the time of Siddhartha's birth, he noticed auspicious signs. Asita journeyed from his mountain-abode and announced that the child would grow up to be a great king or a great sadhu (religious man).

The birth of Prince Siddhartha was the fulfillment of a dream for the King and the Queen. But the happiness was short lived - Queen Mahamaya died seven days after Siddhartha was born. All were shocked and sad. But the saddest person was her husband King Suddhodana. He was also worried because the wise seer predicted that if the prince saw someone old or sick, a dead person, or a monk, he would want to leave the palace and become a monk himself.

The grief-stricken king assigned the task of raising the prince to the Queen's sister - Mahaprajapathi. As the young prince grew up, he was sent to Sage Vishwamitra for his education. Siddhartha quickly mastered all the traditional arts and sciences. He learned sixty-four different languages. He was also skilled at Mathematics.

Siddhartha was kind to one and all. He knew that all living beings wanted to be happy, and that no one wanted grief and sickness. One day Siddhartha saw a lizard eating ants. Soon a snake caught the lizard and ate it. Then, a bird ate the snake. Siddhartha realized each of these creatures' happiness was short-lived and all ended up suffering eventually. Siddhartha thought deeply about what he saw around him. He learned that although he was happy, there was a lot of suffering in life. He felt deep sympathy for all creatures, be it human beings or animals. He could not bear to see any creatures in pain.

When the King and the maids noticed that the prince was often not among the crowd, they went to look for him. They were surprised to find the prince alone, in deep meditation. Remembering the prophecy of the wise-men, that predicted that his son may become a monk, the King built Siddhartha a beautiful palace with a lovely garden to play in. But Siddhartha continued to think about all the suffering and unhappiness around him.

One day, Siddhartha was walking through the palace-woods with his cousin Devdatta, who was very fond of hunting. He had brought his bow and arrows with him. Suddenly, Devdatta saw a white swan flying in the air, and shot at it. Devdatta's arrow wounded the swan severely, and brought it down. Both the boys ran to get the bird. Siddhartha reached the swan first, and found to his surprise that it was still alive. "Oh poor bird! It must be feeling so much pain," Siddhartha thought to himself. He gently removed the arrow. Siddhartha then squeezed some juice from certain medicinal leaves, poured it on the wound to stop the bleeding, and gently stroked the frightened swan. The swan soon revived.

By then, Devdatta had arrived. He demanded the swan from Siddhartha, claiming it as his prize. Siddhartha refused to hand it to the Devdatta. "If it was dead, I would have given it to you," he said, "but isn't. I have nursed the swan back to life. I cannot give it to you now."

Hearing this, Devdatta was extremely enraged. "Let us go to the court of justice and ask who really owns the swan." Siddhartha agreed, so off they went to the royal court for justice. The judge heard the entire matter, and then gave the swan to Siddhartha. "Life is more valuable than anything else in the world," he said. "And so, it certainly must belong to one who tries to save it. A life cannot belong to one who is only trying to destroy it. Thus, the wounded swan belongs to Siddhartha by right."

Siddhartha grew up to be a strong and handsome young man. He married Yashodhara - a beautiful princess of a neighboring kingdom.

Living in the luxury of his palaces, Siddhartha grew increasing restless and curious about the world beyond the palace walls. He demanded that he be permitted to see his people and his lands. Reluctantly, the King allowed Siddhartha to visit to the nearby towns.

On his first visit Siddhartha saw white-haired, wrinkled man dressed in rags. He had never seen anyone old before. His charioteer explained that we will be old one day. Frightened, Siddhartha asked to be taken back home. He could not sleep that night, thinking about old age.

Still, Siddhartha wanted to see more of the world outside.

On his next visit, he saw a man lying on the ground, moaning. Out of compassion, he rushed over to the man. The charioteer warned him that the man was sick and that everyone, even noble people like Siddhartha or the King could get sick. In the palace, the King had protected Siddhartha from seeing anyone sick. Now Siddhartha was seeing a part of life he never imagined.

On the third visit, Siddhartha saw a dead man lying on the ground. The charioteer told him that everyone will die one day.

Back in the palace, Siddhartha thought for a very long time about what he had seen. Finally, he decided to find a way out of the suffering of old age, sickness and death.

On the fourth visit to town, Siddhartha saw a monk meditating. He noticed that the man looked peaceful and happy. The charioteer explained to him that the man was a monk. The monk had left his family, given up his desire for all pleasures, and searched for freedom from suffering. Inspired by the monk, Siddhartha also wanted to leave home and search for freedom from suffering. That same day, his wife gave birth to a lovely baby boy.

One night, when everyone in the palace was asleep, Siddhartha asked his charioteer to prepare his horse. Then, he went where Yasodhara and their baby Rahula slept. He was filled with loving-kindness towards them and promised himself that he would come back to see them. But first, he had to understand why all creatures suffer, and find out how they could escape from suffering. He left his family and kingdom to seek answers to his questions.

Questions:

1. When did Siddhartha live and where?
2. Before his mother died, what was her dream?
3. How was Siddhartha educated?
4. Was he a good or bad person? Give an example.
5. What did the wise men say would be the destiny of Siddhartha?

6. What is a monk (sadhu)?
7. How did the King try and keep Siddhartha from becoming a monk?
8. What did Siddhartha see that upset him?
9. When and why did Siddhartha leave home?

Lingashtakam

Brahma Murari surarchita Lingam; Nirmala bhasita sobhita Lingam
Janmaja dukha vinasaka Lingam; Tat pranamami Sadasiva Lingam (1)

Devamuni pravararchita Lingam; Kamadahana karunakara Lingam
Ravana darpa vinasaka Lingam; Tat pranamami Sadasiva Lingam (2)

Sarva sugandhi sulepita Lingam; Buddhi vivardhana karana Lingam
Siddha surasura vandita Lingam; Tat pranamami Sadasiva Lingam (3)

Kanaka maha mani bhushita Lingam; Paniphati veshtitha shobhita Lingam
Dakshasu yajna vinashana Lingam; Tat pranamami Sadasiva Lingam (4)

Kumkuma chandana lepita Lingam; Pankaja hara sushobhita Lingam
Sanchita papa vinashana Lingam; Tat pranamami Sadasiva Lingam (5)

Devaganarchita sevita Lingam
Bhavair bhaktibhi revacha Lingam
Dinakarakoti prabhakara Lingam
Tat pranamami Sadasiva Lingam (6)

Ashtadalo pariveshtia Lingam
Sarva samudbhava karana Lingam
Ashtadaridra vinashana Lingam
Tatpranamami Sadashiva Lingam (7)

Suraguru suravara pujita Lingam
Suravana pushpa sadarchita Lingam
Paratparam paramatmaka Lingam
Tatpranamami Sadashiva Lingam (8)

Lingashtakamidam punyam
Yat Pathet Shivasannidhau
Shivalokamavapnoti
Shivena saha modate (9)

Jumble Words – All words are from this lesson

I K Q C U

R E H I

F G E I R

N M K O

S T K U

U U S C I R O

H I S L V A

F R F S E U

J E R C O I E

P S E E C A

Coloring exercise: Sri Krishna