



*The Buddha  
His Life & Teachings  
By Venerable Piyadassi Thera*

## The Middle Path

Now on a full moon day of July, 589 years before Christ, in the evening, at the moment the sun was setting and the full moon simultaneously rising, in the shady Deer Park at Isipatana, the Buddha addressed them:

"Monks, these two extremes ought not to be cultivated by the recluse. What two? Sensual indulgence which is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, and conducive to harm; and self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and conducive to harm. The middle path, monks, understood by the Tathâgata, avoiding the extremes, gives vision and knowledge and leads to calm, realization, enlightenment, and Nibbâna. And what, monks, is that middle path? It is this Noble Eightfold Path, namely: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration."

Then the Buddha explained to them the Four Noble Truths: the noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the arising of suffering, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, and the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.<sup>n21</sup>

Thus did the Supreme Buddha proclaim the truth and set in motion the Wheel of the Dhamma (*dhamma-cakka-pavattana*). This first discourse, this message of the Deer Park, is the core of the Buddha's Teaching. As the footprint of every creature that walks the earth could be included in the elephant's footprint, which is pre-eminent for size, so does the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths embrace the entire teaching of the Buddha.

Explaining each of the Four Noble Truths, the Master said: "Such, monks, was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, the light that arose in me, that I gained about things not heard before. As long as, monks, my intuitive knowledge, my vision in regard to these Four Noble Truths was not absolutely clear to me, I did not claim that I had gained the incomparable Supreme Enlightenment. But when, monks, my intuitive knowledge, my vision, in regard to these Four Noble Truths was absolutely clear to me, then only did I claim that I had gained the incomparable Supreme Enlightenment. And there arose in me insight and vision: unshakeable is the deliverance of my mind (*akuppâ me cetovimutti*), this is my last birth, there is no more becoming (rebirth)."<sup>n22</sup> Thus spoke the Buddha, and the five monks, glad at heart, applauded the words of the Blessed One.

On December 2, 1930, at the royal dinner at the King's Palace, Sweden, when it was his turn to speak, Sir C. Venkata Raman, the Nobel Prize winning physicist, left aside science and, to the surprise of the renowned guests, delivered a most powerful address on the Buddha and India's past glories. "In the vicinity of Benares," said Sir Venkata Raman, "there exists a path which is for me the most sacred place in India. This path was one day travelled over by the Prince Siddhârtha, after he had gotten rid of all his worldly possessions in order to go through the world and proclaim the annunciation of love."<sup>n23</sup>