



THE TWELVE DEEDS OF SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA

Over 2,500 years ago, the devas prophesied, “In twelve years a great bodhisattva will be born who will become either a universal ruler or a buddha, and will be known as Shakyamuni.” The Bodhisattva Mahasattva who resided in Tushita Pure Land heard this, and moved by compassion, resolved to take rebirth in India, on the Jambudvipa continent, as the son of King Shuddhodana and Queen Mayadevi of the Shakya clan.

Buddha Shakyamuni manifested the 12 deeds, as do all buddhas, as implicit teachings for the beings of our world system, in addition to the explicit teachings he gave during his life. Ven. George Churinoff said, “Through the various deeds he showed that that we too, born from a mother’s womb as the Buddha seemed to be, can attain enlightenment. The Buddha’s deeds of leaving his family and palace and his passing away into parinirvana are obvious teachings to his disciples about renunciation and impermanence, for example.”

There are different authentic versions of these 12, which usually mean that two deeds which are presented separately according to one list are combined into one according to another. The deeds on the following pages follow the order presented in His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s *Opening the Eye of New Awareness* (published by Wisdom Publications).

The following depictions of the 12 deeds can be found in the Memorial Shrine, at Land of Medicine Buddha, Soquel, California. They were painted in panels seven feet above the ground by Thubten Gelek and assistant Ngawang Kunkhen, who began their work in early 2000 and finished mid 2001.



Thubten Gelek (insert) and Ngawang Kunkhen work on the panels

Photos: Bill Lovejoy

TWELVE DEEDS

1



Descent from Tushita Pure Land
The Bodhisattva Mahasattva gave his last teaching to the countless bodhisattvas in Tushita Pure Land, before placing his crown on the head of Maitreya, the coming buddha, and descending to Jambudvīpa in the form of a white elephant with six tusks.

2



Entry into his mother's womb
This 'elephant' entered the womb of his mother Queen Mayadevi, while she slept in the city of Kapilavastu, northern India. It was the night of the full moon on the fifteenth day of the month of Vesak (fourth month of the lunar calendar).

3



Birth in Lumbini
Queen Mayadevi, heavy with child, entered Lumbini Park in southern Nepal. The bodhisattva emerged from her right side as she held onto a branch of a fig tree. He took seven steps in each of the four directions and declared: "Thus have I come for the well-being of the world."

Photos of panels: Mark Oatney

4
Becoming skilled in the arts and playing the sports of youth

In the city of Shakya, Prince Siddhartha studied and mastered many arts. He also excelled in kingly sports.

5
Taking charge of the kingdom and keeping a harem
In the town of Serkya at age twenty-nine, Prince Siddhartha married Princess Yasodhara and led a life of love and pleasure with her and many others.



Deed Six is represented in two panels below:

Upon going to the four gates of the city, becoming discouraged with cyclic existence and leaving the householder's life

During a drive outside the palace walls one day, the Prince saw an old man, a sick man and the body of a dead man – sights which sparked his renunciation. He left his father's kingdom, cut off his hair, donned monks' robes and sought instruction from sages Arada and Udraka.



TWELVE DEEDS

Practicing austerities for six years

At the Nairanjana River, Siddhartha sought wisdom by practicing austerities with five noble companions for six years. He then realized that it was not possible to attain the highest wisdom through asceticism alone.



Going to the Bodhi Tree

Siddhartha went to Bodhgaya in Magadha to attain enlightenment, as all the previous buddhas had done. At the Bodhi Tree he sat on his pile of grasses, legs crossed, and vowed not to rise before attaining enlightenment.

Overcoming the hosts of demons

Mara sent many kinds of hosts, both wrathful and sensual, to waylay the prince – yet he sat in single-pointed concentration and did not move. Asserting that the seat used by all buddhas on the day of their enlightenment belonged to him, he touched the earth with his right hand calling the Earth Goddess as his witness. She said, “O greatest of beings, you will achieve the highest accomplishment,” whereupon Mara and his hosts fled.

Becoming fully enlightened on the fifteenth day of the fourth month

Siddhartha sat in solitude under the Bodhi Tree. During the second watch of the night he saw his countless past lives and the passing of endless living forms in the constant round of rebirths.

During the third watch, he attained full enlightenment. The buddhas of the ten directions paid homage to him.





Turning the wheel of the doctrine on the fourth day of the sixth month

For seven weeks the Buddha sat in silent contemplation under the Bodhi Tree. He was implored by the gods Brahma and Indra to teach. “Please do not pass into nirvana,” they said. “Fulfill your vow and share this precious attainment with the living beings of this world.”

He journeyed to Varanasi to turn the wheel of the doctrine. He ordained the five ascetics as his first disciples, and taught the Four Noble Truths. In the second turning of the wheel he taught the *Perfection of Wisdom* to innumerable bodhisattvas in Rajgir. In the third turning, the Buddha clarified the relationship between the teachings of the first and second turnings especially with regard to emptiness and taught buddha nature.



Passing from sorrow in the city of Kushinagar

During his eightieth year, the Buddha explained to his disciple Venerable Ananda that he had reached the end of his days. He went to Kushinagar and on the day of the full moon, lay down on his right side, with his back to the north. After giving his last precepts to his disciples, he passed into parinirvana – going beyond the opposites of samsara and nirvana. He manifested relics that were divided into eight parts and placed in eight great stupas.