

SAMANA GOTAMA TO BUDDHA: A CANONICAL-BASED RECONSTRUCTION

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A Wanderer in Search

Leaving the palace in search of the spiritual life, Prince Siddhartha joins the ranks of Samanas 'wanderers'. These were seekers who had eschewed the path of orthodoxy of the time, namely, Brahminism, and opted for an independent path. They were 'wanderers', not just in the sense of going from place to place with no fixed abode, but also in terms of the wandering spiritual life, trying out this, that and the other, the extreme being, as characterized by the Buddha, 'the practice of self-mortification' (*attakilamathānuyoga*). The name of the clan tagged on, Prince Siddhartha now comes to be 'Samana Gotama'.

In the following Chart, we attempt to provide a thumbnail sketch of how this Samana Gotama, of Watch 1 (6 to 10 PM), emerges in the form of the Buddha in Watch 3 (4 to 6 AM), as he, on that historic night 2599 years ago, sat under the tree which we now call the Bodhi Tree. This a Canonically-based reconstruction, with a little creative ingenuity. While what is contained in the Chart is not unknown to the Buddhist, hopefully, it would help get a systematized visual understanding of what has been read in the books, or heard in one or more *bana* discourses given by the learned monks over the years.

Speaking to the Chart

We invite the reader, then, to begin looking at col. 1, reading BOTTOM UP, beginning with Watch 1. (*Drawn upon the author's article, Rebirth as Empirical Basis for the Buddha's Four Noble Truths, Sumeru (online).*)

Reconstruction

A Canonically-based Intuitive Reconstruction of the Process of Samana Gotama becoming Buddha, through the Three Watches of the Night, attaining both Nibbāna and Buddhahood

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7
WATCH	TIME PERIOD	KNOWLEDGE TYPE	WATCH DETAIL	CONTENT	DETAILED CONTENT	SPIRITUAL STATUS
↑ (To be read bottom up.) 3	6 AM ↑ 2 AM	III 'Knowledge of Getting rid of flows' (<i>āsavakkhaya ñāṇa</i>) (END OF (RE)BIRTH (<i>ajāta</i>) END OF DEATH (<i>amata</i>)	5 – 6 AM ↑	Path (<i>magga</i>) ↑	<u>EXCELLENT</u> <u>SAMMĀ:</u> Concentration <i>samādhi</i> Mindfulness <i>sati</i> Mental Exercise <i>vāyāma</i> Livelihood <i>ājīva</i> Conduct <i>kammanta</i> Language <i>vācā</i> Conceptualization <i>saṃkappa</i> View <i>diṭṭhi</i>	Buddha theorizing on the Path ↕ in the Bliss of Emancipation
			4 – 5 AM ↑	'Cessation' (<i>nirodha</i>) ↑	↑	Attaining Buddhahood ↑ Attaining Nibbāna
			3 – 4 AM ↑ 2 – 3 AM ↑	'Arising' (<i>samudaya</i>) ↑ 'Suffering' (<i>dukkha</i>) ↑	Conditioned Co-origination (<i>paticca-samuppāda</i>)	Emerging Buddha' ↕
↑ (To be read bottom up.) 2	2 AM ↑ 10 PM	II 'Knowledge of exiting and re-appearing' (<i>cutūpapāta ñāṇa</i>) (REBIRTH)		"...according to their actions, bad.. leading to misery and good ... to a good destiny"		Samana Gotama
				"seeing how he himself was born in several life- times"		Samana Gotama
↑ (To be read bottom up.) 1	10 PM ↑ 6 PM	I 'Knowledge of former lives' (<i>pubbenivāsānānussati ñāṇa</i>) (REBIRTH)				Samana Gotama

Watch 1 (see Col. 1)

- 1.1 Col. 2, bottom grid, shows the approximate time period (6 to 10 PM) when the Samana Gotama (see col. 7) begins his final striving (*padhāna*).
- 1.2 Col. 3 (same grid) shows the 'knowledge of former lives' (see the Chart for the Pali term) he comes by, through intense meditation. These relate to his own past lives.
- 1.3 As shown in col. 5, he sees "how he himself was born in several lifetimes".

Watch 2 (see Col. 1)

- 2.1 During this Watch (10 PM to 2 AM, as in Col. 2), Samana Gotama, as he still is (Col. 7), gains the ‘knowledge of exiting and re-appearing’, but this time in relation to his kith and kin and others with whom he might have had the occasion to come into interaction over the lifetimes in samsara.
- 2.2 Here he sees (Col. 5) how these others reap as they have sowed, “according to their actions, bad... leading to misery and good... to a good destiny”.

Watch 3 (see Col. 1)

It is these knowledges, then, that takes the Samana Gotama to the final critical stage in Watch 3 (Col. 2, upper grids)

- 3.1 We may postulate (and this is where the creative ingenuity plays its role) that it is in watching the drama of the past lives unfolding that the First Noble Truth of ‘Suffering’ (*dukkha*) (Col. 4) emerges, in the first hour of the third watch (Col. 4: 2 to 3 AM).
- 3.2 While the earlier knowledges (of past lives) were based in a visual sighting of some actual happenings in the mind’s eye, the knowledge of the *dukkha* is something that can be said to have sneaked up into this consciousness, now rendering him, taking a license here, the ‘Emerging Buddha’ (col. 7). He is no longer just seeking, but yet not found it all either, as when he becomes the Buddha. Thus ‘Emerging Buddha’. Though not Canonical, it seeks to provide the bridge from Samana Gotama to Buddha.
- 3.3 Stemming from the realization of suffering is ‘Arising’ – the reasons for suffering: attachment (*tanhā*) and grasping (*upādāna*), through the six senses. Again, while this knowledge is also based on sighting the rebirths, of self and others, it also entails abstract and intuitive thinking. Still at this stage (3 - 4 AM (see col. 4)), he is an ‘Emerging Buddha’, but now with an additional link of understanding.
 - 3.4.1 Now we see how, in the first hour of Watch 3, knowledge re the *framework* of the Four Noble Truths – Suffering, Arising, Cessation and Path, emerges on the basis of the suffering that he has come to perceive in Watches 1 and 2, the upward arrow indicating this connection. The upward arrows in Columns 4 and 5 also indicate that the interrelated details of each of the Noble Truths come to be worked out as well, roughly one after the other, in the context of the framework.
 - 3.4.2 There is another understanding that emerges in the inquiring, and creative, mind of the Emerging Buddha: Conditioned Co-origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*) (Col. 6). A three-fold reality appears in his consciousness:
 - a. how any given reality has resulted from a preceding condition (linear causality: if A, then B);
 - b. this happening in the context of other conditions (multicausality); and
 - c. that a reality created by a preceding condition in turn serves as a condition in the reverse order (i.e., if B, then A) (reciprocal causality).It is at this moment in time that two more fundamental Teachings can be said to have emerged in the mind of the emerging Buddha :
 - (a) there is no Godhead required to explain any reality; and

- (b) there is no soul, an unchanging entity, that is behind human (and sentient) action or thought. This is the Teaching of *anatta* ‘asoulity’.
- 3.5.1 Now at the cusp of a breakthrough, in even deeper meditation in the 3rd hour of Watch 3 (Col. 4), the Third Noble Truth emerges: Cessation (*nirodha*) (Col 5). As shown in Col. 7, at this point, the Emerging Buddha now becomes, *voila*, the Buddha! A light is born (*aloko udapàdi*); an eye is born (*cakkehum udapàdi*).
- 3.5.2 If this means gaining the ‘Knowledge of getting rid of flows’ (*àsavakkaya nàna*) (Col. 3 top), it also means the actual cutting off of such ‘flows’. If the first is ‘Attaining Buddhahood’, the latter is ‘Attaining Nibbana’ (col. 7), the two-way arrow indicating how one arises in relation to the other, and in the same process.
- 3.5 As Column 3 shows, if Knowledges I and II relate to Rebirth /Re-becoming, Knowledge III relates to end of both (Re)birth (*ajàta*), which by definition means also ‘no death’ (*amata*).
- 3.6 In the final hour of Watch 3 (col. 4), 5 – 6 AM, we see the *Path* emerge (as shown with the upward arrow), now completing the framework of the Four Noble Truths.
- 3.7 Col. 6, then, shows this Path, in terms of the Noble Eightfold Path, excellent in View (reading from the bottom), Conceptualization, Language, Conduct, Livelihood, Mental Exercise, Mindfulness, and finally, Concentration.
- 3.8 The two-way arrow in the last column against the last hour of the Watch 3 shows, again intuitively constructing, the newly minted Buddha both working through the details of the Path, in the ‘Bliss of Emancipation’ (the texts allowing it a whole week out of the first seven weeks). This time period, and thereafter, can be seen as including reminiscing upon his newly experienced state of being, and double-checking for himself the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.