

he promised them that if he should ever find the answer to the problem of suffering and to the meaning of life, he would come back to them and share his discoveries.

The third phase of Gautama's *life* in the forest was *raja yoga*, deep meditation with special body position that is conducive to thought. At the culmination of this period, on one historic night of nights, Gautama sat down under a tree and vowed he *would* not rise again until he had found enlightenment. Through hour after hour, he sat in deeper and deeper meditation until - in the early hours of the dawn, as the tree rained down red flowers and earth quivered as in the pangs of childbirth, the seeker knew that at last he had been put in touch with the ultimate meaning of life. For 49 days, he sat in a trance at the foot of the tree, completely in awe of his experience. Then he arose, sought out his friends, and began to communicate the meaning he had found. From that point onward, Gautama was known as the Buddha, the "Enlightened One" and the tree under which he had found enlightenment was called the "Bo" or "Bodhi" tree (the Place of Enlightenment).

What was the answer the Buddha had found? It is best seen in the actions of the rest of his life, during which for almost five years he traveled from village to village, ministering to each person in the way he needed help. To some, the Buddha became a listener; to others, he became a provider of food and shelter; to some he gathered to himself as a band of disciples who would learn and minister with him. But all was done in a spirit of selfless compassion, and in a life midway between the extremes of luxury and poverty.

In one of his famous sermons to his followers, Buddha summarized his insight into the problem of suffering by delineating the "Four Noble Truths" and the "Eightfold Path." He also preached a way of life which, though based on his knowledge of Hinduism, denounced the caste system, scorned ritual, and ignored metaphysics. That is, the Buddha disclaimed speculation on the nature or essence of God, but bent all energies toward serving the needs of the world. His new philosophy is summed up in the parable of the man with an arrow in his back. The Buddha said that it is of no use to question who shot the arrow or where the shooter was standing but rather to bend all efforts on removing the arrow.

Finally, when the Buddha was more than 80 years old, he was invited to have dinner with a special friend by the name of Cunda. Cunda prepared mushrooms, the Buddha's favourite food. But, unknowingly, he prepared some which were poisonous. Soon the Buddha realized he was dying.

On his deathbed, the Buddha summoned his followers and, determined to ease Cunda's anguish and guilt feelings, declared: "In all my lifetime, two meals stand out supreme: one was the meal that I ate before I sat under the Bo tree, after which I received enlightenment; the other, tonight, at the home of my dear friend, Cunda, after which I shall receive *NiNana*." So saying, the Buddha breathed his last and passed into the eternal absence of pain, designated as *NiNana*.

His followers gathered his sayings and sermons into the **Tripitaka, or Three Baskets of Wisdom.**