

# Freemasonry & Buddhism

## Philosophia Humana

### Siddhārtha Gautama\*

Before we start into the heart of the subject, it is very important to understand the upbringing and character of **Bhuddha**. He was born in **Lumbini, Nepal** as a prince. His father was the king **Suddhodana**, leader of the **Shakya** clan, whose capital was **Kapilavastu**. *Siddhartha* was brought up by his mother's younger sister, **Maha Pajapati**. When he reached the age of *16*, his father reputedly arranged his marriage to a cousin of the same age named **Yaśodharā**. According to the traditional account, she gave birth to a son, named **Rahula**. *Siddhartha* is then said to have spent *29 years* as a prince. Although his father ensured that *Siddhartha* was provided with everything he could want or need, *Buddhist scriptures* say that the future **Buddha** felt that material wealth was not life's ultimate goal.

A turning point happened when, on a day trip outside his palace, an *old man* crossed his path. The depressing vision of the sick and the elderly drove him instinctively to live an **ascetic life**. At this stage, a point must be made about the importance of the *birthdeath* experience in **Buddhist** and **Masonic** rituals. Coming back to our story, soon after the episode stated earlier, he left to live a life of mendicancy. Having learned extensively with **Ārāḍa Kālāma** and **Udraka Rāmaputra**, he still felt unfulfilled and then continued his journey with five companions exploring *self-mortification*. After nearly starving himself to death, he collapsed in a river while bathing and almost drowned. **Siddhartha** began to reconsider his path. Remembering a childhood memory with his father. He attained a concentrated and focused state that was blissful and refreshing, the **jhāna**.

Bridging to a *Middle Eastern* context, **jannah** has the meaning of *Garden* or *Paradise*. It's easy to see the connection between many spiritualities from the **Mediterranean shores** to the **China sea**. Returning again to our subject, having realised that meditative **jhāna** was the right path to awakening, but that extreme asceticism didn't work, Gautama discovered what *Buddhists* call the *Middle Way* being the path of moderation away from the extremes of **self-indulgence** and **self-mortification**. After becoming starved and weakened, he is said to have accepted milk and rice pudding from a village girl named **Sujata**. Such was his emaciated appearance that she wrongly believed him to be a *spirit* that had granted her a wish. Following this strange episode, **Gautama** decided to sit under a *pipal tree* - now known as the **Bodhi tree** - in **Bodhi Gaya, India**, when he vowed never to arise until he had found the truth.

### Rūpa / Arūpa

After a reputed *49 days of meditation*, at the age of *35*, he is said to have attained **Enlightenment**, after having five of his disciples leave him thinking he had left his search for truth. **Gautama** was known to his followers as the **Buddha** or *Awakened One*. **Buddha** is also sometimes translated as *The Enlightened One*. Now that we're done with this rather lengthy **biographical** and **transcendental introduction**, let's us commence the reflexion about the connectivities of the *two very distinct ritualistic brotherhoods*, if I may say.

The *raison d'être* of **Freemasonry** is to perpetuate the transmission of a ritualistic system. The *initiation* conveys a rite of passage. It is interesting to notice the intrinsic **complementarity** with religions. The *degrees* creates a deepening of common beliefs. The *initiated* is on a path to overcome the traditional **Manicheanism** toward a total *deliverance*. **Islam** calls it the *Supreme Identity*, **Hinduism**

the *Brahman Reintegration* and **Buddhism** the *Nirvana*. A **Master Mason** is an *apex* opening the mind to the *small mysteries*, as **René Guénon** suggested. They develop the possibilities of the *human nature*, the return to a *primordial condition*. Those states are the *El-insānul-qādim* in **Islam** and *Anāgāmi* in **Buddhism**. *Anāgāmi* is the necessary translation to pure form, *rūpa*, leading to the ultimate purifications of *nirvāna*.

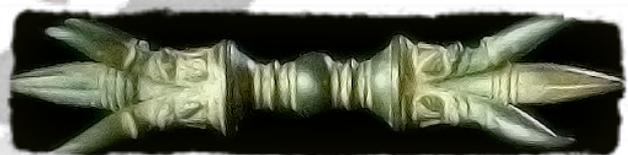
In every *initiation*, there's a close link between **rituals** and **symbolism**. In fact, every rite can be understood as *manifest symbols*. The word is from the *latin ritus* coming from the *sanskrit rita* meaning the *accomplishment of the cosmic order*. We can see here the **transcendence** applied from the *individual to history*. The **symbol via the rite** is the universal vehicle of *metaphysical teachings* as to bond emotion and instinct. To summarise, the *moi* mastering the *ego*. A mutual concept realised through the archetype of **Gautama** and **Hiram**.

### L'Équerre et le Compas

It is necessary now to examine the *two fundamental tools* found in every lodge and every **V.S.L.** The *compass* measures the world; it is the *manifestation* coming from a **single point**. It describes the **perfect figure** of the *infinite totality*. The square is to draw *perpendiculars*, in opposition to *circle*. It is the defined **Earth** versus the ethereal **Sky** curved and unified. The **Worshipful Master's jewel** is the representation of the *two poles* reestablishing unity. In **Tantrism**, the *bell* has a similar purpose through a different symbolism, the round and hollow aspect is wisdom. The complementary **vajra** with four branches at each extremity of his axe represents human action. Their union secures *Nirvana* by fusing opposites.

### The G or the Importance of the Center

The omnipresence of the *G* invites the **Worshipful (Past) Master** to transform himself as the *impersonation of the temple* within the sacred space of the lodge. As a subtle connection, we can see the relationship with the *maṇipūra chakra* representing willpower and achievement well known in **Tantrism**.



### The Path, Shadow & Light and Life & Death

The *fundamental initiatic way* models the passage from an **inferior ontological state** to a *blissful eternal knowledge*. The *Entered Apprentice* takes the shape of **shadow to light** and the *Master Mason* from **death to resurrection**. Both aspects represent the *essence of the awakening*: to be purified to see clearly and the death of the self to live the **Hiram / Buddha** example as *divine embodiment*.



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\* **Buddha** was born in *560 BC* and died at the age of *80* in *480 BC*. His first name mean *he who achieves his aim* in **Pāli** (Middle Indo-Aryan language of the Indian subcontinent. It is best known as the language of many of the earliest Buddhist scriptures).