

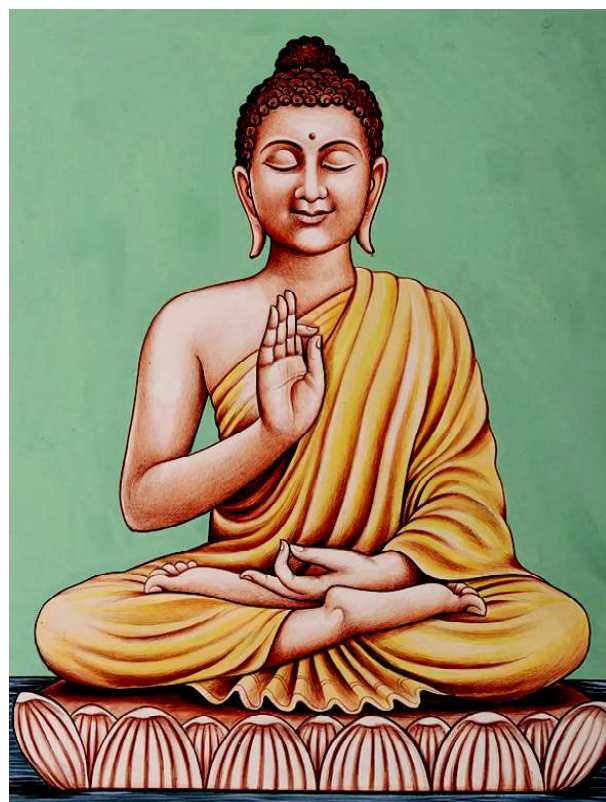
# Buddha ' s Sacred Relics

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**A**round 483 BCE, Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha and revered as one of history's greatest spiritual teachers, attained Parinirvana, his final passing, at Kushinagar in present-day Uttar Pradesh. What happened next would lead to the creation of some of the most sacred objects in Buddhism. This is the remarkable story of the Buddha's relics: how they were divided, where they travelled, and why they remain sacred to this day.

According to Buddhist texts, after Buddha's Parinirvana, his body was placed in a coffin and kept for seven days. This ensured that his disciples and followers

from distant places could make the journey to pay their final respects to their beloved Guru. After seven days, his chief disciple,



Mahakashyapa, carefully placed the body on a funeral pyre and lit the sacred fire.

When the flames died down and the ashes cooled, the disciples discovered something extraordinary. Among the ashes, they found small, pearl-like objects that glowed like crystals. Buddhists call these *sarira*. They also found bone fragments and teeth that had survived the intense heat. To Buddha's followers, these were not ordinary remains. They believed these sacred relics carried the Buddha's spiritual energy and represented a physical connection to their enlightened teacher.

News of these sacred relics spread quickly across northern India. Soon, armed warriors from seven powerful kingdoms marched toward Kushinagar, each demanding a share of Buddha's remains. The local Malla people, who had cremated the Buddha and now guarded his relics, refused to give them up. Tensions escalated rapidly. The seven kings and their armies prepared for battle, ready to fight for these precious objects.

War seemed inevitable. But then, a respected Brahmin scholar named Drona stepped between the opposing forces. He reminded the

assembled kings of an important truth: "The Buddha spent his entire life teaching peace, compassion, and the end of suffering. Would you now dishonour his memory by shedding blood over his remains?" His words struck a chord. The warriors lowered their weapons.

Drona proposed a fair solution. He would divide the relics equally so that everyone could honour the Buddha in their own homeland, and the kings agreed. Working carefully, Drona divided the Buddha's cremated remains into eight equal portions. One portion went to the Mallas of Kushinagar, the local people who had performed the cremation. The remaining seven portions were distributed to King Ajatashatru of Magadha, the Licchavis of Vaishali, the Sakyas of Kapilavastu (Buddha's own birth clan), the Bulis of Allakappa, the Koliyas of Ramagrama, the Brahmins from Vethadipa, and the Mallas of Pava. Each recipient now possessed a sacred piece of their beloved teacher's remains.

After dividing the relics, Drona kept the vessel that had been used to measure and distribute Buddha's remains. He took this cremation vessel as his own share and

considered it sacred since it had held the Buddha's relics during the division.

Just as everyone was preparing to leave, the Moriyas from Pipphalivana arrived with their own request. Unfortunately, they had come too late—all eight portions had already been distributed. However, they too wanted something to honour the Buddha. So, they were given what remained: the ashes and charred wood from the funeral pyre itself. Though not the bone relics, these ashes were still considered sacred because they came from the fire that had cremated Buddha's body.

Each group returned home and built a stupa—a dome-shaped monument designed to protect and honour sacred relics. These structures became like sacred tombs, with the relics buried deep inside under layers of brick and stone. Buddhists would walk around these stupas clockwise as a form of meditation and respect.

These ten stupas scattered across northern India became the world's first Buddhist pilgrimage sites. They proved that the Buddha's final gift to his followers was not conflict, but a lesson in his core teachings: through wisdom and

compassion, even the deepest disputes can be resolved peacefully.

About 200 years later, a powerful emperor named Ashoka changed everything. Ashoka started as a cruel ruler who killed over 100,000 people in the Kalinga War. The terrible violence made him deeply sad, and he converted to Buddhism.

As a Buddhist, Ashoka wanted to spread Buddha's teachings far and wide. According to ancient texts, he collected seven of the eight original relic portions. Only one, the Ramagrama stupa, remained untouched because it was believed to be protected by serpent gods.

Ashoka then undertook something remarkable. According to Buddhist tradition, he redistributed the relics across thousands of stupas that he built throughout his vast empire, stretching from Afghanistan to Sri Lanka. This extraordinary endeavour transformed Buddhism from a regional tradition into a faith that would spread across the whole of Asia.

The portion that went to the Sakya clan (Buddha's own family) was buried at Piprahwa, which was ancient Kapilavastu. This was not a simple burial. Around 240-200 BCE, during Ashoka's time, they

added magnificent offerings alongside the bone relics. Inside five small vases, they placed approximately 1,800 gemstones and semi-precious stones, including thousands of pearls, rubies, topazes, sapphires, carnelians, amethysts, gold ornaments and jewellery, rock crystal, coral, and shells.

Many of these gems were carved into beads and pendants. This was the largest collection of precious offerings ever found in a single Buddhist site. These were not just decorations. They were sacred gifts meant to honour the Buddha forever.

For over 2,000 years, this treasure lay hidden underground, covered by earth and plants.

In 1898, a British engineer named William Claxton Peppé was working in the Piprahwa area. India was under British rule at that time, and there was a famine. To help provide jobs for starving farmers, Peppé organised an excavation of the old stupa on his land.

After digging through 18 feet of solid brickwork, the workers found a large stone box. Inside were five small vases containing bone fragments, gold ornaments, and beautiful jewellery. Most exciting was an inscription in ancient

Brahmi script that read: “This shrine for relics of the Buddha, the August One, is that of the Sakyas, the brethren of the Distinguished One.”

Buddhist texts had been proven right. This was Buddha’s own family’s portion, exactly where it should be.

But under the 1878 Indian Treasure Trove Act, the British Crown claimed everything. The sacred deposit was fragmented: bone relics went to Thailand’s King Chulalongkorn, who shared them across Buddhist Asia. Major gold pieces and the stone coffer went to Calcutta’s Imperial Museum. Peppé retained about 350 gems—roughly one-fifth—labelled as ‘duplicates’.



**Buddhas relics**

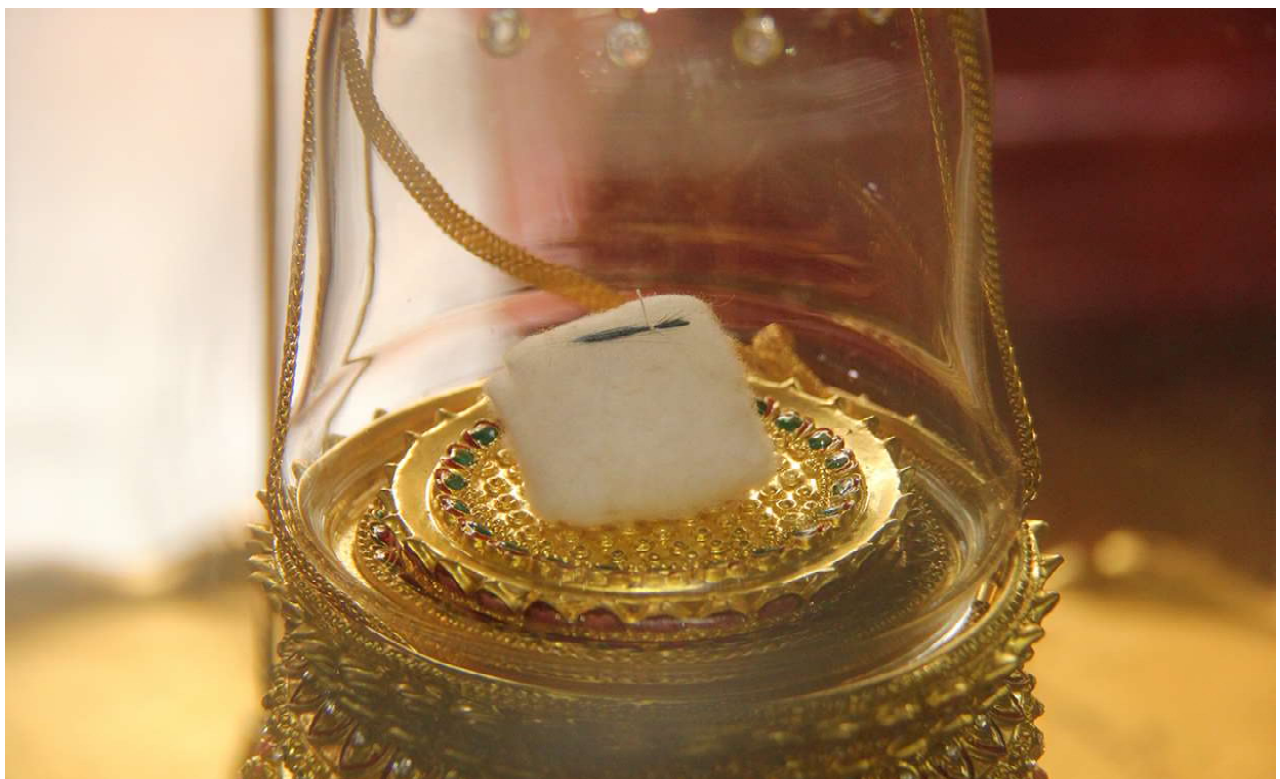
The dispersed relics began separate journeys. The bone fragments travelled to temples and museums worldwide, venerated by millions. In 1978, they left India for the first time, and were exhibited in Sri Lanka, where nearly 10 million people came to pay homage. They have since travelled to Mongolia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, and Bhutan, carrying the Buddha's presence across the modern world.

The gems kept by the Peppé family were exhibited at famous museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and museums in Singapore and South Korea.

In 2025, Peppé's descendants decided to sell the remaining gems at an auction in Hong Kong. They expected to get about Rs. 105-110 crores.

This announcement made people angry worldwide. Buddhist scholars said these were sacred relics, not ordinary items to buy and sell. Professor Ashley Thompson explained that the bones, ashes, and gems were placed together intentionally and should remain together forever. She said separating them repeated the damage caused during colonial times.

The Indian government acted. India's Ministry of Culture sent legal notices demanding the auction be stopped. Just hours



**Lord Buddha Hair Relics**

before the May 7, 2025 sale was supposed to happen, Sotheby's auction house postponed it.

After negotiations, Godrej Industries Group bought the gems privately. On July 30, 2025, exactly 127 years after they were taken from India, the gems finally came home.

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi called it 'a joyous day for our cultural heritage'. The gems are now permanently displayed at the Indian Museum in Kolkata, reunited with the main Piprahwa collection where they belong.

To Buddhists, relics are sacred objects that carry Buddha's spiritual presence and teachings. There are three types: bodily relics like bones, teeth, and hair; personal items he used such as robes and bowls; and symbolic objects like statues and footprints that represent him. Buddhists believe these relics are filled with Buddha's wisdom and compassion, making them much more than mere historical artefacts.

There is also a profound and moving prophecy in Buddhist tradition about the final destiny of the Buddha's sacred relics. One day, in the far distant future, when the Buddha's teachings have faded entirely from the world, something extraordinary will unfold.



**Prime Minister Narendra Modi  
Inaugurates Grand International  
Exposition of Sacred Piprahwa Relics**

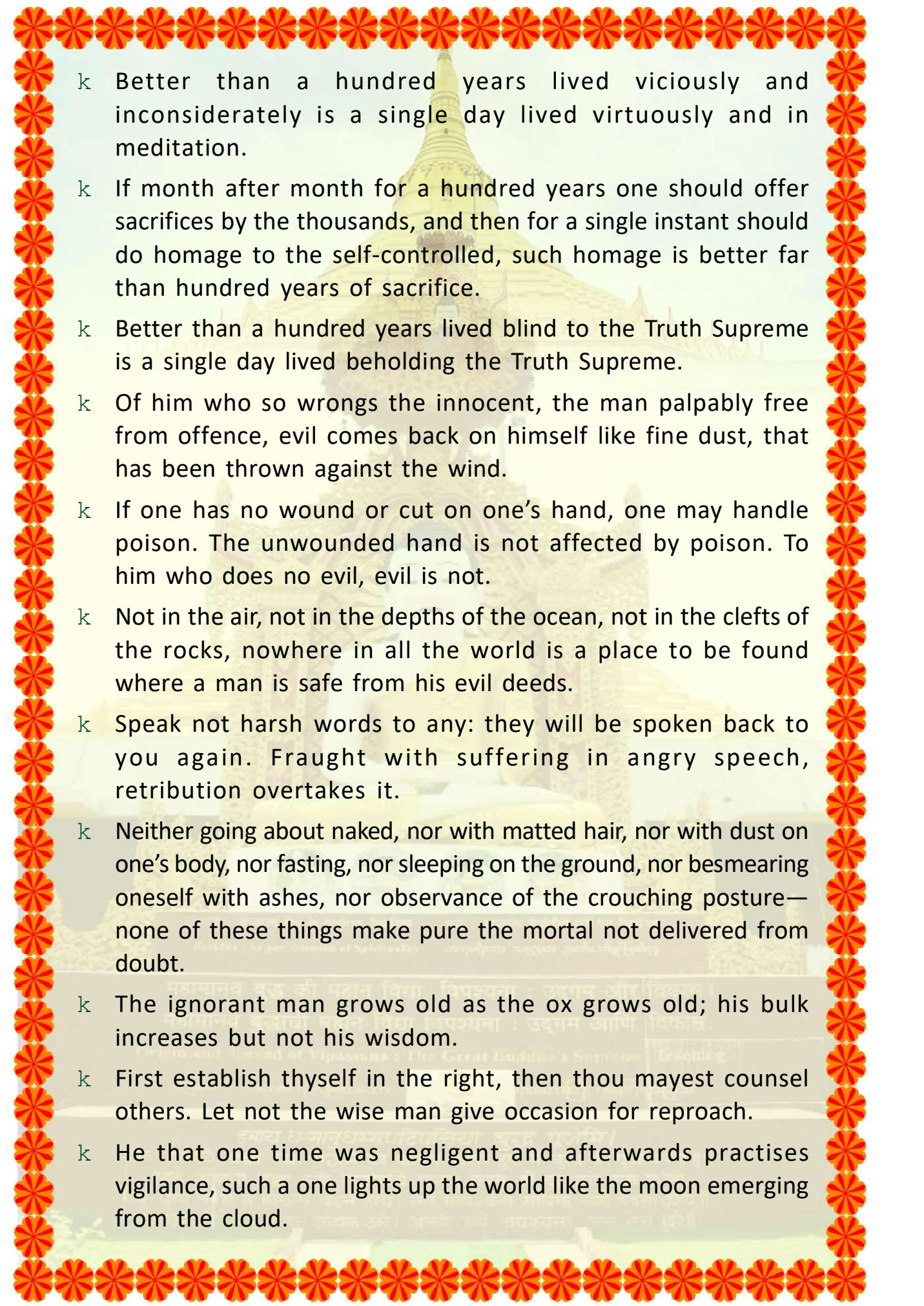
From every stupa and shrine across the earth, the relics will rise up and travel through the sky, converging on Bodh Gaya—the very place where Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree. There, they will reassemble into the complete form of the Buddha's body, radiant and serene, blazing with light in all directions.

The gods and celestial beings will descend to pay their final respects, offering worship one last time to the Enlightened One. Then, in a great burst of flames, the relics will pass beyond the world entirely—never to return.

This is known as the parinirvâna of the relics, the final and complete passing of everything the Buddha left behind, bringing his presence in this world to its ultimate, beautiful close. ●

## Gems from Dhammapada

- k Vigilant among the vigilant, awake among those asleep, as a fleet courier leaves behind a sorry nag, so go the wise.
- k Fear there is none in the man awake, whose mind is clean of craving, done alike with good and with evil.
- k Enemy works evil to enemy, hater to hater, but worse is the evil wrought by a wrongly directed mind.
- k As the bee takes the honey from the flower, leaving colour and fragrance uninjured, so let the sage go about in a population.
- k As from a heap of flowers many fair garlands may be made, so by one living mortal many good deeds should be done.
- k The good man diffuses fragrance in all directions.
- k Long is the night to the watchman, long is the league to the weary, long is the round of lives and deaths to the fools that know not the Truth.
- k Irrigators conduct water where they will; fletchers shape the arrow; carpenters bend the wood to their will; the wise bend themselves.
- k Even as a solid rock is unshaken by the wind, so do the wise remain unmoved by praise or by blame.
- k Desire not a son either for thyself or for another, not yet wealth nor a Kingdom. Seek not thy own success by others' loss. Be virtuous, wise, righteous.
- k Better than a thousand words devoid of meaning is one word charged with meaning, through the hearing whereof comes peace.
- k Though one should conquer in a battle thousands and thousands of men, he who so shall conquer himself, is the greatest warrior.
- k In him who is ever respectful to the ripe in years, these four things are increased—length of days, beauty, happiness and health.

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- k Better than a hundred years lived viciously and inconsiderately is a single day lived virtuously and in meditation.
  - k If month after month for a hundred years one should offer sacrifices by the thousands, and then for a single instant should do homage to the self-controlled, such homage is better far than hundred years of sacrifice.
  - k Better than a hundred years lived blind to the Truth Supreme is a single day lived beholding the Truth Supreme.
  - k Of him who so wrongs the innocent, the man palpably free from offence, evil comes back on himself like fine dust, that has been thrown against the wind.
  - k If one has no wound or cut on one's hand, one may handle poison. The unwounded hand is not affected by poison. To him who does no evil, evil is not.
  - k Not in the air, not in the depths of the ocean, not in the clefts of the rocks, nowhere in all the world is a place to be found where a man is safe from his evil deeds.
  - k Speak not harsh words to any: they will be spoken back to you again. Fraught with suffering in angry speech, retribution overtakes it.
  - k Neither going about naked, nor with matted hair, nor with dust on one's body, nor fasting, nor sleeping on the ground, nor besmearing oneself with ashes, nor observance of the crouching posture—none of these things make pure the mortal not delivered from doubt.
  - k The ignorant man grows old as the ox grows old; his bulk increases but not his wisdom.
  - k First establish thyself in the right, then thou mayest counsel others. Let not the wise man give occasion for reproach.
  - k He that one time was negligent and afterwards practises vigilance, such a one lights up the world like the moon emerging from the cloud.