

The Last Days of the Buddha



PUPIL INFORMATION SHEET

The Buddha was now an old man of eighty years old. His body was tired, “like a rickety old cart held together with string”, but his mind was still sharp.

He had been visiting a number of his followers, to see them one last time, and to encourage them to keep following his teachings. Finally, with his old friend and companion, Ananda, he came to the edge of the town of Kushinara, and lay down in the shade of some trees. He knew he was dying and he gave instructions about his funeral.

Ananda was too upset to listen. He had not yet reached Enlightenment and his old friend and teacher, who had always been so kind

to him, was dying. He moved away and leaned against the door of a house. He cried. How could he live without the Buddha?

The Buddha, noticing how upset Ananda was, called him over. “Dear Ananda, have I not

told you, many times, that we all have to part with the people we love? You’ve looked after me kindly all these years. Your efforts will result in Enlightenment.”

The Buddha’s friends and followers gathered. Again he asked whether they had any last questions for him. He wanted to be absolutely sure they had understood his teachings, so that they too would gain freedom from suffering, and teach others what they knew.

Nobody answered. “If you feel unsure, tell

your question to a friend.” Still there was silence. To everyone, the Buddha gave his last words. “All things are impermanent. With mindfulness, strive on.”



Many of his friends cried, but some remained perfectly calm. They had loved him very much, but they understood that nothing was wrong: it is natural for everything to come to an end.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Rewrite the story of the Buddha’s last days as if you were his good friend Ananda.
2. Some of the Buddha’s friends remained perfectly calm when he died, but it was not because they did not care. Draw or paint a picture of the Buddha dying, surrounded by his weeping friends, and his perfectly calm friends. How will you show the difference?
3. Make a list of the key events in the life of the Buddha. Re-tell the story of his life in the form of a comic strip, with words and pictures.
4. Online activity: arrange four events in the life of the Buddha in order of their importance to the future of Buddhism. Explain your choices. Now choose a different order and do the same thing again. Is any event unimportant?