

Gradually, the basic four pilgrimage sites (Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar) were increased in terms of the great events of the Buddha's life to eight by adding four more places considered to be the scenes of four principal miracles that he performed, namely: (i) The Twin Miracle in Sravasti, (ii) Descent from Heaven in Sankasia (iii) Taming of the drunken elephant, Nalagiri in Rajgir and (iv) Offering of honey by a monkey in Vaishali. However, the claim that the offering of honey took place in Vaishali appears to be doubtful.

According to the Dhammapada Commentary Book 1:5b, the offering of honey by a monkey took place in the Parileyakka forest near Kosambi, where the Buddha stayed after leaving the Ghosita monastery because of a quarrel among the monks. A Tibetan version, which is similar to the Pali version can be found in the Mulasarvastivadin Vinaya. It places the locale at Sravasti. Xuanzang, who visited India in the 7th century AD, gave two similar versions; one at Mathura, the other at Vaishali. The story of the monkey offering honey to the Buddha seems to be well known among all the Buddhist traditions. It was probably derived from an earlier common source. However, there is so much variation with respect to the locale, that it is prudent not to include it in this book in order to avoid controversy.

Among the events in the Buddha's life when great earthquakes shook the earth, the first took place when the Bodhisatta descended from Tusita heaven and entered the mother's womb. Three more earthquakes followed, one each in Lumbini, Bodhgaya and Sarnath at his Birth, Enlightenment and Preaching of the First Sermon, respectively. The fifth earthquake took place when the Buddha renounced the will to live on at the Capala shrine in Vaishali, three months before the Mahaparinibbana. The sixth earthquake occurred when the Buddha passed into Mahaparinibbana in Kushinagar.

The particular event at Vaishali is recorded in the canonical literature of all the Buddhist traditions. There is no question about the locale. Vaishali certainly deserves to be included among the Four Places of Miracles because of the Buddha's renunciation of the will to live on, not because of the offering of honey by a monkey, whose the locale is doubtful.

ISBN 978-983-41633-7-2

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The Eight Great Places of Buddhist Pilgrimage

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