

The life of the Buddha

Many years ago lived a fine young prince called Siddhartha. He lived in a great palace surrounded by beautiful gardens and forests. His father, the king, loved him dearly and protected him from anything that might upset him. Siddhartha had all that he wanted in life: fine food, beautiful clothes, friends to play with and clever teachers to teach him. He was very happy.

When he grew older he became very curious about life outside the palace. He had never been through the palace gates and he wanted to find out about the world, so one day he arranged for his servant to accompany him on a ride outside the palace grounds. Siddhartha saw four things outside the palace that would change his life entirely.

The first thing he saw was an old man struggling along the road with a stick. He had grey hair and wrinkled skin and he had great difficulty in walking. 'What is wrong with that person?' asked Prince Siddhartha. 'He is old,' replied his servant. 'Everyone gets old.' Siddhartha had no idea. The palace was always filled with healthy young people.

The prince then saw a sick person. 'People suffer from sickness from time to time,' explained the servant. Siddhartha was alarmed. How did he not know about all this suffering?

Next, the pair came across a funeral procession. A dead person was wrapped in a sheet and was being carried by friends and relatives through the street. They were crying and wailing with grief. 'Everyone dies in the end,' explained the servant. Siddhartha became more and more depressed with all that he saw. He began to realise that suffering was an inevitable part of life and that everyone suffers, whoever they are.

Finally, the prince saw someone who gave him an idea which changed his future. Prince Siddhartha met a holy man. The man wore simple robes and was wandering the countryside. He had given up his home and his possessions, and he spent his time meditating and in calm concentration. The holy man was seeking to find out the truth about life and how to find peace. This meeting really made Siddhartha think about his own life.

When he returned to the palace he was very troubled about all that he had seen. How could he go on living his pampered existence in the palace when there was so much suffering in everyone's lives? And so he made a decision.

One night, when all were asleep, Prince Siddhartha left the palace and all his fine clothes and riches to live a simple, poor life and to seek the answer to life's suffering.

He gave up all worldly pleasures and ate and slept very little. He spent his time focusing his mind and meditating on life. He became very thin and weak, and realised that punishing his body and his health was not helping him to find the answers he was looking for. He realised that he needed to feed his body and to rest it. Siddhartha continued his life of meditation and concentration for many years.

One day, while he was sitting under a tree, in a deep meditative trance, Siddhartha had an amazing experience. After years and years of meditation his mind became crystal clear and he suddenly understood all about the nature of suffering and how

people might overcome their suffering. He had become enlightened and he felt a wave of perfect bliss overcome him.

From this point on Siddhartha knew his mission in life was to share his enlightenment with others. He became a great teacher, travelling far and wide sharing his ideas and his wisdom. The people loved him and all that he taught them, and they called him the Buddha, the Enlightened Being.