

## The Life of The Buddha

2,500 years ago in 460 BCE, in a village called Lumbini, India, Prince Siddhattha Gautama was born. Some weeks before he was born, his mother Queen Mayadevi dreamed that a six-tusked white elephant came down from the skies and entered her body through her right side. A holy man told the King Shuddhodana, that this meant the child would either be a great king or a famous holy man. If he saw any suffering then he would be a holy man but if he did not see suffering, he would be a king.

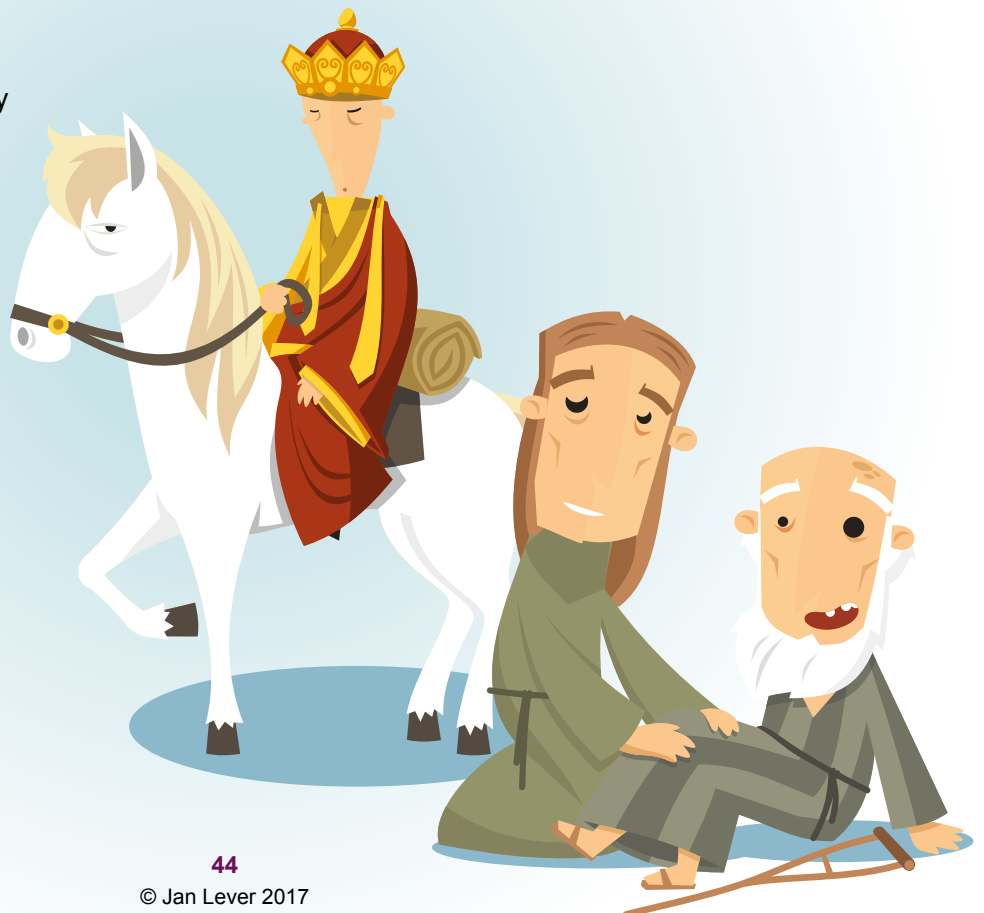
The king wanted his son to follow in his footsteps, so he ordered that Siddhattha be protected from seeing anything that might hurt him or make him unhappy. Instead, Siddhattha was to be kept within the palace grounds and given everything he could possibly want. The prince lived like this for all of his early life, and at sixteen he married a beautiful princess, Yasodhara. Soon she gave birth to a son called Rahula.

However, even though he had everything a person could wish for, Siddhattha still felt like something was missing from his life. He wasn't very happy and he couldn't work out how to be. He realized that he wanted to see what lay beyond the palace walls. Perhaps he would discover what was missing from his life and work out how to be happy. One night while everyone was asleep, the Prince ordered his faithful charioteer, Channa, to take him out of the palace and into the world beyond its walls. What Siddhartha was about to see may not surprise us but, because he had only lived in the palace, the things he saw shocked him.

Leaving the palace, it was not long before he saw an old man who was finding it difficult to walk, each step was painful. Siddhattha asked his charioteer what was wrong with the man. Channa replied that this was often what happened with old age, life became harder. The prince was troubled as he didn't like to see someone suffering and unhappy, so he asked to return to the palace.

The next night the pair left again and it was not long before they came across a man who was really ill. He asked Channa what was wrong with the man. Channa said that sometimes everyone gets sick. The thought that this could also happen to him terrified Siddhattha and made him unhappy. Again he returned to the palace.

The following night they left again and soon saw a dead body being carried through the streets to a funeral, with people crying because they were so sad. When Channa told Siddhattha that this was the body of someone who had lived until a little while ago but who was now separated from their loved ones forever, Siddhattha was very troubled, especially when he realised that this happens to everyone, even him. The prince knew that he could not carry on with life as it was and that he needed to go and look for a way to be happy. Then he could share this with other people too.



On the fourth night the pair left again and saw a wandering holy man. He looked at peace, not worried, just happy to be as he was. Channa told the prince that this man had very little but was peaceful and happy living a simple life.

Seeing him filled Siddhattha with hope. He decided that he too would try to escape the sufferings he had seen by giving up his kingdom and becoming a holy man. The following night Siddhattha woke Channa and the pair sneaked past the palace guards. They rode to a river that marked the border of the land and there the prince swapped his royal robes for the ragged clothes of a poor man. He said goodbye to Channa, his faithful friend, and left.

Siddhattha decided to find out what other people thought so he went from one teacher or 'guru' to another, listening to their teachings and trying to learn as much as he could. But despite all his efforts, he still couldn't find what he was looking for. He wanted to find a way to be happy and not to suffer, for his sake and for other people too.

After a while, he realized that no one could show him how to be happy all the time, he would have to discover the way for himself, if there was one. So he went to live on his own with 5 other followers.

From then on, Siddhattha and the five holy men meditated, kept silence, and survived on a diet of two seeds and a grain of rice a day. But, after nearly six years of living like this, he realized that this was not the way to be happy and not suffer. In fact, he was so weak from not eating that he hardly had enough strength to meditate, and so he decided that he would eat proper food again. As soon as he told his followers what he was going to do, they lost faith in him and left.

Soon after Siddhattha sat down beneath a Bodhi tree at a place called Bodh Gaya and promised himself 'Even if my body dries up and my skin, flesh, and bones are swept away, I shall not move from this seat until I am enlightened (understand how to be happy and free from suffering).' and entered into deep meditation.

Finally, after sitting and thinking hard for a long time, he realised what people needed to do to be happy. It is all about how people think about things that helps them to be happy. He had achieved enlightenment. From then on he was known as the Buddha or 'Enlightened One'.

For the remaining forty-five years of his life the Buddha travelled throughout India, teaching the truth he had discovered to others. The teachings he gave are still taught today. Finally, the Buddha died. The year was 380 BCE and he was eighty years old.

