

## **ORIGINS OF BUDDHISM: Siddhartha becomes The Buddha**

1

**'The Buddha'** is not a name but a title. It means **The Enlightened One**.

When he was born, The Buddha was called **Siddhartha Gautama** Siddhartha Gautama was born in the **fifth century BCE**.

Siddhartha's father was a **Hindu king** and his mother died when Siddhartha was still a baby.

2

When he was born, Siddhartha's parents had **his horoscope prepared. This said that he would either be a great ruler or a great spiritual leader**. Naturally as his father was the king, he was keen for Siddhartha to be a great ruler so he made sure that while he was growing up he never saw anything to disturb his mind or encourage him to think about things in a deep way.

3

As Siddhartha reached adulthood his **marriage was arranged and some time later he had a son**. But he had led a **very sheltered life** within the Palace estate. As the time for him to become King approached he began to wonder what the world was like beyond the palace, so since he knew his father would disapprove, **he arranged to go out secretly, with his friend Channa who was his charioteer**.

4

Siddhartha was enchanted by the world outside the palace, but then he saw something very strange. A man was coming along the street, but he was bent and walking slowly, using a stick. And his hair was grey. Siddhartha had never seen **an old man** before and when Channa explained that everyone grows old, he was really shocked and upset. So they went back to the Palace.

5

Next day Siddhartha went out again with Channa. He hoped that he would not see another old man, and he did not – but he saw someone lying down, moaning and covered in sweat, breathing with difficulty. Siddhartha was curious and keen to help the man in some way - but Channa urged him to stay away, explaining that **the man was sick**. He was suffering from pain and a high fever. Siddhartha was upset, especially when Channa explained that he might catch the sickness if he went too close, and that everyone gets sick once in a while.

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On the third day, Siddhartha asked Channa to take him a different way. He did not want to see any old people or sick people this time. All was well until they noticed a group of people approaching. Some people led the procession playing sad music and then some people passed by carrying a narrow bed. A man lay on this but he was covered in cloth which was piled up with flowers. Siddhartha could hardly see the man at all and asked Channa why this man was all covered up and why people were carrying him. Channa explained that this was **a dead man**. Siddhartha did not understand. When Channa explained about death he was horrified. Everyone has to die? Even his beautiful wife and sweet little son would die? It was unthinkable.

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They went out again next day and this time Siddhartha said he wanted to go somewhere right away from everyone. He just wanted some peace and quiet. So Channa took him down by the river where they could walk together enjoying nature's beauty. And there, by the river, sitting under a large tree, Siddhartha encountered another unusual sight. He saw **a Hindu holy man sitting in deep meditation**.

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Siddhartha asked Channa who this strange man was and what he was doing. Why was he being so lazy? What was he doing with the beads he held? Channa explained that he was **a holy man**. He was **repeating the name of God, using the beads to keep track of his chanting and praying for infinite peace, infinite bliss**.

Siddhartha wanted to know what the man was doing. He wanted infinite peace, infinite bliss, himself. But Channa said that they should not disturb the holy man, so they returned to the Palace.

9

All the things that Siddhartha had seen occupied his mind from that day onwards. He could not go back to his old unconscious life of pleasure. He realised that he must find **a way of ending suffering not just for himself, but for his wife and child too** – indeed for **everyone**.

10

Siddhartha decided that he must leave his family and the Palace. No more the life of luxury, he would **renounce his former life** and embrace the life of an ascetic, a wandering holy man, owning nothing, begging for his food and spending his days in prayer, meditation and spiritual discipline. He had to find a way of overcoming suffering.

11

After six years of travelling and studying at the feet of the wisest people he could find, practising exercises and disciplines to develop control of his senses – including fasting and practically starving himself, Siddhartha decided that enough was enough. He sat under a **large Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya in Northern India** and vowed that here he would either discover the truth or die in the attempt.

12

Siddhartha entered into deep meditation and remained there for days if not weeks without moving from the spot. A woman who lived nearby was impressed by his sincerity and intensity. She brought him food each day and he accepted it. He came to see that everything should be done in a balanced way. It is not necessary or helpful to starve the body any more than it is necessary or helpful to live a life of luxury. **The middle way** is by far the best.

13

The Buddha never spoke about God but he did describe the demons that attacked him while he was meditating under the Bodhi tree. They were desperate to distract him from his quest for the truth. But he was able to remain in his deep meditation and ignore them completely. As he reached new levels of awareness and understanding, he broke free from the shackles of human ignorance and limitation. He touched the ground and called on the Earth to witness his **victory over the demons** and his inner achievement.

14

Siddhartha was now enlightened. He felt that for the first time he could see the world as it was, with a new clarity and understanding. He said it was like waking up. **‘The Buddha’ means ‘The Enlightened One.’**

15

The Buddha was not sure if it would be possible to share the insights he had discovered, but he met some ascetics who he had known before he was enlightened. They could tell that something special had happened to him, they could sense the new wisdom and light that radiated from him and they asked him to teach them, so there, **in the Deer Park at Sarnath (near Varanasi, in India)** he began his teaching.

16

The Buddha spent the rest of his life teaching his philosophy and setting up **‘The Sangha’ a community of Monks and Nuns** whose lives were dedicated to following his teachings.

17

After a very full and fruitful life, **at the age of eighty, The Buddha died and entered into his final Nirvana.** His students cremated his body and took his ashes to places which were important to them. They erected memorials there and these are still places of Buddhist pilgrimage.

18

The leading Buddhists met and collected together all his teachings. These were memorised and **passed down by word of mouth** for many years. Much of a Buddhist Monk's time would be spent in learning the teachings perfectly so that they were passed on unchanged until they were eventually written down.

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**The Tripitaka** (called Tipitaka in Pali) **is the earliest collection of Buddhist writings.** Initially, they were composed orally, but were written down by the third century BCE. The word means "the three baskets," (tri=three, pitaka=baskets), and refers to the way the texts were first recorded.

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