

Buddha

Buddha, the Enlightened One, was born c. 563 BC as Prince **Siddhartha Gautama** to **King Suddhodana** and **Queen Mahamaya** of the **Sakya** dynasty ruling over the kingdom of **Kapilavastu**. According to Buddhist legends, he was conceived in a vision when his mother, **Maya**, dreamt that a white elephant had entered her right side. He was born in a garden in **Lumbini** (Nepal) and his mother died two days later. He was brought up by his aunt, **Prajapati**. At his birth, astrologers predicted that he would either be a great emperor or else renounce the world to pursue a spiritual life.

Siddhartha was educated in the royal tradition to be a great king. All through his childhood, the Prince was sheltered from the outside world and kept within the confines of the palace. He married **Yashodhara**, the daughter of **King Devadatta** and had a son, **Rahul**.

One day, Siddhartha persuaded his father to allow him beyond the palace accompanied by his charioteer, **Chandaka**. His father made elaborate arrangements to clear the streets of any old or sick people. However, on his first outing, Siddhartha was surprised to encounter a feeble old man lying on the side of the road and had the concept of ageing explained to him. On three further visits, he saw a helpless sick man, a dead man being carried on a pyre and a serene sage. Thus the Prince realised the four fundamental truths of Life:

- All men who are born have to die eventually
- Sickness comes to all men
- Old age also comes to all men
- Renunciation is the way to attaining peace and salvation.

Thus at the age of 29 Siddhartha decided to leave home to seek the way to achieve salvation. The Prince left at the dead of the night on his horse, **Kantaka**, and accompanied by his charioteer, **Chandaka**. On reaching the outskirts of the city, Siddhartha divested himself of his royal accoutrements and turned back his horse and companion.

Siddhartha wandered in the forests seeking instruction from numerous sages and ascetics. However, since these teachings did not satisfy his quest, Siddhartha attempted alternative means to attain salvation. He decided to practice austerities, but was once again disappointed. He finally took recourse to meditation and settled under a **Pipal** tree (later known as the **Bodhi** tree, after he was tested by temptation). Having overcome temptation and in deep meditation, the Prince finally achieved **Nirvana** or realisation to salvation. Thus at the age of 35, Siddhartha became the **Enlightened One** or the **Buddha**.

His preachings

Buddha's teachings included

- **Four Noble Truths**
- **Holy Eightfold Path**
- **Wheel of Law or Dharma**

Following the Eightfold Path will lead to **Nirvana** or salvation from the cycle of rebirth.

Buddha's first sermon (528 BC) was delivered in the **Deer Park** at **Sarnath** where he preached the **Dharma** or the **Wheel Of Law**.

Buddha travelled around northern India preaching sermons and teaching his Middle Way to a growing number of disciples for 45 years.

Buddha died in **Kushinagara** in 483 BC.