

## The Story of Prince Siddhartha

In Nepal in the year 583 BC, King Suddhodana and his wife Maya had a baby boy whom they named Siddhartha Gautama. The baby was healthy and strong but Queen Maya died soon after he was born.

When Prince Siddhartha was a few days old, a holy man told his father that he would have a great future, either as a spiritual leader or a military hero. His father decided to raise him to be a military leader as this was the future he wanted for his son. He raised Siddhartha in luxury, never allowing him to leave the palace and making sure he never experienced pain or suffering. He grew up unaware that there was illness, suffering and death in the world.

When he was 29 years old, Prince Siddhartha decided that he wanted to explore outside the palace walls. He asked a servant to take him out in chariot to see the countryside. The sights that he saw shocked and disturbed him. He first saw an old man, then a dying man and finally a corpse. He realised for the first time that suffering and death are a reality of life.

As they were driving back to the palace, the servant pointed out a holy man who looked peaceful and contented. The servant explained that the holy man had renounced the suffering of life and had dedicated his life to finding a release from fear and death. Prince Siddhartha returned to the palace in a thoughtful mood and was very troubled by all he had seen on his first trip out of the palace.

When he returned to the palace, he found that none of the luxuries he had enjoyed gave him any pleasure. All he could think of was the four sights he had seen on his journey. He decided that he could no longer live the life of a prince and vowed to go out into the world to find out the truth about life. So he cut off his hair and exchanged his princely robes for beggar's clothes. He left the palace secretly that night, leaving behind his wife and his newborn son. He had started his quest for enlightenment.

Siddhartha began talking to holy men who taught him how to meditate and told him about their lives. Yet even though they taught him all that they knew, Siddhartha was still not satisfied.

He went off to find the Truth by himself and sat beneath a sacred fig tree. He meditated alone there and thought about all he had seen and experienced. He sat there for a long time when suddenly he found the Truth he had been looking for. He was enlightened and became a Buddha. From then on, the fig tree became known as the bodhi tree.

At first, the Buddha did not want to teach what he had learned as he knew that what he had discovered could not be explained in words. But soon he started to tell people how they could achieve enlightenment and find the Truth. Instead of teaching doctrines about enlightenment, he chose to prescribe the path people could follow to achieve enlightenment themselves. He taught until his death at the age of 80.

