

# CONTENTS



AN OVERVIEW OF BUDDHISM	1
CHAPTER ONE — <b><i>Buddha, The Enlightened One</i></b>	2
<i>Prince Siddhartha</i>	2
<i>The Four Sights Revealed</i>	4
<i>The Search for the Truth</i>	5
<i>The Bodhi Tree and Enlightenment</i>	6
CHAPTER TWO — <b><i>Buddhist Beliefs and Teachings</i></b>	8
<i>The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path</i>	8
<i>Nirvana</i>	10
<i>Other Beliefs</i>	10
<i>A Summary</i>	13
CHAPTER THREE — <b><i>Worship and Ceremonies</i></b>	14
<i>Worship</i>	14
<i>Special Ceremonies</i>	15
CHAPTER FOUR — <b><i>Festivals and Holidays</i></b>	18
<i>Wesak</i>	18
<i>Buddhist New Year</i>	19
<i>Other Festivals</i>	20
CHAPTER FIVE — <b><i>Sacred Writings</i></b>	22
<i>The Tipitaka</i>	22
<i>Sutras</i>	23
CHAPTER SIX — <b><i>Buddhist Sects</i></b>	26
<i>Theravada Buddhism</i>	26
<i>Mahayana Buddhism</i>	27
<i>Tantric Buddhism</i>	28
<i>Zen Buddhism</i>	28
<i>Pure Land Buddhism</i>	29
CHAPTER SEVEN — <b><i>Holy Places</i></b>	30
<i>Stupas</i>	30
<i>Temples</i>	31
<i>Monasteries</i>	33
<i>Other Pilgrimage Sites</i>	34
CHAPTER EIGHT — <b><i>A Short History of Buddhism</i></b>	36
<i>Emperor Asoka</i>	36
<i>Theravada Buddhism Spreads to Southeast Asia</i>	37
<i>Mahayana Buddhism Spreads to Northern Asia</i>	37
TEST	39
ANSWER KEY	42

# CHAPTER ONE

## *Buddha the Enlightened One*

Buddhism traces its origins back some 2500 years ago to India. It began around 563 B.C. with the birth of an Indian prince named *Siddhartha Gautama*. This prince, who had everything the world could offer, nevertheless gave it all up and went on to become the *Buddha*, or “the Enlightened One.” What led to his decision to forego a life of ease for one of meditation and poverty makes for an interesting story.

### *Prince Siddhartha*

Siddhartha Gautama’s birth is shrouded in mystery and myth. One legend holds that when he was conceived, a white elephant painlessly entered the side of his mother, Queen Maya. When the time came for his birth, he is said to have sprung from his mother’s side. He then took seven steps and proclaimed that he was born to achieve bodhi (awakening) for the good of the world.

Siddhartha’s father, King Shuddhodana, was puzzled and troubled by these events. He was the rajah, or ruler, of a small Hindu kingdom located at the foothills of the Himalayas. (In those days, the kingdom was in India, but today the region is part of Nepal.) As such, Shuddhodana expected his son to follow in his footsteps and rule as a great king. Was his infant son destined to become a religious holy man instead of a king? He pondered these things and sought the help of the sages at court.

The sages did little to ease Shuddhodana’s concerns. They said that they saw wheels on the palms of baby Siddhartha’s hands and on the soles of his feet. They interpreted this to mean



that he would grow up to be a Chakravarta, or a “Wheel Turner.” This meant that he would become a very important person. But would that person be a king or a religious leader?

What the sages told Shuddhodana next was what he did not want to hear. They talked about Four Sights that would cause young Siddhartha to give up a life of worldly pleasures for one of religious privation.

“What are these Four Sights?” asked the king.

The sages replied: “They are an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a monk.”

Now because Siddhartha was a baby, he had yet to see any of the four things mentioned by the sages. And his father was determined that he would not.

“From this day forth,” Shuddhodana commanded in so many words, “my son will not come into contact with any suffering, pain, or death.” To this end, Shuddhodana built three luxurious palaces for Siddhartha. There was a palace for the winter, another for the

According to Buddhist legend, Siddhartha Gautama—the future Buddha—was born from the right side of his mother, Queen Maya, who is said to have given birth to him while standing and holding onto the branch of a tree which miraculously offered itself to her.



summer, and a third for the rainy season. Each palace was set in the midst of parks and beautiful gardens.

There were also numerous ponds on which graceful swans swam among lotuses, a kind of lily. (Later, after Buddhism developed, the lotus became one of its symbols, standing for everything that is pure and good.)

Despite such luxury, young Siddhartha was not happy. He had everything a young prince could possibly want, but none of it brought him happiness. He had hundreds of servants who saw to his every need. He ate nothing but the finest foods. He wore nothing but the finest clothes. His father provided beautiful dancing girls for his entertainment. But nothing seemed to make him happy.

When Siddhartha was sixteen, his father decided it was time for him to marry. According to legend, several thousand daughters of chieftains in the region were sent to Shuddhodana's

palace. They were some of the most beautiful and talented girls in the kingdom. From among them, King Shuddhodana chose Yasodhara, the daughter of a chieftain named Dandapani, to become his son's wife.

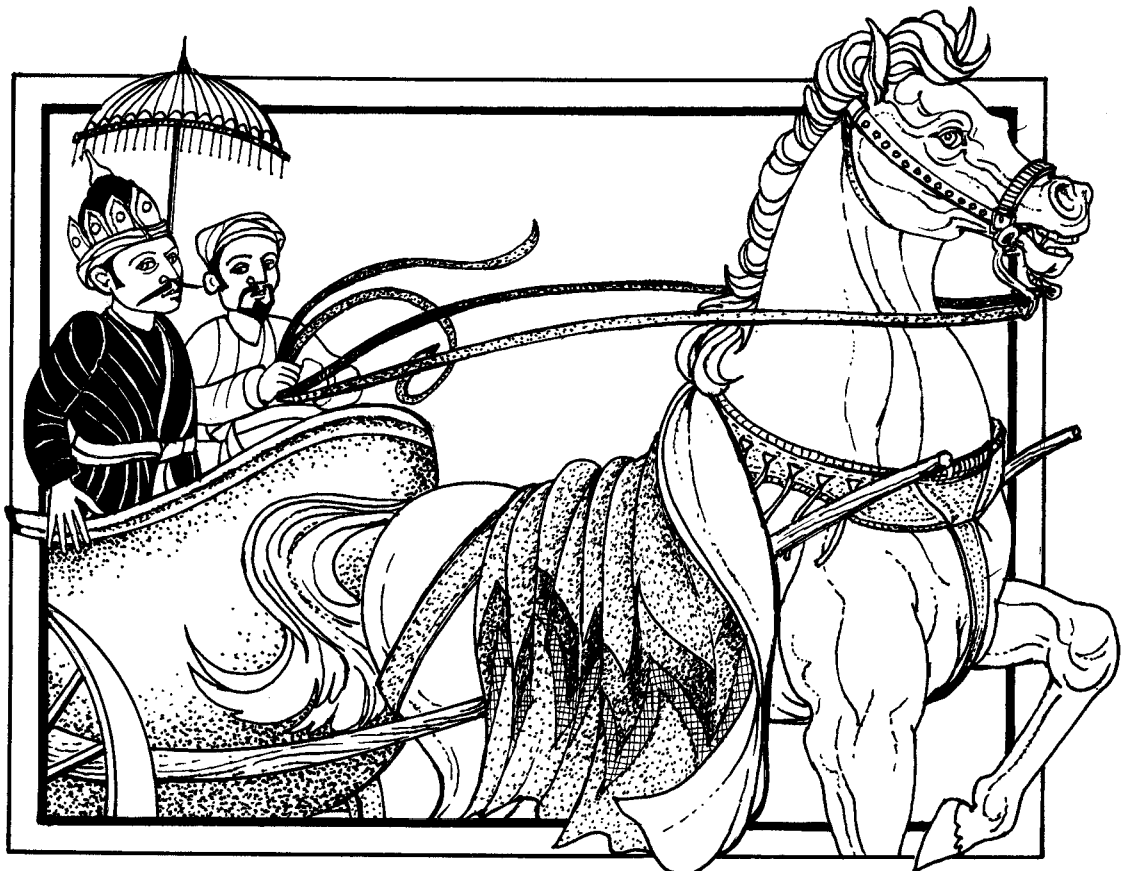
For thirteen years after his marriage, Siddhartha Gautama lived the non-eventful life of a pampered prince. He never left the palace grounds, and his father, remembering the prophecy of the Four Sights, sought to protect him from the outside world. During those years, Siddhartha was shielded from any person who was old or sick. He never saw anyone die or witnessed a funeral. And he had no knowledge of what went on outside the walls of the palace grounds.

One day, boredom and curiosity got the better of Siddhartha. He called for his chariot and went outside the palace walls and into the world for the first time. What he saw changed his life forever.

### Words to remember:

Siddhartha Gautama  
Buddha  
Queen Maya  
bodhi  
King Shuddhodana  
rajah  
sages  
Chakravarta

A pivotal moment occurred in the life of Siddhartha Gautama when, having requested a chariot, he ventured beyond the walls of his father's palace, and saw the world for the first time.



## Section Review:

1. What did the sages mean when they told King Shuddhodana that his son would grow up to be a “Wheel Turner”?
2. Why was Shuddhodana so concerned about the Four Sights?
3. What steps did Shuddhodana take to protect Siddhartha from the outside world?
4. From what you have read to this point, why do you think Prince Siddhartha could not find happiness?

### *The Four Sights Revealed*

There are different versions about Prince Siddhartha’s first excursion into the outside world. Some say he discovered that pain and suffering existed in just one trip. Others state that he journeyed outside the palace walls on four different occasions. Regardless, he was shocked by what he saw and learned.

The first of the Four Sights Siddhartha encountered was an old man. The man had gray hair and was toothless. When the prince saw him standing by the side of the road, he ordered his charioteer, Chandaka, to stop.

“Chandaka,” the prince asked, “what kind of person is this?”

“He is an old man, Master,” Chandaka answered. “He has lived many years, and now he is old.”

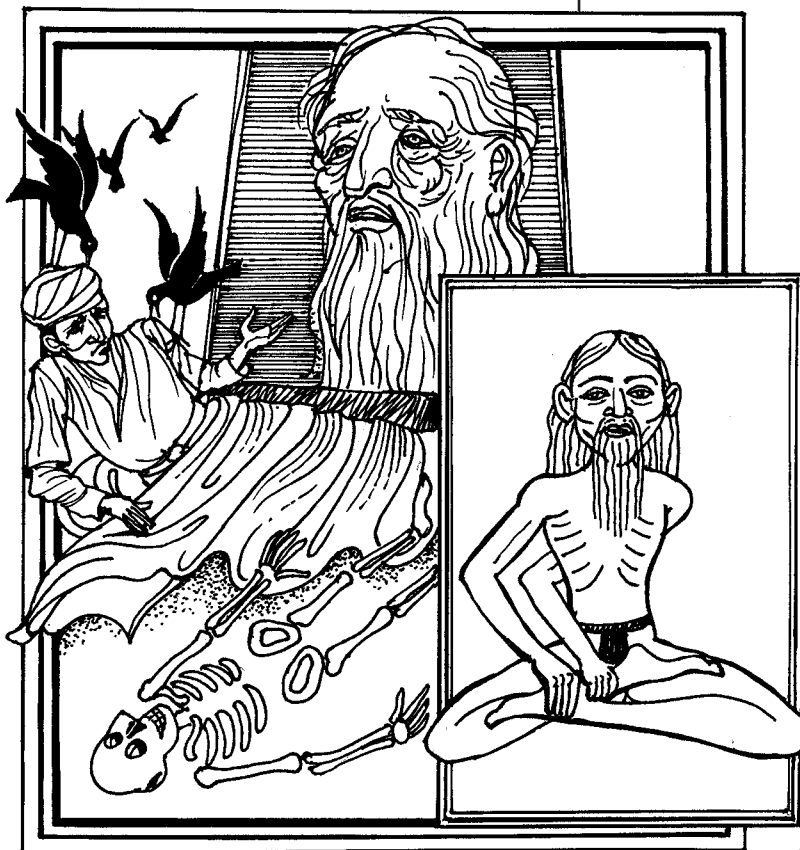
Siddhartha was stunned. He had never seen an old person before. He asked Chandaka if there were many old people in the world and if he, too, was destined to become such a person.

Reluctantly, Chandaka, who feared what might happen to him when King Shuddhodana learned that Siddhartha had ventured beyond the palace grounds, replied:

“Yes, Master, there are many old people in the world. And yes, you too shall someday become old.”

Siddhartha next came upon a man

who was sick. The man was lying beside the road, barely able to move. Siddhartha asked and received from Chandaka a reply that was similar to his



question about the old man. Yes, there were sick people in the world. Yes, he too was likely at some point to become sick.

The third of the Four Sights was revealed when Siddhartha and his charioteer happened upon a funeral. For the first time, Siddhartha saw a dead person. Thus, another truth about the world struck home. He knew from that moment that all people die.

With the revelation of the third sign, Siddhartha fully understood that pain, suffering, and death were a part of life. But how to deal with it? How to escape samsara, or reincarnation, the Hindu belief that people die and are reborn many times? How to avoid being born again and again, perhaps not even as a person but as an animal or an object? How to reach that stage where

While sources differ as to whether Siddhartha encountered the “Four Sights” on his first trip outside his father’s palace or over the course of several trips, it is clear that the discovery of old age, sickness, and death had a transformative effect on his life. Siddhartha’s encounter with a monk (the fourth sight) suggested to him the possibility of transcending life’s transience and impermanence.



reincarnation stops and a person attains eternal peace? How to reach Nirvana, that state of bliss?

Siddhartha thought he might at least have a clue to the answer when the fourth sight was revealed. One day he was out in his chariot when he met a holy man. Some sources say the holy man was an ascetic, a person who practices strict self-discipline and lives a life free from all worldly pleasure. Others say the man was a monk. Regardless, he made an impression on Siddhartha. He wore a yellow robe and his head was shaven. There was a serene, happy look on his face. He told Siddhartha that he had given up his family and home to wander and search for happiness. At that moment, Siddhartha decided that he would follow the example of the monk. He would give up his life of ease and go out into the world to find the answers to the things that troubled him. So shortly after the birth of his son, he left the palace, leaving his wife and child behind.

### Words to remember:

**Chandaka**  
**samsara**  
**Nirvana**  
**ascetic**

### *Section Review:*

1. Which of the Four Sights was revealed to Siddhartha first?
2. Why was Chandaka, Siddhartha's charioteer, somewhat reluctant to answer his master's questions regarding old age, sickness, and death?
3. What is meant by reincarnation?
4. What did Siddhartha decide to do after encountering the monk?

### *The Search for the Truth*

Shortly after his encounters with the Four Sights, Siddhartha went back to the palace grounds and prepared himself for his mission. At the age of 29, when he had everything a person could possibly want in life, he knew he must give it all up. One night, taking a final glance at his wife and young son as they lay sleeping, he stole from the palace and went into the world. Legend states that the gods caused everyone who resided within the

palace grounds to fall into a deep sleep, thus enabling Siddhartha to depart without being detected.

Siddhartha discarded his princely clothes and put on the saffron (orange-yellow) robe of a monk. He shaved his head and his beard. Having only a begging bowl to carry, he began his wanderings throughout India in search of the Truth.

After awhile, Siddhartha met and joined a band of five ascetics. They told him that the way to Truth lay in denying the body of all comforts, especially food. Siddhartha tried this method. For six years he ate nothing but the juice squeezed from beans and peas. His body became so thin that his ribs stuck out and the bones of his spine resembled spindles. His skin withered and changed color, and he became so weak that he could not move. But he truly believed at the time that denial and self-torture would lead him to the Truth.

While Siddhartha was in the company of the five ascetics, he also practiced bodily rituals that caused him great pain. He tried holding his breath until he passed out, thinking that would help. It did not. He also tried yoga.

Yoga is a system that combines mental discipline with a variety of physical postures. During Siddhartha's time, there were thousands of these postures, or asanas.

An ascetic performing yoga might start by placing the right foot upon the left thigh and the left foot upon the right thigh. Then he would cross his hands and grab his two big toes. Finally, he might place his chin upon his chest and focus his eyes on the tip of his nose. He would stay in that position and meditate as long as his body could stand it. Siddhartha probably tried this and other yoga positions in an attempt to rise above earthly concerns and find the way to happiness. But no amount of yoga brought him the enlightenment he sought.

After six years, Siddhartha decided that extreme self-denial and bodily

punishment were of no benefit. He concluded that the middle way was best—a way that shunned extreme poverty as well as riches. He started eating again. When the five ascetics with whom he had traveled so long saw him eating a regular meal, they accused him of being pleasure-loving and abandoned him in disgust. Siddhartha was alone once more.

### Section Review:

1. What did the five ascetics tell Siddhartha was the way to the Truth?
2. What is yoga?
3. Why did the five ascetics leave Siddhartha?

### The Bodhi Tree and Enlightenment

After the ascetics departed, Siddhartha wandered until he came to a river. A girl from a nearby village offered him a bowl of rice and milk, which he readily accepted and ate. With his strength renewed, he bathed in the river. Then he decided to sit under a fig tree on the riverbank. He remembered a time in his youth when he had sat under the cool shade of a great tree and felt an inner peace. Perhaps this is the way to the Truth, he thought.

The fig tree under which Siddhartha sat later came to be called the “bodhi tree,” or the “tree of wisdom.” Siddhartha vowed that he would sit there until he understood the meaning of life. Not until he had found a way to end suffering for himself and all humankind would he leave. He sat there for 49 days. During this time, he sat cross-legged and meditated. He thought about many things during his seven-week ordeal. He thought about all the great Hindu teachings. He thought about reincarnation, the endless cycle of death and rebirth. And he thought about all the pain and suffering in the world.

Mara, the Evil One, overheard Siddhartha’s vow and was determined to

stop him from becoming enlightened. He and his army of demons tried to drive Siddhartha away with a whirlwind, a downpour, a meteor shower, and a darkness that blotted out



everything. But Siddhartha held fast. The wind that uprooted other trees had no effect on the bodhi tree under which he sat. The rain did not wet him, and the meteors that fell from the sky changed into flowers and incense. And when the darkness descended on him, it immediately turned into brilliant sunlight. Every attempt of Mara and his demons to dissuade Siddhartha failed.

Legend says that at the moment Siddhartha became enlightened, the earth shook and it rained from a cloudless sky. At the age of 35, he had come to understand suffering and how to avoid it. Buddhists believe that he realized there

Siddhartha’s struggle for enlightenment was made more difficult by Mara, a supernatural being, who attempted to defeat Siddhartha with a whirlwind, a downpour, a meteor shower, and an all-consuming darkness.

### Words to remember:

saffron  
yoga  
asanas  
middle way



were Four Noble Truths that explained suffering and how it could be ended. They also believe that he said this could be accomplished by following a Noble Eightfold Path. Both the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path are discussed in Chapter Two.

#### Words to remember:

bodhi tree  
Mara  
Four Noble Truths  
Noble Eightfold Path  
Devadatta

For 45 years, Siddhartha, now known as the Buddha, preached and won converts in northern India. Included among these were his father, King Shuddhodana, his wife, Yasodhara, and his son, Rabula. Not everyone in his family, however, rushed to follow his beliefs. He had a life-long enemy in his cousin Devadatta. Devadatta had always been jealous of Siddhartha, and now he was determined to kill him.

According to legend, Devadatta first hired a band of criminals to murder his famous cousin. But the Buddha's kindness won them over, and they joined his disciples. Next Devadatta unloosed a crazed elephant on the street where the Buddha was begging for food. But Buddha's kind demeanor turned the elephant into a fawning puppy. Furious, Devadatta decided to kill the Buddha himself. He climbed to the top of a cliff and planned to push a huge rock down

on the Buddha's head. For all his efforts, he only succeeded in injuring the Buddha's foot. However, because he had injured the Holy One, the earth is said to have opened up at that very moment and dragged Devadatta into the lowest hell.

Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, continued to preach until he was 80 years old. Some sources say that he died a natural death. Others maintain that he died from food poisoning. After his death, his teachings spread throughout the Orient. The spread of Buddhism is discussed in Chapter Eight.

#### Section Review:

1. What childhood memory prompted Siddhartha to sit under the fig tree?
2. Why is the tree under which Siddhartha sat called the "bodhi tree"?
3. What steps did Mara, the Evil One, take to prevent Siddhartha from attaining enlightenment?
4. With whom does Mara compare in Christianity and other religions?
5. Why did Devadatta try to kill Siddhartha?

#### For Further Thought:

1. Was Siddhartha Gautama's father justified in protecting his son from the sufferings and miseries of the world? Why or why not?
2. Imagine newspapers existed in the time of Siddhartha and that you are a reporter for *The Himalaya Herald*. Write an article based on an interview you had with Siddhartha after the Four Sights were revealed to him.
3. Pretend that Siddhartha kept a diary. Make an entry he might have written the night he left his wife, son, and worldly possessions to become a holy man.
4. Why do you think almost all religions recognize a devil? What role does such a personified spirit of evil play in a society?
5. Look up yoga on the Internet or in some resource and write a one-page report about it.
6. What personal traits do you think characterize persons who are drawn to mystic cults? Would you join such a group? Why or why not?