

## Activity: Buddhism Play

There are not many people in the world who do not want to be happy. In our lives at some stage we have all felt some level of pain and suffering. How can we ever be free from it?

Well around 2500 years ago there lived a man who wanted to find the answer to this very question. His name was Prince Siddhartha or now commonly known as the Buddha or enlightened one.

Prince Siddhartha, the Buddha to be, was born to King Sudhodhana and Queen Mahamaya of the Sakya clan. They lived in the city of Kapilvatthu at the foot of the Himalayas. At the time of his birth five wise men came to see the newborn baby. They made an astounding prediction. They predicted that this child would one day grow to be a wise man. However he would want to leave the palace. He will not want to rule the kingdom but will want to teach his wisdom to others.

At the thought of this the King became very frightened and decided there and then that he would give his child all he possibly could to distract him from his mission. He would make his life so happy and free from suffering that he would not want to leave the palace.

A few years passed and the Buddha grew to become a charming child. He had all the material possession he could desire and in all other matters was like any other child expect in one instance. This child seemed to possess a marked compassion and sympathy for all living beings.

One day the prince was playing with his cousin, Prince Devadatta with their toy bows and arrows.

### Scene 1

Devdatta and Buddha are playing about shooting bows and arrows.

Buddha (stops playing suddenly): Oh look what a beautiful swan

Devadatta: I bet I could get it with my bow and arrow

Buddha: No Don't

Devdatta already has shot the arrow while Buddha is still speaking

Buddha: What have you done. You have harmed a defenceless creature.

Buddha then walks up to the swan takes the arrow out of it and starts to nurse its wounds (Buddha will need to turn the swan around so that audience can see the 'blood' covered side). Buddha then rips off part of his clothes and starts to bandage the swan

### Narration

Years passed. The compassionate child grew into a charming young man. The king, remembering the prediction of the wise men at the time of the Prince's birth made sure that his life was filled with pleasure and that the prince saw no sorrow. And so at the age of 16 the king arranged for the prince to be wedded to the beautiful princess Yashodhara.

The King built a beautiful palace where the prince and his bride were to spend their days. Siddhartha was told by his father to live within the confines of this palace and not to venture out. The king did not want the prince ever to see any sign of suffering.

Dancers and singers were engaged to entertain the prince and princess. For a while the prince and princess lived happily in their palace. The Prince however, gradually began to get curious as to the outside world and yearned to discover what was beyond the confines of the palace walls.

Scene 2 ( Servant is waiting near the entrance)

Buddha: May it please you sire but I have a request to make.

King: Yes son, you know I will give you anything you desire

Buddha: Sire do not think me ungrateful. You have bestowed upon me a most comfortable life and surrounded me with all the worldly possessions my heart could desire. But sire I have one more desire which is your permission.

King: Name it. I only want to make you happy

Buddha: For some time now I have lived within the four walls of this palace. I long to see the life of real people outside the palace. Please gracious king, grant me permission to leave the palace and see the life of your subjects.

King: Son I am shocked. What need have you to leave the palace walls. You have everything you need here. What reason is there for you to leave the palace?

Buddha: Yes sire you have certainly given me all that I need or want. But the life I have lived surely does not reflect the life that is led by your subjects in your kingdom. Please permit me to see this for myself if only for a few short visits.

Continue to act whilst narration is going on. Buddha is pleading with the king .

Narration

Like this the Buddha pleaded for some hours. The king was scared to let his son go. The prediction of the wise men kept him from fulfilling his son's desire. He had managed to keep his son within the palace up until now but he saw that further resistance would be futile in the face of his son's desperate pleading.

Scene continues

King: Yes son very well. If it is your desperate wish to go I will permit you to do so. But, with the proviso that your visits are short and you return to the palace.

King: Servant come here.

Servant: Yes sire how may I serve you?

King: Call the royal charioteer.

Servant: As you wish sire

Servant then walks off.

(Channa arrives)

Channa: Pranaam Maharaja. How can I serve you today?

King: My son wishes to leave the palace to visit parts of the kingdom. Take him where he wishes to go but make sure that he returns the same day.

Channa: As you wish your highness (Channa bows)  
Curtains close

### Narration

With this the prince undertook a series of trips outside the palace. He wanted to discover the world beyond the palace walls. He wanted to know what life was like and what life for most people was about.

And so along with the royal charioteer, Channa, Siddhartha began to take a number of short trips throughout various parts of the kingdom. These visits, although the prince did not know it, were to change the course of his life. He was to experience, what most Buddhists now call the signs of suffering. On the first visit out with the charioteer Channa, the prince spotted an old man.

### Scene 3

Old man walks in with white hair, and walking stick. Hobbling as he walks

Buddha: Tell me Channa what is wrong with this man? Why is his skin wrinkled and why does he walk so?

Channa: Sire this man is old. We will all end up in this sort of state as we are all bound to get old. His appearance of youth has faded he walks with pain and slowly as his limbs are now failing him.

Chariot moves a little further – by this time the old man has walked off the stage  
Curtains close??

### Narration

The prince had never seen such a sight in his life before. He did not even know that all humans were destined to become old. Still astounded the prince ventured another visit out of the palace grounds.

(Man lying on the floor and groaning - should already be on the stage)

### Scene 4

Buddha: Channa what is wrong with this man? Why is he groaning? He seems to be suffering.

Channa: Sire this man is suffering from a serious illness. Illness is something that affects the normal working of the body and it impairs the normal human ability.

Curtains close???

### Narration

The prince looked on in amazement for some time. He had never seen a sight such as this. Again his curiosity grew further and he decided to make a third visit outside the confines of the palace walls.

### Scene 5

A man is being carried away on a stretcher and there are people crying with sorrow around him.

Buddha: Why is the man on the stretcher being carried away Channa? Why does he lie so still? Can he not walk? Why are all these people crying around him?

Channa: Sire this man has left his earthly body. He is no more and has passed on to the other realms. He has died your highness.

Close curtains????

### Narration

Again the Buddha returned to the palace. The prince had become deeply shocked and affected by what he had seen. Some time passed and his wife gave birth to a baby boy. The Buddha however still had his thoughts on the events he had seen outside the palace and began to wonder. Was there anybody who was free from suffering?

As he was thinking this he saw a monk walk past. This monk was so happy. He did not seem to have a care in the world, he had very few possessions but a beaming smile on his face. He asked Channa the charioteer who happened to be nearby.

### Scene 6

Monk walks past looking blissfully happy

Buddha: Who is this man, Channa? Why is he so happy?

Channa: the man is a monk sire. The monk has left his family and given up his desire for pleasures to search for freedom from worldly suffering.

### Narration

Buddha returned to the palace and began to wonder. He asked himself. Why were the old man, the sick man and those mourning for the dead man suffering? What is the cause of suffering? Is there any way out? The monk certainly seemed to be happy, maybe there is a way out. Maybe these monks have the answer.

That very night the prince made a decision. He decided that he was going to leave the palace. He was going to follow the life of these wandering monks and find the cause of suffering and the method of its eradication. He left that very night leaving the palace, his father, his wife and child behind.

At first he came across five asectics and he decided to copy their practices to see if he could find and answer to the problem of suffering. He punished his body in many ways and nearly died of starvation. Finding that none of these ways worked, the prince decided that he would try and find the way himself. To this end he sat under a large Bodhi tree and closed his eyes.

Curtains open – Buddha sitting under a tree meditating

As he meditated, Siddhartha let go of all outside disturbances, and memories of pleasures from the past. He let go of all worldly thoughts and turned his mind to finding the ultimate truth about life. He asked himself: "How does suffering start? How can one be free from suffering?" At first many distracting images appeared in his mind. But finally his mind became very calm, like a pond of still water. In the calm of deep meditation, Siddhartha concentrated on how his own life had started.

First, Siddhartha remembered his previous lives. Next, he saw how beings are reborn according to the law of cause and effect, or karma. He saw that good deeds lead the way, from suffering to peace. Finally, he became completely free from thinking in a way that caused him any suffering. This freedom is called nirvana. So, at the age of 35, Siddhartha became the Buddha, the Supreme Enlightened One.

Curtains close

Buddha went out then to teach what he had learnt – and what he had learnt is still practiced to this day by all Buddhists and spiritual people – they are known as the four noble truths. The first is that suffering

exists. The second is that the causes of suffering are desire, greed and jealousy. The third that there is a way out of suffering. The final noble truth – that the way out of suffering is to follow the path of dharma.

To this end the message of Buddha's life was a practical one. I defy anyone in this audience to say that they have never suffered. I also defy anyone in the audience to say that they do not want to be truly happy and free from suffering. Buddha, much the same as Baba, showed the way to true happiness. He told us that the common denominators for all suffering were and are desire greed and suffering. If all of you analyse any random moment of sadness you will find its cause in one or more of these factors. The way to eradicate these cause is and will always be the path of dharma.