

BALVIKAS

SARVA DHARMA (UNITY OF ALL RELIGIONS): BUDDHISM

What have we learnt so far?

- **That religion is a pathway to God**
- **That all religions ultimately lead to the same goal**
- **That we follow different religions because they fit with who we are**
- **That there is no religion that is better than the others**

The Story of The Founder of Buddhism: Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha)

King Suddodana ruled the kingdom of Kapilavastu, located in the foothills of the Himalayan mountains. One night his pregnant wife, Queen Mahamaya, dreamt of a white elephant with six tusks entering her body. When she woke up, she told the king about her dream. The king consulted the wise men, and they predicted that the child would either be a great king or would renounce the world to become a holy man. The child was born and was named "Siddhartha" which means every wish fulfilled. Siddhartha was the only heir to the throne and, king Suddodana did not want him to renounce the world. He decided to keep the prince within the walls of the palace so that he would not be exposed to any holy man who may influence him. Unfortunately, Queen Mahamaya died soon after childbirth. Siddharata was then raised by his aunt with great love and care.

Siddharatha was highly gifted and mastered everything that he was exposed to. But was a loner and an introvert. One of Siddharthas cousins, Devadatta, was very jealous of the prince and did cruel things to hurt him. One day Devadatta shot a flying swan. The prince caught the bird as it fell, removed the arrow, and nursed the swan back to life. Devadutta demanded the swan from Siddhartha, claiming it as his prize. But Siddhartha refused. So they brought their disagreement to the royal court. The judges awarded Siddhartha the swan, saying, "Life is more valuable than anything else in the world. Whoever saves a life is in harmony with the Truth, and owns it."

When Siddhartha was sixteen, King Suddodana decided to get Siddhartha married. At that time a swayambara (where the princess selects from the assembled princes, her husband, on the basis of his superior demonstration in martial art) was arranged for the beautiful princess Yasodhara. Siddhartha won in all the competitions and won the hand of the princess. In few years they had a son. He was named Rahul, meaning, conqueror of all miseries. King Suddodana rejoiced for now it seemed less likely that Siddharatha would renounce the world.

But soon after Rahul was born, prince Siddhartha began to feel restless. He was curious about what lay outside his sheltered world. So one day he asked his charioteer to take him for a ride far outside the kingdom. They slipped beyond the palace gates and there, for the first time in his life, the prince saw human suffering: an old man, a sick man, and a dead man.

Siddhartha asked the charioteer, "Does everyone become sick, old and die?" The charioteer replied, "Yes master. This is the law of nature." Siddhartha felt very depressed. On their way back Siddhartha spotted a monk, wearing saffron robe, meditating under a tree. He seemed completely at peace. Siddhartha came near the

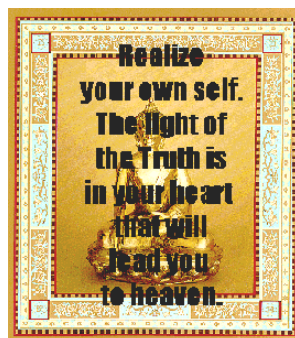
monk and asked, "Who are you?" The monk replied, "I am a seeker of the Truth, of life over death. And to find it, I have given up everything on this earth." Siddhartha was deeply influenced. He decided to leave his luxurious life and family and follow the monks footsteps.

That night he gazed at his sleeping wife and his infant child for the last time and crept out of the palace. He rode with his charioteer until dawn. In a remote place, far away from the kingdom, Siddhartha dismounted and told the charioteer, "Now I begin my quest for the Truth. Tell my father that I will either return someday as the conqueror of sickness, old age and death, or I will fail and die." The charioteer sadly left to tell to the king this sorrowful news.

Seeing his princely clothes, a beggar came asking for alms. Prince Siddhartha exchanged his princely clothes with the beggar. He then cut off his hair and began his quest for enlightenment. Siddhartha continued his journey, seeking wisdom from the monks he met along the way. But none could teach him how to obtain the ultimate peace. He gave up eating, torturing his body to get closer to the Truth but failed. Soon he became weak and was on the verge of losing his life. A low caste village girl, Sujata, saw his miserable condition, and took care of him. Siddhartha revived and renewed his search for enlightenment.

Sidhartha was determined to succeed. One day, after bathing in the river, he walked to a large bodhi (banyan) tree where many others had received enlightenment. He spread straw beneath him, and vowed, "I will not leave this seat until I have attained my goal.

Evil powers tried to dissuade Siddhartha from attaining his goal but he was steadfast. At dawn, when Siddhartha opened his eyes with the rising sun, he saw the whole cycle of life; the whole mystery of life. He saw the whole of existence within himself, and himself within the whole of existence. Siddhartha's search for the Truth had ended. At the age of thirty five he had become Buddha. Siddhartha, the Buddha, continued to sit in meditation. He left the shelter of the bodhi tree to go forth and teach others what he had learned. When he found the five hermits of Uruvilva, located in Kashi (today's Varanasi), he taught them the four noble truths which he had discovered.



1. Life ends in death.
2. The cause of sufferings of life is desire and our bad deeds, the Karma.
3. The end of desire leads to the end of suffering.
4. The way to end desire, and hence to end suffering, is to follow the righteous path and discovering the divine Truth that is inherent in us.

The five hermits became his first disciples. Buddha then traveled far and wide, teaching the four noble truths as well as the art of meditation to purify body, speech,

and mind. Soon Buddhas teachings spread throughout the land, and he had many followers.

During his travels, Buddha met a young woman grief stricken over the death of her child. She came to Buddha with her dead child begging Buddha to bring her child back to life. Buddha looked at her with great compassion and said, "To heal your child I need a mustard seed from a home where death has never occurred." The woman went to every house in the village, but there was no home where death had not occurred. Then she began to understand the law of nature: Death is universal. She returned to Buddha to learn the path that leads to eternal peace.

When Buddha returned to Kapilavastu, king Suddodana came to see him, along with his grandson, Rahul, Buddhas son. When the king saw Buddha begging on the street, as holy men do, he became alarmed. "You are a prince" he exclaimed. "It is not fitting that you should beg in the streets of your own kingdom!" Buddha replied, "Father, yours is the custom of kings, but I come from a long line of Buddhas, whose custom has always been to beg for food."

Buddhas cousin Devadatta had retained his childhood jealousies and joined the Sangha or congregation of Buddhists, to turn people against Buddha. But he failed. He then tried to kill Buddha by hiring criminals but the criminals became Buddhas disciples. When he turned loose a mad elephant while Buddha was begging on the street, the wild animal came near Buddha and submitted to him. At last, Devadutta decided to kill Buddha himself. He waited at the edge of a steep over-hanging hill over a path where Buddha often walked. Devadutta pushed down a huge boulder when he saw Buddha coming, but the boulder broke into pieces. A tiny fragment, however, cut Buddhas foot. For this assault against the great Buddha, Devadutta instantly died.

At the age of eighty, after preaching for forty-five years, Buddha prepared himself to enter Nirvana, a state of eternal peace, where there is no more birth or death. Before his final departure, Buddha addressed his disciples:

REALIZE YOUR OWN SELF. THE TRUTH IS IN YOUR HEART THAT WILL LEAD YOU TO HEAVEN.