

The Story of Buddha

"People came to him even as they were to come to Jesus asking what he was. How many people have provoked this question - not "who are you" with respect to name, origin or ancestry, but "What are you"? What order of being do you belong to? What species do you represent?...When the people carried their puzzlement to the **Buddha** himself, the answer he gave provided an identity for his entire message.

"Are you a god?" they asked. "No." "An Angel?" "No" "A Saint?" "No" "Then What are you?"

Buddha answered "I am awake"

His answer became his title, for this is what Buddha means. The Sanskrit root "budh" denotes both to wake up and to know. **Buddha**, then means the "Enlightened One", or the "Awakened One". While the rest of the world was wrapped in the womb of sleep, dreaming a dream known as the waking state of human life, one of their number roused himself. Buddhism begins with a man who shook of the daze, the doze, the dream-like vagaries of ordinary awareness. It begins with a man who woke up."

From "The World's Religions" by Huston Smith - Page 82

"He was born around 563 B.C. in what is now Nepal, near the Indian border. His full name was Siddhartha Gautama of the Sakyas. Siddhartha was his given name, Gautama his surname, and Sakya the name of the clan to which his family belonged."

"He was, in short, a man who seemed to have everything: family, "the venerable Gautama is well born on both sides, of pure descent"; appearance, "handsome, inspiring trust, gifted with great beauty of complexion, fair in color, fine in presence, stately to behold"; wealth, "he had elephants and silver ornaments for his elephants." He had a model wife, "majestic as a queen of heaven, constant ever, cheerful night and day, full of dignity and exceeding grace," who bore him a beautiful son. In addition, as heir to his father's throne, he was destined for fame and power. Despite all this there settled over him in his twenties a discontent, which was to lead to a complete break with his worldly estate."

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Buddha's Early Years

When Buddha was born, his father was approached by an astrologer. He was told, "Your son has the potential to choose one of two paths. Either he will become one of the world's greatest emperors or he will become a mystic." Buddha's father asked, "How is it possible to face such an extreme choice? I am confused. Please explain this to me." The astrologer said, "It is said in the scriptures that when a very wealthy individual suddenly has a spiritual awakening, he divests himself of all material wealth. This may be the case with Buddha."

Buddha's father became worried and looked for ways to ensure that his son would succeed him. He said to his astrologers, "I have only one son. I am very old. My wife passed away immediately after she gave birth to Buddha, so I cannot have any more sons. The future of my kingdom is jeopardized. Please help me." The astrologers made predictions that were based on their books. They said, "Under no circumstances, should you allow Buddha to experience any pain, misery, or sadness. Make sure you keep him away from the elderly and shield him from the idea of death. Surround him with beautiful women. Let him live a life of luxury, happiness, and comfort."

Buddha's father followed the advice of his astrologers. Three mansions were built for Buddha. In the summer, he lived in a cool house. As the seasons changed, he would move to his other homes. Buddha was surrounded by beautiful women, wealth, and luxury. It was said that not even a flower was allowed to die in the palace of Buddha. As soon as a flower faded, it was immediately removed. One night Buddha was being entertained. There were beautiful girls dancing, music and laughter; suddenly, he fell asleep. He woke up in the middle of the night. The girls had gone to sleep and one was having a nightmare.

For once Buddha's eyes did not rest on beauty. He actually felt repelled by the women. He experienced reality but kept silent. Later, on his way to a festival, Buddha saw an old man. He asked his chariot driver, "What has happened to this man? Why does he look so wrinkled and decrepit?" The driver said, "It happens to everybody. We all become frail as we grow old." Buddha's chariot passed a funeral procession. He asked his driver, "What has happened to this other man? Why are people carrying him on their shoulders?" The driver said, "The man is dead, sir. We must all die eventually." Buddha said, "Stop this chariot. Will I also die one day?"

The driver knew that Buddha's father had tried to protect his son from the idea of death. However, he was honest and told Buddha, "We all have to die one day. Whoever takes birth must also die." Shortly after, a monk appeared behind the dead man. Buddha asked, "Who is this man? Why is he wearing a robe?" The driver answered, "This man has renounced life and is in search of the essence." Buddha said, "I have renounced it as well." By nightfall, Buddha had left the palace.

After this moment, he went through a very difficult and intense period of seeking the truth. He went through many different teachers and systems of learning. He performed all kinds of difficult austerities, fasting and complex meditation methods. Finally, at the last moment, he achieved his life long ultimate goal! He became the Buddha! The Enlightened One!