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## What Is Buddhism?

By Colleen Messina

Sometimes having everything in the world isn't enough! It's what is inside you that is most important. A prince discovered this 2,500 years ago. His name was Siddhartha Gautama, and he was born in the country we now call Nepal. His discovery led to the founding of Buddhism.

According to ancient legends, the prince's mother had a dream when she was pregnant. Queen Maya dreamed that she was carrying a white elephant in her tummy! The elephant carried a lotus flower in his trunk. A wise man explained that the child she was carrying would become a holy man. The man's words scared the prince's father who definitely didn't want his son to become a skinny, hungry, holy man.

Siddhartha was born in 563 B.C. Queen Maya died when Prince Siddhartha was a baby, so his father raised him. The king wanted the prince to have the best of everything so that he would grow up to be a good king instead of a holy man. Prince Siddhartha grew up in a white palace surrounded by gardens that had flowers of every color and shape. The prince ate the tastiest food and saw only handsome people. It is believed that he never saw any sickness, poverty, or death during his childhood!

When he turned 16, the prince married a lovely girl named Yashodhara. The wedding celebrations lasted for seven days and nights. The Prince settled into married life, and when Yashodhara became pregnant, Siddhartha's father finally believed that his son would follow in his footsteps and become the next king. He allowed the prince to go outside the palace walls for the first time.

Prince Siddhartha rode around the kingdom in a horse-drawn chariot. It is believed that he saw things that made him wonder about life's purpose. First he saw an old man, bent and wrinkled. On the next chariot ride, a sick man crossed his path. Then, the prince saw a funeral procession. These three sights made him realize that life is

full of misery for many people. On his last ride, Prince Siddhartha saw a holy man. He realized that the peaceful, holy man was not afraid of old age, sickness, or even death. Prince Siddhartha realized that he wanted to find his own inner peace, but to do that, he had to leave everything that he loved.

Prince Siddhartha left his royal life behind. He left his wife and newborn son behind. He changed out of his silken robes. He cut off his hair and removed his jewels. Siddhartha went into the forest and sat in a cross-legged position in meditation for six years. Evil spirits assailed him, but he kept on meditating. Buddhists believe that Siddhartha received enlightenment while sitting under a bodhi tree near the Ganges River. Traditionally, the date for this event was the full moon in the month of May. Achieving enlightenment meant that Siddhartha had a deep understanding about life.

After his enlightenment, Siddhartha passed a man on the road. The man noticed something different about the former prince. The man asked him whether he was a god, a magician, or a wizard. Siddhartha said he was none of these things, but that he was awake! That is how Siddhartha came to be called the Buddha, which means "The Awakened One."

The Buddha began preaching. His teachings became known as the Four Noble Truths. See what you think of the Buddha's simple truths: Life is full of suffering. Desire for worldly things causes suffering. Suffering can stop when desire stops. There are eight rules to follow to stop wrong desire. These rules are called the Noble Eightfold Path.

Because of the Eightfold Path, a wheel with eight spokes became the symbol of Buddhism. The Buddha gave his followers these rules in a sermon called the Deer Park sermon. After his sermon, his father, his wife, and his son became his disciples! Here are the Buddha's eight rules for living a good life: right thought, right intent, right speech, right conduct, right work, right effort, right mindfulness, and right contemplation. They may seem simple, but it takes a lot of discipline to live up to all of these things.

The Buddha thought that if people were together, it would help them follow his rules. He formed a community of monks called the Sangha. Monasteries became a central part of Buddhism. Even children spend some time in the Sangha. A young Buddhist boy can become a monk for a few months. He shaves his head and puts on a monk's robe, which is usually orange or red. A Buddhist girl can also become a nun for a little while. Buddhists believe that a monastery

