

## The Buddha

A new prince was born in ancient India, about 2500 years ago (in 553 BCE). His name was Prince Siddhartha Gautama. His parents loved him very much. All his life, growing up, his parents gave the prince excellent food to eat, fine clothes to wear, and good servants to wait on him. When he became a man, his parents gave him a different palace for each season of the year. The prince and his wife were blessed with the birth of a baby, a new son, who was strong and healthy. You might say the prince had everything!

But all the prince could see was suffering. It had bothered him greatly, all his life, that pain and old age, and sickness and death were all part of life. The thought of this had always made him very unhappy.

One day, the prince met a monk. That changed his world. He could not believe the monk could find happiness in a world that held such misery. The prince made a startling decision. He decided to leave his parents, his wife, and his newborn son, and become a monk.



The prince traveled ancient India, in search of peace and calm in the face of suffering and sadness. He traveled for six years, as a monk. He was beginning to despair. Perhaps there was no answer. Perhaps all his life he would be unhappy. It was a miserable thought.

It was when he was resting under a fig tree that the way to end all suffering occurred to him! That was the day the monks began to call him "the Buddha", or the Awakened One.

**Four Noble Truths:** What Buddha has realized, while resting under the fig tree, is that life is ruled by four truths, truths the Buddha called the Four Noble Truths. Those truths are:

- Life is filled with suffering
- Suffering is caused by people's wants.
- Suffering can be ended if people stop wanting things, like more pleasure or more power.
- To stop wanting things, people must follow 8 basic laws, called the Eightfold Path.

**Eightfold Path:** These are the eight basic laws that all people must follow if they wish to end suffering:

- To know the truth
- To intend to resist evil
- To not say anything to hurt others
- To respect life, property, and morality
- To work at a job that does not injure others
- To try to free one's mind from evil
- To be in control of one's feelings and thoughts
- To practice appropriate forms of concentration

**The Middle Way:** Buddha realized that people could not follow rules if the rules were too strict. That's why the Eightfold Path is also called The Middle Way. The rules demand a certain behavior, but it is behavior that costs nothing except effort and care.

Buddha continued to travel around India, telling everyone he met about the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Many people listened. They too had trouble finding happiness in a world full of suffering. Some who listened became monks, and helped to spread the word.

**Proverbs:** The rules of the Eightfold Path are simple to list, but are sometimes difficult for people to follow. To help people better understand and remember the rules, Buddha's teachings were written down as proverbs many years ago. Here are two proverbs written down around 2,000 years ago:

**As a solid rock is not shaken by the wind,  
even so the wise are not ruffled by praise or blame.**

**Hatreds never cease by hatred in this world;  
by love alone they cease.  
This is an ancient law.**



### **The Laughing Buddha**

Many statues of the Buddha show him laughing. The Buddha is laughing to remind us that we need to greet each day with joy.

Another goal of Buddhism is to become the greatest person in the world. This teaching is often misunderstood. It does not mean that you are better than everyone else. It means that you are the best person you can be. The famous example that Buddhists use is the story of the ant. When an ant puts his best effort into carrying a grain of rice, the ant is no longer just an ant; he is the best ant he can be, and thus the greatest ant in the world. But, when a horse carries a grain of rice, it is not much of an achievement.

**The Growth of Buddhism:** After a time, many people began calling the prince "the Buddha". Buddhism spread rapidly throughout Southern and Eastern Asia.

Today, Buddhism is a world religion. People who follow Buddha's teachings are called Buddhists. There are over 500 million Buddhists in the world. Buddhists value goodness, self-control, wisdom, calm, and love.