



### THE QUEEN'S DREAM

Two thousand five hundred years ago, King Shuddhodana (pronounced: Shoe-DOE-da-na) of the Shakya clan ruled in northern India. One night his wife, Queen Maya, had a strange and wondrous dream in which a white six-tusked elephant, made of brilliant light, approached and melted into her body. The queen awoke, filled with greater happiness than she had ever felt before. When told of this dream, the wise men at court declared that it was a sign the queen would give birth to a son who would someday grow into a great man.



### THE BIRTH OF A PRINCE

As was the custom, when the time for the royal birth drew near, Queen Maya and her entourage proceeded to her parents' home. On the way they paused in the beautiful gardens of Lumbini, and it was here, supporting herself by the branch of a tree, that the queen gave birth.



### A BEAUTIFUL BABY

From the moment of his birth, the prince displayed many unusual qualities. He was alert and aware, very pleasing to look at, and had a peaceful, loving disposition. Such wonderful signs appeared at his birth that his father had reason to believe his son would grow up to be an even greater king than himself. This pleased him very much, and he decided to call the child "Siddhartha" (SIDDHAR-ta), which means "the one by whom all things are accomplished."



### A BRILLIANT STUDENT

Prince Siddhartha grew up to be a most remarkable boy. He was very intelligent and quickly mastered whatever he was taught. One day his teachers reported to the king, "Your Majesty, the prince no longer needs us. Not only has he learned everything we had to teach him, but he has taught us many things we did not know ourselves!" The king was very proud and became even more convinced that his son would grow up to be a great ruler.



### A WOUNDED SWAN

More remarkable than his intelligence, however, was the prince's kind and gentle nature. Even wild animals trusted him and became tame when he drew near. One day he found a swan that had been wounded by an arrow. The prince gently picked it up, removed the arrow, and wrapped the injured bird in his own shirt to keep it warm.



### A QUARREL BETWEEN COUSINS

The swan had been shot by the prince's mean-hearted cousin, Devadatta (Day-va-DOT-ta). When Devadatta found Siddhartha holding the bird in his lap, he became very angry. "That swan does not belong to you," he cried. "I shot it, so it's mine. Give it back!" But Siddhartha refused. "I found it here dying," the young prince said firmly, "And until it gets better, I am not going to let go of it."



### A WISE DECISION

The two boys took their argument to court. There, the ministers of the king tried to decide who should get to keep the swan, Siddhartha or Devadatta. They discussed the case for a long time until suddenly there appeared in court a very wise-looking old man. When they asked him what he thought, he said, "Every living being values his or her life more than anything else. Therefore, I believe that the bird belongs to the one who tried to save its life, not to the one who tried to take its life away." The king and his ministers all agreed with these wise words, and the swan was awarded to Siddhartha.



### A GIFT OF LOVE

When the prince grew older, his father decided it was time for him to get married and begin raising a family of his own. So he arranged a large party to which all the young noblewomen of the realm were invited. The prince was instructed to give a present to each of his guests, and as he did so, ministers of the king watched to see which of the young women the prince appeared to like. But the prince showed no particular interest in any of them until it was time for Princess Yashodhara (Yah-SHOW-da-ra), the daughter of a neighboring king, to approach and receive her gift. When they looked into each other's eyes, the prince and princess immediately fell in love, and Siddhartha decided this was the young woman he would marry. Because all the presents were gone, the prince took a ring from his own finger and presented this as a special present to his future bride.



### THE POWER OF KINDNESS

Even though Siddhartha and Yashodhara wanted to marry each other, they could not do so right away. It was the custom in those days for a contest to be held among all the suitors to decide who was most worthy of marrying the princess. Although Siddhartha had never showed any interest in the martial arts, he was able to defeat the other suitors in contests of strength and archery. The final test was to ride a horse that was so wild it had never been successfully mounted by anyone. All the suitors who dared climb on the back of this powerful beast were quickly thrown off. But when the prince came near, the animal was immediately calmed by Siddhartha's gentle nature. The prince was easily able to mount and ride the previously untamed horse while the crowd cheered, "Siddhartha has won! Siddhartha has won!"



### A SONG OF BEAUTY

Siddhartha and Yashodhara were married and lived together in special pleasure palaces that King Shuddhodana had built for them. Everything in these palaces was beautiful, and the musicians, singers, dancers, and other attendants who served there were instructed to make Siddhartha's life as enjoyable as possible, so he would never wish to leave. But one day, when he was twenty-nine years old, he heard an enchanting song describing the beauties of lands beyond the palace walls. The prince asked his father if he could journey forth to see these wonders, and the king agreed that it was time for Siddhartha to see the kingdom he would someday rule.



### VISIONS OF SUFFERING

Accompanied by his charioteer, Channa, Siddhartha passed beyond the gates of his pleasure palaces for the first time, much to the joy of the townspeople, who greeted their prince with cheers of delight. The king had ordered that everything unpleasant be removed from the prince's route, so there would be nothing there to disturb him. Despite these precautions, Siddhartha encountered sights that day that would completely change the course of his life. Amid the vibrant, happy faces of the joyous crowds, he beheld the totally unexpected visions of old age, sickness, and—most disturbing of all—death.



### OVERCOME BY SADNESS

Siddhartha was shocked by what he saw. His gentle, sensitive nature was saddened when he realized that people's lives were filled with such sufferings as old age, sickness, and death. He lost all interest in the pleasures that filled his palaces and could think of nothing else but the unhappiness he had seen. Siddhartha grew pale and despondent, and everyone worried that the beloved prince might himself become ill and die.



### A PEACEFUL VISION

One day, to calm his disturbed mind and bring himself some peace, the prince paid a visit to the countryside. It was very restful there, and as the prince relaxed, he gazed out at the beautiful scene before him: the clear blue sky, the fleecy clouds above the green hills, the blossoming trees, and the cultivated farmland. But as he looked closer, he saw that even this beautiful scene was filled with suffering. The oxen strained as they pulled the plow, the farmer sweated in the heat of the sun, small animals and insects lost their homes and even their lives as the plow cut into the earth, and the birds who came to eat these small animals fought with one another.



### MEDITATION

The prince sat down in the shade of a rose-apple tree and, with his legs crossed and his hands resting in his lap, silently reflected upon all that he had seen. In his meditation he understood that even though all beings, both human and animal, only want to be happy, they spend much of their lives harming others and bringing harm to themselves. His mind grew calm and steady as the determination rose in him to discover the way to bring an end to all this unwanted suffering and lead others to the happiness they desire.



### A HOMELESS WANDERER

When the prince finished his meditation, he opened his eyes and saw before him a most unusual-looking man. Although he seemed to own nothing more than the poor rags in which he was dressed, this stranger had a very calm expression on his face and a powerful look in his eyes. Siddhartha asked him who he was, and the man answered, "I am someone who has given up his home and possessions to search for the path leading out of suffering." Then the prince knew that this was exactly what he himself must do with his life: leave his father's kingdom and search for the truth.



### A FATHER'S FEAR

When the prince went back to the palace, he immediately made his way to his father's room and requested the king's permission to leave the royal life. His father was bitterly disappointed. All these years he had wanted nothing else than for his only beloved son to grow up, inherit his throne, and become a great ruler. And now Siddhartha wanted to turn his back on all this and become a homeless wanderer! The king's disappointment turned to anger and rage as he forbade his son to leave the palace grounds and ordered the palace guards to make sure he did not escape.

## A LAST WISH

But that night a deep enchantment fell upon the palace. All the musicians, dancers, singers, attendants, and guards became drowsy and fell asleep, leaving only the prince awake. He wanted very much to pick up his newborn son before he departed, but was afraid he might accidentally wake up Yashodhara, who would certainly entreat him to remain.



## ESCAPE

So he silently made his way past the sleeping figures and escaped by horse out into the night, accompanied only by Channa, his faithful charioteer. At the edge of the city, Siddhartha looked back and vowed to himself, "Until I learn how to conquer all sufferings, I shall not return to this fair kingdom!"



## THE GREAT RENUNCIATION

All night they rode together until they were far from his father's realm. Then Siddhartha told Channa to return by himself and tell everyone that the prince had now become a homeless seeker of truth. After Channa sadly departed, Siddhartha began his spiritual journey in earnest. Realizing that it was improper for a homeless wanderer to be dressed as royalty, Siddhartha exchanged his elegant garments for the simple robes of a forest dweller. Then, in a final gesture showing that he had renounced the princely life for good, he cut off his long black hair and began his quest.



## SIX YEARS OF STRUGGLE

In those days, many spiritual seekers thought they could achieve their goal by developing tremendous willpower. By enduring great pain without complaining, they thought they could eventually overcome all mental and physical suffering completely. After studying with two respected teachers, Siddhartha decided to practice these difficult austerities himself. He went to a forest famous as a place of meditation and began his self-appointed task. He sat completely still for days on end, unprotected from the heat, cold, wind, and rain. Eventually, he gave up eating anything but the few seeds that happened to land in his lap as he sat immobile. After six years of such extraordinary practice, his body, which once had been so strong and handsome, was reduced to little more than a skeleton.



## EXHAUSTION

One day an accident nearly took Siddhartha's life. While bathing in the nearby river, he was almost carried away by the current and drowned. With great difficulty he made his way to the shore and collapsed on the bank. As he lay there, he realized that his austere practices had been too extreme. Instead of bringing him closer to his goal, they had weakened him to the point where he had almost lost his life. Now he understood that if he was going to continue his spiritual quest, he would have to follow a middle path between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-denial.



## AN OFFERING OF FAITH

As he sat near the river, a woman named Sujata (Sue-JAH-ta) approached him. She was carrying a bowl of milk rice as a thanksgiving offering intended for the spirit to whom she had prayed so often while awaiting the arrival of her recently born son. Seeing the frail but still distinguished-looking Siddhartha sitting there, she thought he was the spirit who had answered her prayers and presented him the milk rice. Silently, Siddhartha accepted the offering from the grateful woman. Then he told her, "I am just a man, not the spirit you believed me to be. But your offering will be the cause of great happiness."



## UNDER THE TREE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Strengthened by Sujata's nutritious offering, Siddhartha was prepared to enter the final phase of his spiritual journey. He crossed the river, made a cushion from a bundle of cut grass, and took his seat under what was later to be known as the Bodhi Tree, or Tree of Enlightenment. With the strong determination to win full enlightenment in order to benefit all other beings, he began his meditation. Remembering the success he had experienced many years before under the rose-apple tree, he entered into a profound contemplation on the nature of reality. As the sun set and the full moon rose, the spirits of the air rejoiced, knowing that Siddhartha had entered the meditation that would transform him into a fully awakened buddha!



## THE GREAT BATTLE

But not every being rejoiced that fateful night. Looking on with terror was Mara, the demonic force that embodies all the ignorance, hatred, and greed that keeps beings trapped in suffering. Seeing Siddhartha seated under the Bodhi Tree, Mara summoned his fearsome legions to him and instructed them to disturb Siddhartha's meditation. "If he is successful," Mara warned, "then our control over the world will be doomed." First, he ordered his troops to attack the meditator with violent storms and fierce weapons. But nothing could interfere with Siddhartha's concentration, and the weapons of destruction turned into harmless flower petals as they entered the aura of his love. Next, Mara tried to distract the meditator with visions of sensuous beauty and even enticing memories of his wife and child, but these too proved unable to weaken Siddhartha's concentration.



## THE DEFEAT OF MARA

Finally, Mara dismissed his army and appeared before Siddhartha alone. In a mocking tone he tried to fill the meditator with doubts about his ability to achieve enlightenment. “Why do you think that you—who have wasted twenty-nine years of your life in sensuous pleasure and six more in meaningless pain—can find a way to overcome all suffering?” he taunted. “Show me even one witness who can testify that you are worthy of succeeding where so many others have failed.” Without breaking the train of his meditation, Siddhartha silently lifted his right hand from his lap and reached out to touch the earth. The earth shook, testifying that for many lifetimes Siddhartha had perfected the spiritual disciplines of generosity, morality, patience, perseverance, concentration, and wisdom, thereby preparing himself for ultimate victory in the battle against suffering and delusion. Mara was defeated and faded away like a bad dream.



## FULL ENLIGHTENMENT

Left alone, Siddhartha now continued his meditation undisturbed. His mind penetrated ever more deeply into the nature of reality, and he saw that the only thing keeping beings imprisoned in suffering and fear was the ignorance obscuring the essentially pure nature of their minds. As the clear light of love and wisdom dawned in his heart, the last traces of this ignorance within his own mind was dispelled, and he saw how he could lead others to liberation from their suffering as well. The full moon set, the sun rose, and he who had been simply Prince Siddhartha was now Buddha, the Awakened One! The air was filled with rare fragrances, and beautiful flowers blossomed spontaneously. On that wonderful morning, all of nature seemed to reflect the glory of Buddha's awakening.



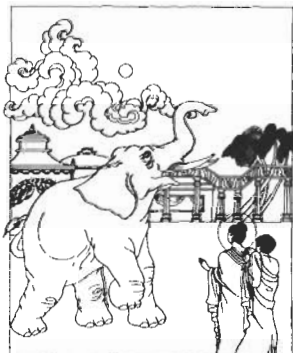
## COMPASSION FOR ALL

Buddha was now thirty-five years old, and for the next forty-five years he taught the path to complete liberation from suffering to all who were interested. He always taught in a manner that was suitable to the intelligence and temperament of the individual listener, gently guiding each one of them along the path of spiritual awakening. At the heart of his teachings was love and compassion for all beings. In those days, the practice of animal sacrifice was widespread in India, and Buddha prevented a great deal of suffering by teaching that such practices were mistaken and that great care should be taken to avoid giving harm to any being, animal or human.



## THE ENRAGED ELEPHANT

When Devadatta—Siddhartha's mean-spirited cousin—grew up, he became jealous of Buddha's fame and plotted to kill him. On one occasion, as Buddha and a group of his followers were walking down a road, Devadatta and an accomplice set loose a wild, enraged elephant directly in his path, hoping the beast would trample him to death. When Buddha's disciples saw the elephant charging toward them, they fled. Only Ananda—Buddha's closest companion—remained at Buddha's side.





## THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE

Instead of becoming frightened or angry, Buddha felt great love and compassion for the poor elephant. The power of his love was so great that even the enraged beast fell under its spell. It stopped charging, walked meekly over to the Buddha, and bowed its large head at the Awakened One's feet. As Buddha gently petted the subdued animal, he said to Ananda, "The only way to destroy hatred is with love. Hatred cannot be defeated with more hatred. This is a very important lesson to learn."



## THE RETURN

Eventually, the time came for Buddha to return to his birthplace and see his family once again. When the king heard that it was his son's practice to beg for food, he was shocked. "Why do you do that?" he asked upon seeing his son for the first time in many years. "It has always been our custom to beg," was the reply. "What do you mean, our custom?" demanded the enraged king. "We come from a long line of rulers who never had to beg for anything in their lives." To this the gentle answer came: "It is true that you come from a line of royal kings, but I come from a line of teachers: the buddhas of the past. These teachers have always been very humble and have received their food from the people they served. When I say that it is our custom to beg, I mean it is the custom of the compassionate buddhas."



## REUNITED

Buddha then took hold of his father's hands and walked with him alone for a long while, explaining the path that leads to the end of all suffering. Afterward, the king said, "It is true: you have become a great teacher. I bow before you, O Buddha. Please accept me, who once wanted you to be a king, as one of your disciples." Soon Siddhartha's wife, his son, the aunt who raised him, and many others from the palace also asked to become his followers. "We were so unhappy when you rode away from us many years ago," they told him, "But now you have brought us happiness and peace of mind. We are glad that you left us to return as a buddha."



## ALL THINGS MUST PASS

Finally, in his eightieth year, Buddha realized that he had helped all those he could and that it was time for him to pass away. Just as he had shown others how to live without fear, he would now show them how to die with a peaceful mind and an open heart. After giving final words of advice to his disciples—"All things must pass; strive diligently to attain liberation!"—he lay down on his right side, closed his eyes, entered deep meditation, and passed away. Many of Buddha's disciples wept at his passing, but those whose minds had been tamed by his teachings remained at peace. Even now, 2,500 years later, millions of people are still traveling the path to true happiness and peace by following the teachings of the compassionate Buddha.