

# THE PRINCE WHO HAD EVERYTHING THE LEGEND OF THE BUDDHA

retold by Aaron Shepard

Of all Buddhist tales, the best-known and best-loved is the story of the Buddha's own birth and youth. Buddha — "the Enlightened One" or "the Awakened One" — is the religious title given to Siddhartha Gautama, a prince of the Sakya clan, which ruled an area that today straddles the border between Nepal and the Indian state of Bihar. He is believed to have lived from around 563 B.C.E. to around 483 B.C.E.

No official account of the Buddha's life was left by either Buddha or his disciples. As has happened for most great religious leaders, the stories of his early life were gradually expanded and embellished by his followers. Still, the legend that follows probably represents in symbolic form the early spiritual life of the young man who became the Buddha.



illustrated by Omar Rayyan

In the royal city of Kapilavatthu, a son had come to the great King Suddhodana and his lovely Queen Maya. They named the boy Siddhartha, which means "He Who Reaches His Goal."

Soon after the birth, the king was visited by a great seer named Asita. The baby was brought for him to see. To the king's alarm, the holy man burst into tears.

"Sir, what is wrong?" asked the king. "Do you foresee some disaster for my son?"

"Not at all," said the seer. "His future is supreme. Your son shall become a Buddha, an Enlightened One, and free the world from its bonds of illusion. I weep only for myself, for I will not live to hear his teachings."

Now, the king was distressed that his only heir might turn to a life of religion. He called upon eight Brahmin priests, all skilled in interpreting signs, and asked them to prophesy for the prince.

When the priests had conferred, their spokesman addressed the king. "Your majesty, if your son follows in your footsteps, he will become a Universal King and rule the known world. But if he renounces

home and family for the life of a seeker, he will become a Buddha and save the world from its ignorance and folly."

The king asked, "What would cause my son to renounce home and family?"

The priest answered, "Seeing the four signs."

"And what are the four?"

"An old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a holy man."

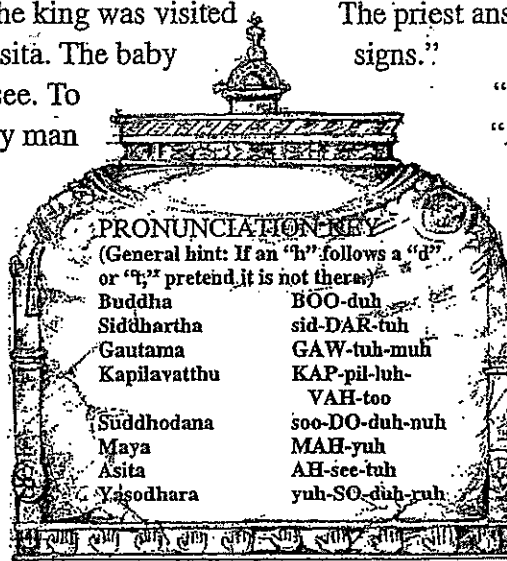
"Then none of these shall he see," the king declared. And he placed guards around the palace to keep all such persons away.

As Siddhartha grew to manhood, the king sought ways to

strengthen his son's ties to home. He married the prince to the lovely Princess Yasodhara, who in time bore a son. And he surrounded him with dancing girls to wile away the hours. The prince became a creature of pleasure and seldom left his palace.

But one day Siddhartha thought he would visit a park outside the city. The king arranged the outing, issuing strict orders to his guards to keep the road clear of the old, the sick, the dead, and the holy.

As the prince passed through the city in his royal carriage, people lined the road to



admire him. The guards followed the king's orders as best they could. But even so, the prince spied in the crowd a man with gray hair, weak limbs, and a bent back.

"Driver," said Siddhartha, "what is wrong with that man?"

"He is old, my lord."

"And what is 'old'?" asked the prince.

"'Old' is when you have lived many years."

"And will I too become 'old'?"

"Yes, my lord. To grow old is our common fate."

"If all must face old age," said the prince, "then how can we take joy in youth?"

Not long after, the prince spied a man yellow-faced and shaking, leaning on a companion for support. "Driver, what is wrong with that man?"

"He is sick, my lord."

"And what is 'sick'?"

"'Sick' is when your health has left you."

"And will I too become 'sick'?"

"It is likely, my lord. To be sick is our common fate."

"If all must face sickness," said the prince, "then how can we take pride in health?"

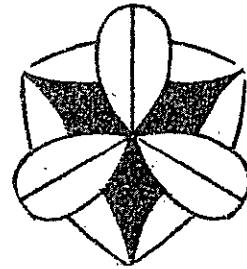
Before long, the prince spied a stiff, motionless man being carried along by four others.





# Siddhartha Gautama:

The Buddha, The Man



by Duane Damon

In the darkness that cloaked the palace, Siddhartha crept noiselessly toward the apartment of Yasodhara. At the door to his wife's quarters, he paused while a jumble of mystical and disturbing images paraded through his head.

His mother's vision of his creation haunted him. Queen Maya's tale of the great, gold-tusked white elephant entering her womb had foretold some greatness in her son. His birth in a shady glade months later had sent a burst of joy throughout the kingdom. More rejoicing had followed sixteen years later when he married his cousin Yasodhara. But now, at the age of twenty-nine, Siddhartha had come face to face with the harsh realities of the world.

A day-long trip with his charioteer and friend Channa had deeply affected him — the sight of the bent and trembling old man . . . the pathetic helplessness of another man wracked by disease . . . the chilling stillness of the corpse by the side of the road . . . the serene dignity of the yellow-robed monk with his begging bowl. What did all this misfortune and poverty mean? Was man, already fated to die only to be later reborn in a new body, also doomed to an eternity of misery? Did the solution to this riddle of suffering lie in the self-denial and meditation of a simple monk?

Well might this last question have tantalized the young prince. In the century before Siddhartha's birth in 563 B.C.E. (according to one reckoning), India's greatest religion was Brahminism. But a gnawing dissatisfaction had spread steadily among some of its believers. They saw the Brahmins, the priest class of Indian society, as greedy and corrupt. Feeling hungry for a new path to religious awareness, many people turned to a life of ascetism. Often, these ascetic monks lived in forests, hills, and caves, where they discussed religion or pored over sacred writings. For a young man of royalty whose view of life had been shaken to the core, this lifestyle must have seemed to offer answers.

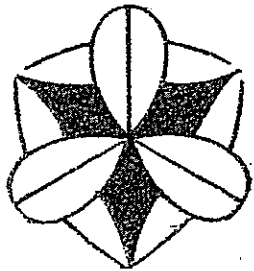
Siddhartha gazed upon the sleeping faces of Yasodhara and their son,



OPPOSITE: A bronze sculpture of Buddha from Thailand. ABOVE: These scenes were part of a portable shrine. The top image portrays the Buddha's birth and death. The bottom image is of a man in a squatting position with a child in a basket strapped to his back.



This 13th-century painting from Tibet shows the Buddha being attended to by bodhisattvas, or future Buddhas.



Rahula, for a moment, then turned away. Outside the palace, Channa waited with Siddhartha's steed, Kanthaka. The prince mounted and rode through the blackness with his friend. After crossing the Anoma River, Siddhartha stopped. Here he rid himself of his robes and finery, and donned the drab garb of a wandering ascetic. Then, having sent Kanthaka home with Channa, the former prince set off alone.

Yet the enlightenment Siddhartha sought was elusive. The prince soon met up with two great ascetics who were meditation masters and shared the secrets of meditation with him. But even the knowledge of these holy men seemed to fall short of the great truth for which he was searching.

Next he joined with five fellow seekers. In their company, Siddhartha tried a succession of severe disciplines in hopes of finding his Truth. At one point, he nearly starved himself to death. But starvation, Siddhartha realized, was not the route to his spiritual destination, and soon he gave it up. Disgusted at his change in attitude, his five friends deserted him.

But Siddhartha was getting closer to his goal. Six years after beginning his quest, the *bodhisattva* (future Buddha) arrived outside the town of Gaya.

Siddhartha sat himself cross-legged under the spreading branches of a pipal tree (now known as the Bodhi, or Bo, tree), and vowed not to move until he found enlightenment.

According to legend, Mara, the Evil One, appeared to taunt and assault him. Unleashing the full fury of his demon hordes, Mara set upon Siddhartha floods, earthquakes, and deadly whirlwinds. Next, the Evil One tempted the bodhisattva with his daughters Desire, Pleasure, and Passion. Through it all, Siddhartha sat silent, unharmed, and unmoved. Fearful of losing his hold on humans if Siddhartha gained the supreme truth, Mara demanded that Siddhartha show proof of his goodness. Without speaking, Siddhartha merely touched the ground beside him with his hand. In a voice that rumbled like thunder, the very earth answered Mara: "I am his witness."

The defeated Mara and his followers fled in a rush. Alone, Siddhartha continued his meditation, and as dawn appeared, he attained his goal. Whether his final battle was the conflict with Mara's legions or a struggle of the good and evil within himself, Siddhartha had triumphed. He was now the Enlightened One — the Buddha. ¶

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*Duane Damon is a freelance writer who lives in Tampa, Florida. He has written some thirty articles for CALLIOPE and her sister magazine COBBLESTONE, and has recently completed work on a nonfiction book on the Civil War for young readers.*



A widely used Buddhist symbol is the Bodhi tree. The Buddha sat under the tree in meditation until he achieved Enlightenment. Today, at Anuradhapura on the island of Sri Lanka, a Bodhi tree, believed to have grown from a branch of the original tree, draws Buddhist pilgrims from around the world.

