

Resource 2

The story of the Buddha

King Suddodana ruled the kingdom of Kapilavastu, located in the foothills of the Himalayan mountains.

One night his queen Mahamaya, dreamt of a white elephant with six tusks entering her body. When she woke up, she told the king about her dream. The king consulted the wise men, and they predicted that the child would either be a great king or a holy man.

The child was born and was named "Siddhartha". King Suddodana did not want him to leave his kingdom and become a holy man. He decided to keep the prince within the walls of the palace so that he would not meet any holy man who could influence him.

When Siddhartha was sixteen, King Suddodana decided to get Siddhartha married. In those days princesses chose their husbands at "swayamvaras" or gatherings where competitions were held among princes. The person who won married the princess.

Siddhartha won all the competitions and won the hand of the princess. In few years they had a son. He was named Rahul.

But soon after Rahul was born, prince Siddhartha began to feel restless. He was curious about what lay outside his sheltered world. So one day he asked his charioteer to take him for a ride far outside the palace. They slipped beyond the palace gates and there, for the first time in his life, the prince saw human suffering: an old man, a sick man, and a dead man. Siddhartha asked the charioteer, "Does everyone become sick, old and die?" The charioteer replied, "Yes master. This is the law of nature." Siddhartha felt very depressed. On their way back Siddhartha spotted a monk, wearing a saffron robe, meditating under a tree. He seemed completely at peace. Siddhartha came near the monk and asked, "Who are you?" The monk replied, "I am a seeker of the Truth and to find it, I have given up everything on this earth."

Siddhartha was deeply influenced. He decided to leave his luxurious life and family and go in search of the Truth.

Seeing his princely clothes, a beggar came asking for alms. Prince Siddhartha exchanged his princely clothes with the beggar. He then shaved his head. Siddhartha continued his journey, seeking wisdom



from the monks he met along the way. But none could teach him how to obtain the ultimate peace. He gave up eating, torturing his body to get closer to the Truth but failed.

One day, after bathing in the river, he walked to a large bodhi (banyan) tree. He spread straw beneath him, and vowed, "I will not leave this seat until I have attained my goal.

Evil powers tried to dissuade Siddhartha from attaining his goal but he was steadfast. At dawn, when Siddhartha opened his eyes with the rising sun, he saw the whole cycle of life; the whole mystery of life. Siddhartha's search for the Truth had ended. At the age of thirty five he had become the Buddha. Siddhartha, the Buddha, continued to sit in meditation. He left the shelter of the Bodhi tree to go forth and teach others what he had learned.

When he found five hermits of Varanasi, he taught them the four noble truths which he had discovered. The Buddha said, the cause of suffering is desire. By ending desire we can end suffering. The five hermits became his first disciples. The Buddha then travelled far and wide, teaching the four noble truths as well as the art of meditation to purify body, speech, and mind. Soon Buddha's teachings spread throughout the land, and he had many followers.

