



Brief life story of the Buddha

The Buddha was born a prince more than 2,500 years ago in India. When he was born, the wisest man in India predicted: “if prince Siddhartha lives in a palace, he will be the greatest and most powerful king in the world. But if he lives outside the palace, he will be a beggar. All the suffering he sees in the world will make him suffer, and he will be too compassionate to bear it.

His father, the king, really wanted his son to become king and so he did everything he could to protect his son from the suffering in the world – he built him vast luxurious palaces where everyone was young, healthy and happy, so that Siddhartha could not see suffering. But Siddhartha was adventurous and sneaked out to see what the world was like outside the palace. And what he saw shocked him – old age, sickness and death. He felt immense compassion for everyone who has to go through this suffering and became determined to find a way to end this suffering. So he fled his father’s palaces and became a beggar, and it was as a beggar that he changed the world.

He began his quest for the truth by becoming a hermit and enduring pain and hardship, along with five other hermits. After five years of little food and no comfort, he realized that he was no closer to the truth. The way to the truth was not through too much pleasure and riches, as he had in the palace, or through too much pain, as he had with the hermits. He was sure there must be another way – a middle way between too much pleasure and too much pain.

So he ate some food, and sat down under a Bodhi tree and began to meditate. All sorts of temptations and distractions came to visit him – angry thoughts, greedy thoughts, doubting thoughts. But Siddhartha paid no attention to them. Finally, he reached enlightenment – he understood the mystery and meaning of life, and the way to be happy. He found all of this wisdom inside his own mind, and realized that all of us have this wisdom inside us, we just don’t know it is there, because we never look! We spend all our time looking outside ourselves for answers and entertainment, and never realize this treasure we have inside.

Buddha started to teach this wisdom to everyone he met, he showed others how to meditate, and how to train their minds to uncover their own wisdom and compassion.

This is the essence of Buddhism – developing peace, compassion and wisdom.

Reproduced from *What makes you not a Buddhist?* by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, Shambhala Publications.