

The Life of Gautama Buddha

Long Ago In India



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Introduction

If you should take a trip to India, you would see huge gardens with flowers showing all colors of the rainbow, snow-capped mountains, sparkling rivers where children and parents bathe, and big elephants with men riding on them.

At night in the wild forests the eyes of tigers and elephants and other creatures would peer at you from the darkness

In the cities you would be so excited and thrilled to see many different kinds of people, some tall and dark with flashing eyes and white teeth and others shorter and fair. Your eyes would open wide to see little boys wearing turbans on their heads and little girls walking gracefully down the streets with tiny bells tinkling at their ankles.

This is the land of India where the Lord Buddha was born so long ago.

It is in this setting that we will learn the life of Gautama, the Buddha, from the time of his birth to Enlightenment

Who was Gautama, the Buddha?

We girls and boys have been coming to the Dharma School for several years.

All the time that we have been attending Dharma School, our teachers have been telling us about Amida Buddha. When we look at the picture of Buddha in the shrine, it is Amida Buddha. When we say, "Namo Amida Butsu," we are calling Amida's name.

Why is Amida Buddha so important?

Amida Buddha is very important to our lives because he is the unchanging Buddha who is always with us.

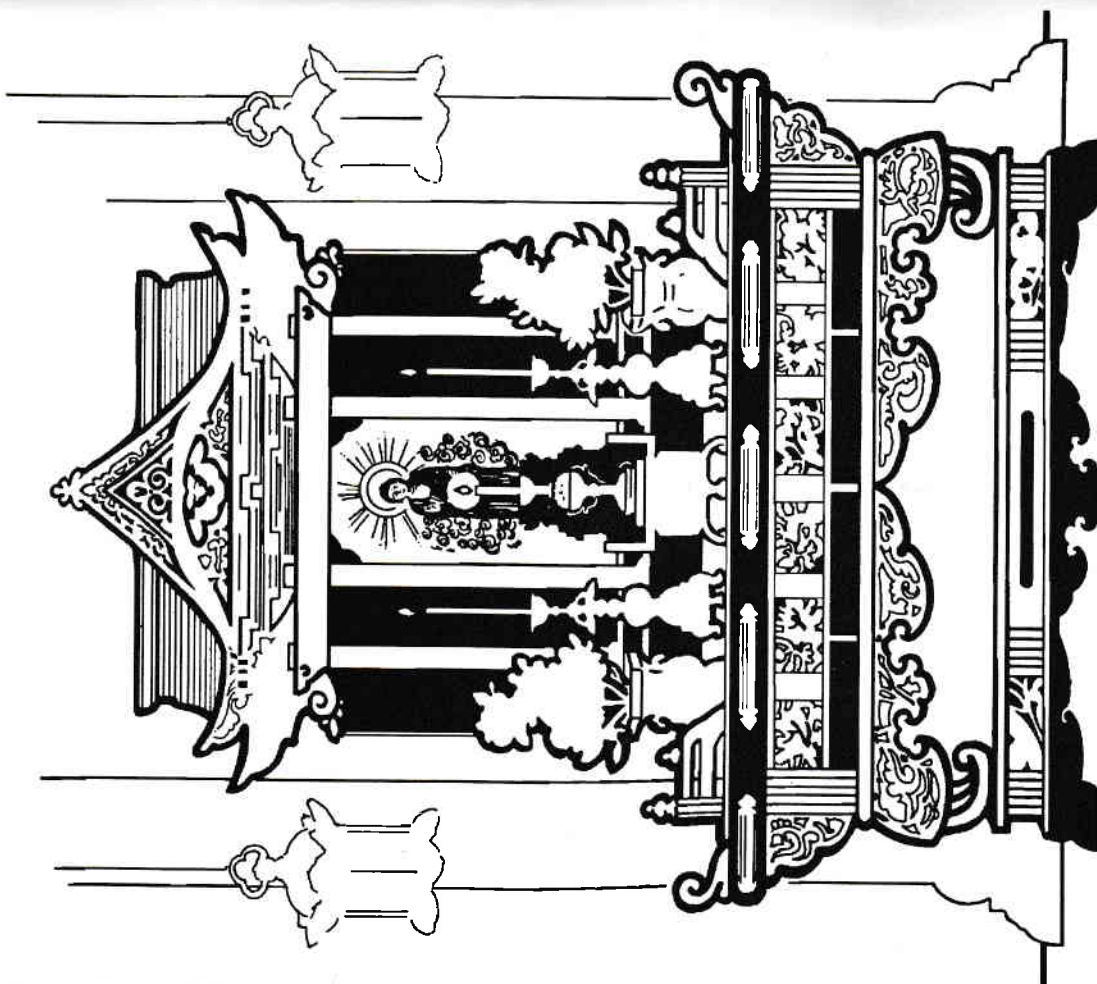
It does make us feel warm inside to know of Amida Buddha doesn't it?

But who told our Dharma School teachers about Amida? Perhaps it was their parents, their sensei, or another Dharma School teacher.

We could go on asking such questions, and find ourselves going way, way back to the first man who told the world about Amida Buddha.

Yes, it seems that you gave guessed the answer already. The first man who found out about Amida Buddha and became a Buddha himself was Gautama Buddha.

It is Gautama Buddha's birthday we celebrate on Hanamatsuri. We celebrate his birthday to thank him



for teaching us about Amida Buddha.

Gautama Buddha, who was born a prince, lived and grew among people very much in the same way as you or I.

But, now, we are getting ahead of our story. We must begin from the very beginning and learn the details of his wonderful life.

In the olden days India was not under one ruler but was divided into many small states. The rulers of these states were called rajjas, or kings.

Now, in the Kingdom of Potala, there lived a king who had five sons. Because of a promise the King made to the Queen, the youngest son was made heir to the throne. The four elder sons were banished.

Accompanied by their sisters and a great number of attendants, the four brothers left their royal homes to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Turning their steps northward, they travelled many weary days until at last they came to a rich and fertile land, where the rivers flowed and thick forests grew, and in the far distance the white summits of the Himalaya stood high against the deep blue of the sky.

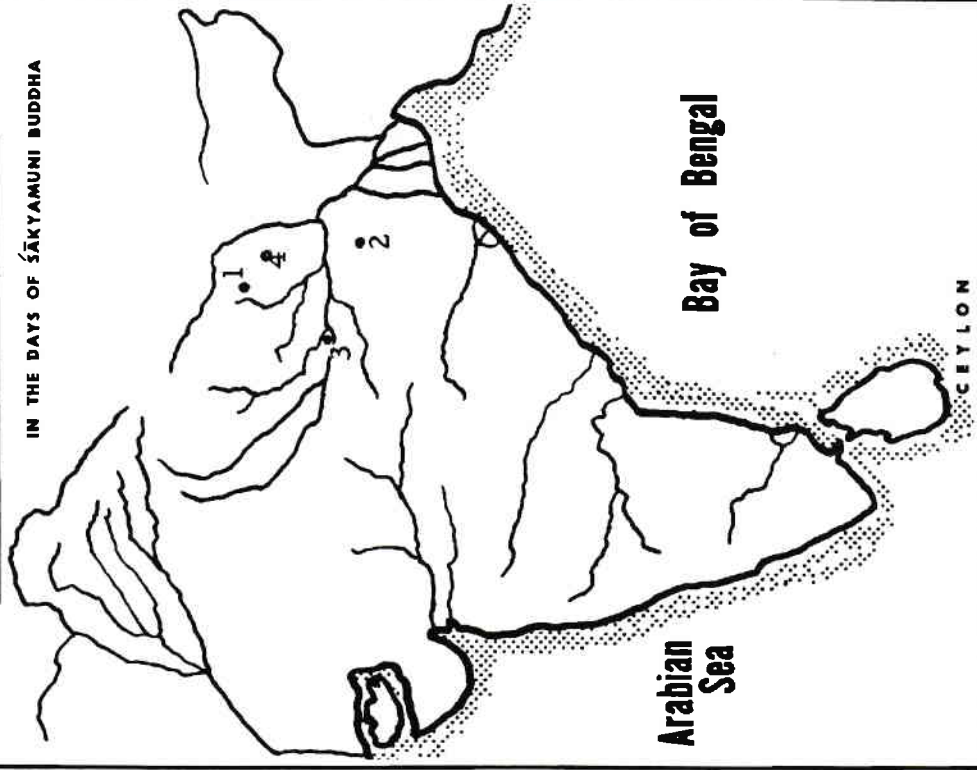
A holy man named Kapila who lived in the area gave the brothers much wise advice, and in the end persuaded them to build a city. The brothers, in gratitude to the holy man, named the place Kapilavastu (meaning the "soil of Kapila"). The river flowing through the settlement came to be known as Rohini.

Sometime after the building of this city, the King of Potala, inquiring as to what had become of his four sons, was told the story of their adventure. When he heard how they wandered into a strange land and founded a city of their own, he was filled with wonder at their boldness, and called them daring youths. And from that day, the King's sons, and their descendants after them were known as the Sakyas, which means "The Daring" or "Enterprising."

King Suddhodana, the father of Gautama, the Buddha, was a ruler of the Sakya clan. His queen who came from across the River Rohini, was called Maya.

BUDDHIST INDIA

IN THE DAYS OF ŚĀRYĀMUNI BUDDHA



1

King Suddhodana and Queen Maya, who lived in a beautiful castle, were loved by all the people.

The King and Queen were very happy except for one thing. They did not have any children. They wanted a child very much.

After many years of waiting, the King and the people of Kapila rejoiced to hear that a child was to be born to their fair Queen.

When the Queen dreamed of a great white elephant with six tusks, wise men predicted that the child to be born would be blessed in many wonderful ways.

2

All winter long the King and Queen and the people of Kapilavastu waited for the birth of the royal child.

Nearby in Lumbini Garden* strange whispers were heard. This was unusual because in the long cold winter the garden was usually quiet. Little bushes began to awaken and they said, "What is that sound? What are they whispering about?"

The other little bushes said, "We don't know, but we can hear it too."

The whispers that now sounded like a lullaby seemed to be saying, "Prepare. . . prepare."

"Prepare for what?" asked one brave little plant.

The wise old plants and trees knew the secret, but they said nothing. They knew something wonderful. . . something holy was going to happen.

Each week the weather became brighter and the sun grew warmer. The flowers, already awake heard the whispers and they grew tall and beautiful. Trees stood straight and strong. Bushes sent out buds numerous and healthy.



* A park situated between Kapila and Koli the home of Queen Maya's parents.

When spring came along, the garden was buzzing. A happy feeling filled the air. Even the birds sang cheerfully.

At last on a warm day in April, an old, old tree spoke up and said, "We are ready."

It was on that memorable day of April 8th, 566 B.C., that Queen Maya was on her way to the home of her parents. The Queen with all her servants had stopped to rest at Lumbini Garden.

Suddenly, as the Queen plucked a flower from a tree, a little baby boy was born.

Now at last the whole world knew the secret. It had been preparing all winter for the birth of this marvelous baby.

3

When the people heard of the birth of the Prince, they were very happy. People came from many different places to honor the new baby. Even the animals sensed something very special and became gentle. All things became peaceful, and the whole world was brightened by a great light.

The little baby, born to King Suddhodana and Queen Maya, was named Siddhartha, which meant "every wish fulfilled." His full name was Siddhartha Gautama for Gautama was the family name.

To the King and Queen who could ask for no greater blessing, the birth of their child was a fulfillment of all their fond dreams.

4

“REJOICE O KING AND QUEEN, A MIGHTY SON HAS BEEN BORN TO YOU,” said Asita, the Wise Man, to King Suddhodana and Queen Maya. He looked into the sweet face of their baby son, Siddhartha.

Then Asita, who could see into the future and knew of many things to happen, clasped his hands, and was lost in deep thought.

“The time is ripe for another Buddha to be born. How happy am I that this one should be born in our ancient land of India...in this very city of Kapilavastu. This tiny baby was born to bring happiness to the world.” Tears of joy filled his eyes for that many, many wonderful things that were to happen. Tears of sadness also filled his eyes to think that because he was so old he would not be able to see these wonderful things happen.

But the holy man spoke no more. Slowly he made his way out of the castle through many winding paths to the quiet of the cave that was his home. Brushing aside the wild roses, Asita sat in the doorway as the stars came into the sky and the moon cast long shadows. Asita spoke softly into the silence of the night. . . .

“Another Buddha has been born. . . another Holy Teacher to help those living now and all those millions of people yet to come, forever and ever.”

And Maya holding her new born son looked at the snow capped mountains and was happy.



5

The King and Queen were very happy to have such a fine son. The King, forgetting Asita's prediction, began to plan— "I'll make him into a strong, brave warrior. Together we will grow powerful." But the gentle Queen had other thoughts in her mind. The Queen held the tiny baby close, whispering soft words heard only by the small one— "No, my son, you will not be a warrior. You will be strong it is true. But your strength will be of a different kind. You will learn of the Holy Ones and their sacred teachings. If you make war, it will be a gentle war against everything that is bad."

Queen Maya sat close to her child watching and loving him every minute. But the fair Queen, who had not been too well, passed away within seven days after the birth of her baby.

The King was saddened. Who would take care of his son? He made a trip to see the mother and father of Maya. Together, they talked about Maya and the baby.

Shortly thereafter, Prajapati, the younger sister of Maya came to the home of Suddhodana and became a real mother to Siddhartha. The little boy grew up happily thinking of Prajapati as his mother.

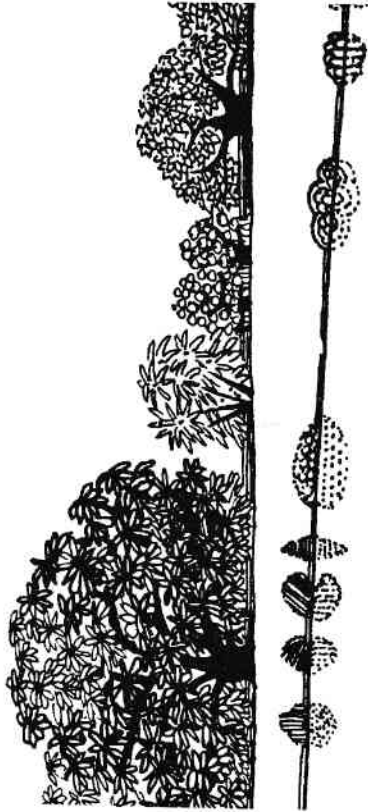


6

Prince Siddhartha was now a growing boy about six years old who liked to run about and play. But when he went to play, his friends had trouble saying his name. They tried and tried but they couldn't say it right. The Prince would laugh and say, "No, that isn't my name... you say it this way... Siddhartha... Siddhartha." And he would say his name carefully many times until they could say it very easily.

Soon it was time for the Prince to go to school. He was not to go to school with other children. As a Prince, he was to have his own teacher.

King Suddhodana had found a wise and kind teacher named Viswamitra for his son. Siddhartha was very happy for he was eager to learn many things.



7

Early in the morning Prince Siddhartha washed his face very, very clean. Prince Siddhartha combed his hair very neatly. He stood tiptoe tall and wore a big smile.

His own teacher was coming. The small boy listened for footsteps. It seemed such a long, long wait.

He listened. Siddhartha heard the strong booming voice of the King far down the hall. Then a gentle voice answered.

The little boy tried to stop smiling. He tried to look serious but the happy smile won out.

The door opened. There before his eyes stood the kindest, most wonderful teacher he could ever imagine.

Soon they were alone. Viswamitra, the teacher, was speaking, "You will learn about the bright sun that shines during the day and the stars and moon that shine at night. We shall watch the many-colored birds flying in the meadows around the lakes. We shall follow the footprints of small furry creatures and make them our friends. We shall visit the shady beaches, looking for strange rocks and signing shells and jewel-like pebbles. All this and more we shall do."

"And now let us start..."

The little Prince quickly took up his new slate of ox-red sandalwood and the long writing stick.

8

Viswamitra asked the boy many questions. Each time the answer came back better than before. For awhile the teacher talked to his bright little student. Then he said, "We must not spend all our time inside. I see you are a small boy. We must make you big and strong."

Taking Siddhartha by the hand, Viswamitra added, "Tell me young prince. . . what kind of pet would you like to own?"

By the happy smile upon his teacher's face, the Prince guessed that a present was already awaiting him. How kind of his teacher. But what was it?

Siddhartha began to guess. Was it a monkey? A bright colored bird that could talk? Did it have feathers or fur or skin? Did it have two legs or four? A kitten? A puppy?

"Oh, please tell me," he said jumping up and down in excitement.

Viswamitra said, "Come, we shall go and see it."

Together they walked through the big hall, out of the palace through beautiful gardens and into a sunny field. There, Siddhartha clapped his hands in joy.

9

As Viswamitra gave a low whistle, out from the shade of a tree pranced a snowy white colt.

"Oh," exclaimed Siddhartha, "What a wonderful surprise. Is it to be mine?"

"Yes," answered his teacher, "This is my present to you."

"Oh, thank you, Viswamitra," said Siddhartha. "A horse is so wonderful! Do you have a horse?"

"Yes," answered his teacher.

Siddhartha was most happy, for now they could ride through the meadows and woods. They could take food to the deer in the winter and help all the little animals that were sick and hungry.

For the rest of the afternoon Siddhartha played with the colt. At first, it seemed very shy, but little by little, Siddhartha coaxed the shy little creature until it began to nudge close to his head in friendship.

Kanthaka was the name chosen by Siddhartha for his horse.

10

In the morning Siddhartha studied hard with the kind teacher Viswamitra. But in the afternoons the teacher and pupil left their studies to ride through the woods and fields, crossing the rivers and the streams.

Almost everyday the two rode for miles until the pathways were worn into the ground. The teacher taught the boy to become a fine rider. He also taught him to ride quietly among the trees, to know the calls of birds and animals, and to see their places of rest.

The young Prince's happiest moments were spent riding Kanthaka and studying with his teacher Viswamitra.

Viswamitra saw that the fast growing boy was kind and well-mannered.

11

Once during the Plowing Festival in the spring, Siddhartha went with his father to the fields to watch the farmers at work.

Each year the King cut the first furrow in the fields for the spring planting. Many men and boys were gathered about laughing and visiting while they watched. They gave out loud shouts of joy as the first deep furrow showed in the ground. The farmers took over, and row after row of hardened soil was turned over. Siddhartha had never seen men work in this way before. It was so exciting and so much fun. Suddenly he heard sharp cries coming from the sky. Looking up, he saw a big flock of black birds circling about in the air.

"Why are the birds so excited?" Siddhartha asked his father.

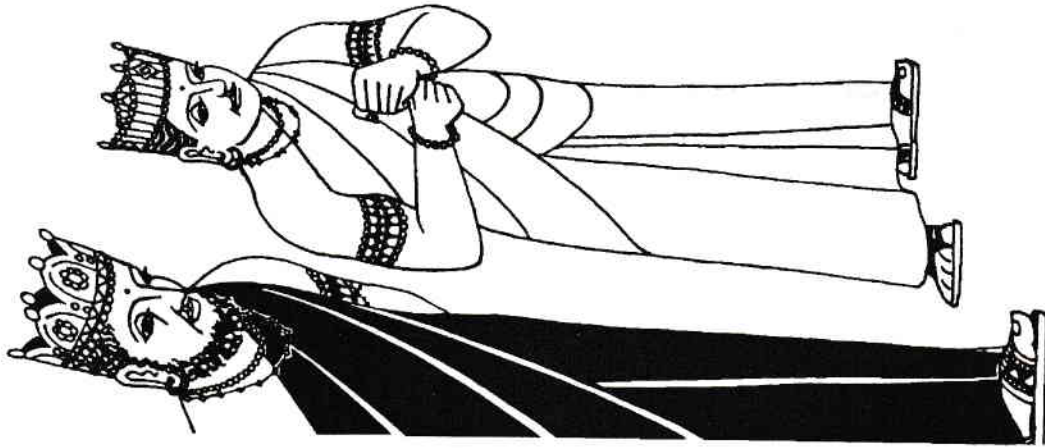
The King laughed heartily. "Wait a few minutes and you will see."

With shrill cries the birds swooped down and spread out greedily over the fields. Their sharp beaks snapped into the earth, pulling out long, struggling worms and little bugs.

Later he saw the farmers beating and whipping the poor oxen as they pulled heavy plows across the fields. Siddhartha turned from the unhappy sight and sat alone beneath the shade of a large tree.

“Why must one creature hurt another? Why must birds be so cruel to the little worms and bugs? Why must farmers beat their oxen?”

Siddhartha’s mind was filled with many questions.



12

The King shook his head and said to Prajapati, “What kind of a son do I have? What will happen when he becomes a man? I want my son to become a strong warrior. He should not be too gentle and kindhearted. Please see that he plays with his cousins and friends. He must not be alone too much. His cousin, Devadatta, thinks only of play and shooting arrows. Let Siddhartha practice the game with him.”

“That I will, Sire,” said Prajapati.

Arrangements were made to have Siddhartha play with his Cousin Devadatta.



13

One day Siddhartha and his cousin, Devadatta, were playing with their bows and arrows. They shot at old trees and stumps and at pieces of wood floating in a lake near by. Whoever shot the arrow the farthest and best won the game.

But Devadatta kept looking for something else. He shot at the bright flowers growing on a tall tree. His arrow tore them to pieces. He laughed loudly and was proud of himself.

Just then Siddhartha and Devadatta heard the cry of a white goose as it flew happily round and round in the air.

Both boys stopped shooting and watched the big bird. It was having so much fun sailing in the breeze. It would go way up high, then float down, down, almost to the top of the big tree. What a wonderful time the bird was having.

Suddenly Devadatta raised his bow and held his arrow tightly. As the lovely goose came close, he let fly the arrow. Siddhartha called out, "No, Devadatta, don't." But it was too late. With a sharp cry the big goose came falling from the sky, turning over and over in the air.

Devadatta sat down and laughed and laughed while Siddhartha felt terrible. Running as fast as he could, Siddhartha went to the bird. He bent down and carefully pulled out the long sharp arrow.

The bird still lived! Siddhartha was so glad. He picked it up in his arms and hurried toward his home.



14

“Siddhartha, Siddhartha, what has happened? Is Devadatta all right? What are you carrying?” Prajapati and the King were afraid something terrible had happened.

Before Siddhartha could answer, Devadatta came running and screaming in a very angry voice, “Give me the bird. . . you stole my bird. . . it is mine for I shot it down.”

“What does this mean, my son? Did your cousin truly shoot the goose?”

“Yes, father,” said Siddhartha, “but it is mine now, for I plan to save the life of this helpless creature. Devadatta plans to kill it.”

The King sighed. How could he decide which boy was right?

At last, the King said, “I will call the Wise Men and let them decide this case.”

The Wise Men questioned each boy. Devadatta claimed that the bird because he had shot it down. Siddhartha claimed the bird because he wanted to save its life.

Finally, one of the Wise Men said, “Prince Siddhartha, what do you plan to do with the bird when it is well?”

“I will turn it loose to live freely among its own kind.”

Then the Wise Man smiled and spoke to his companions, “The bird belongs to the boy who will save its life, not to the one who will destroy it.”

30

15

As the years went by and Prince Siddhartha grew to manhood, Viswamitra asked to speak to the King.

“Sire,” said Viswamitra, “Your son has grown into a fine young man. I have taught him more than he needs to learn. It has been wonderful for me, a humble teacher, to live and study with Prince Siddhartha. Sometimes I have wondered. . . which one is the teacher, and which one is the pupil. Siddhartha has a keen mind and a kind heart. He is strong, but not fierce. He is brave but not bold. Siddhartha can ride as swiftly as the wind but he is gentle with both horses and elephants. With a bow and arrow the young man has no equal. Still he hurts no living creature. He is good to every living thing. I feel I have nothing more to teach him.”

“My work here is done.”

31

16

One day the King spoke to his son of marriage.

“What kind of wife would you choose, my son?” said the King.

“The girl I choose must be gentle and kind. She need not be very beautiful. The girl I would choose must be unselfish. She must be good to her parents and family. And her temper must be sweet. These things I would hope for, in my wife, Father.”

“You have spoken well, my son. Now we must try to find such a girl.”

The King and his ministers began to search for a suitable wife for Prince Siddhartha.

At last the Prince chose a very good and lovely girl to be his wife. Her name was Yasodhara.

17

The King sent for Yasodhara’s father and spoke of marriage between the young people.

Yasodhara’s father answered slowly, “My daughter has many suitors. If Prince Siddhartha wished to marry her, let him prove his skill in many arts against his rivals. For it is the custom in my clan to marry our daughters to those who are skillful and strong, brave and wise.”

This saddened the King who hurried to speak with Siddhartha. But Siddhartha was not worried, “Fear not, Father, I will gladly meet my rivals in their chosen games.”

“Very well,” answered the uncertain King, “let there be a great contest, but see that you are fully prepared.”

18

Criers were sent near and far throughout the country telling the people of the event. Young nobles eagerly announced their intention of entering the contest. None wanted to miss this chance of showing his skill and strength.

Then, too, all heard of the young Yasodhara. To win her as a wife was their earnest hope.

On the day of the contest the grounds were filled with anxious nobles and their families. All contenders were skilled in different sports and had spent most of their days in daily practice.

First of all, the nobles were to prove their skill in archery. Then came the riding contest. In both contests Prince Siddhartha did well.

The crowd went wild! With one voice the other contestant exclaimed, "He is the best. It is too much for us to beat him."

Tears of happiness came to the eyes of the King.

And Yasodhara's father said, "My Prince, I have no greater praise for your manly feat than to say...Yasodhara shall be yours."

19

King Suddhodana was proud and overjoyed. He ordered a great feast and made elaborate wedding plans. The Palace was changed into a fairyland of fragrant flowers. Temple bells chimed throughout the country from dawn until night. The finest musicians hurried to the city. Famous cooks, known for their delicious dishes, arrived from many parts of the kingdom.

At last the wedding day came and Prince Siddhartha and the fair Yasodhara were married.

In his joy the King had a new palace built for the young couple. Legend tells us that there was a palace for each season of the year.

The King did everything he could to provide his son with all the things that would make a young man happy. Anything that was unpleasant or ugly was carefully avoided.

The Prince lived in a world of his own where there was nothing but happiness, beauty, and laughter.

Prince Siddhartha and Yasodhara lived very happily for many years. King Suddhodana was well satisfied with the marriage and felt that now surely his worries were over. No longer need he fear the prediction of Asita that his son would leave home and Kingdom to become a holy man.

He began to make plans for Siddhartha to follow in his royal footsteps. The King discussed with his ministers how Siddhartha would become a great king and develop the kingdom into one of power and glory.

However, all was not well with the young Prince. It was not that he was unhappy. Yasodhara was good to him and life all around him was gay and beautiful.

Perhaps that was it! Life was too good. The Prince, who was very alert in mind and spirit, grew tired of the pleasures that surrounded him day after day. There were so many things that he wanted to know.

Finally, he asked the King to allow him to visit the city in order to see for himself how the other people lived. The King, unable to refuse his son's request, ordered that the surrounding country be decorated. He demanded that all aged and diseased men be removed from the streets.

Not knowing that preparations had been made for his coming, the Prince with his faithful servant, Channa, went out of the palace gates in a gilded chariot. As he passed through the streets, the people crowded around him and bowed for they all loved his beauty and gentle manners. And Siddhartha looked graciously at his people, and was glad to see them look so happy.

Suddenly, in the middle of the road, just in front of the Prince's chariot, tottered an old man. Siddhartha who had never seen such a pitiful sight, turned to Channa and said, "Why is this man so different from other men?"

Channa replied, "My Prince, this is an old man. He has lived long. We, too, will one day be as old as he."

Siddhartha ordered Channa to drive back to the palace. He was silent and thoughtful as he could not forget the sight of the helpless old man. He felt as though the sun had darkened and all the beauties of the earth had faded away.

23

Messengers came to tell the Prince that the Princess had given birth to a son.* As happy as he was over the news, Siddhartha was still determined to go ahead with his plan. Now that he had become a father, it was harder than ever to leave. But late one night, the Prince slipped quietly away riding on his favorite horse, Kanthaka. He was followed closely by Channa who wished to accompany his master.

They rode swiftly into the night going beyond the land of Koli. Here by the banks of the river, Anoma, the Prince stopped his horse and dismounted. Taking off his royal ornaments, he gave them to Channa, and bade him return to Kapilavastu.

Though Channa begged that he might stay with his master and continue to serve him, the Prince would not allow it. "You must go back," he said, "and tell my father and my family what has become of me."

These events happened when the Prince was 29 years old.

* Son was named Rahula.

24

From the River, where he had left Channa, Siddhartha wandered from place to place until he came to Rajagṛha,* the capital of the kingdom of Magadha.

For the first time in his life, Gautama, as he was now called, was all alone without the help of servants or family. He now had no place to call home, and was forced to beg before he could even satisfy his hunger.

Early in the morning, he left his place of rest wearing the yellow robe of a monk and carrying a begging bowl in his hand.

As he walking from door to door, the curious people whispered to each other, "Have you seen him? Have you? He is like a God descended from the sky. But from where does he come. Where does he live?"

The King of Magadha, Bimbisara, seeing the strange monk, was struck by his noble appearance. He told some of his courtiers to follow the monk and see where he lodged.

When King Bimbisara heard where the strange monk was to be found, he went to visit him. So charmed was he by Siddhartha's manner and conversation that he offered to give him wealth, lands and everything which could make life pleasant for him.

"O King," Siddhartha replied, "I have known riches and jewels and every pleasure. The world's treasures bring no peace and cannot conquer sorrow.

* Rajagṛha = Rajagriha

I am trying to find the path which leads to the highest wisdom.”

“Promise me,” said the King, “that when you have found that wisdom you will come and teach it to me.” Siddhartha promised the King that he would do so.



25

In his search for true happiness, Siddhartha studied with the wise men for awhile. Unsatisfied with the teachings of these men, he decided to leave Rajagrha. He travelled in a southerly direction until he came to the great forest of Uruvilva. Here, not far from the present temple of Buddha Gaya, he settled himself for a life of solitude and meditation.

Together with him were five other monks who were so struck by his great goodness and holiness that they attached themselves to him as disciples. They served him as their master because they felt sure that one day he would find perfect wisdom.

But as of yet Gautama saw not the truth, though he sought it by every means in his power. For six long years he continued to put his body through all kinds of torment. His poor body was greatly weakened, thin and tortured.

Would he ever be able to find the Truth with his body in such poor condition? Surely some change would have to be made.

At last he decided to bathe in the clear warm waters of the River Nairanjana. Later, Siddhartha sat in the warm sunshine and rested. As he thought to himself, he knew that instead of torturing himself, he must eat normally and find new strength.

From Sujata, a maiden from the neighboring village, he accepted a bowl of rice milk. Once again his mind became clear and determined.