

Buddhist Foundations

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Indian Background

Buddhism arose in india during a time of great change:

- technological: invention of the iron plow revolutionized agriculture, allowing someone to produce more with less people, invention of iron weapons increased damage in war
- social: kinship system broke down (oligarchy ended) a single tribe of many families exercised control over land and was ruled by the head of these clans distributing profits as needed, the iron plow broke this system as individual clans could have the land and many people were not needed for the work displacing them so they moved into cities, this lead to urbanization

Life of Buddha: Birth and Early Life

There are few historical details, most of what we know is religious in text. There is no life story in early texts. In recent discussion there has been debate about the dates of buddha (it was 566-486, but now we think its more like 490-410). There is about a hundred years of difference so if we accept these dates we need to question the history of that era.

The first biography is from 200 bc, called the *buddhacarita* (deeds of the buddha). It was written by a famous poet called *asvaghosa*.

The buddha was born in *Lumbini* in southern napal. His mother was on her way to her home villiage to have her baby. She became tired and stopped in lumbini for a rest. She bathed and leaned against a tree under which she had her baby. This tree is a modern relic. The king ashoka established this as the birth place of buddha. He erected a pillar to mark the place.

At his conception his mother had a dream about a white elephant entering her side. Her husband called the sooth sayers who said that the she would give birth to an exceptional son. He had only two possible careers, one was to become world conquerer, or a great religious leader. His father (a king) was concerned that his heir would take the religious path. The sages told him that if we wanted buddha to become a world conquerer he should keep the baby from seeing any forms of suffering. So his father was ultra careful to keep him from experiencing any unpleasantness.

So buddha followed in his fathers footsteps. He married a woman named *Yashodhara* was intelligent, beautiful, and spiritual. They had a son *Rahula*.

Life of the Buddha: The Four Sights

Siddhartha was driven from his world conquering destiny by The Four Sights. The king tried to protect him from seeing anything unpleasant so he would have the palace parks cleared before he was allowed to enter them, since they were public parks.

While he was out he saw an old man. He had never seen anyone not young before. Siddhartha wondered what it was and his charioteer replied that it was old age. Siddhartha was not a fan. The servant had to break the news to him that old ages happens to everyone.

His father did not like that so he moved Siddhartha to the summer palace and invited some dancers and singers over for a party. While Siddhartha was out and about he saw a diseased man (probably leprosy). Once again he wondered what it was and his servant had to explain that disease happens to everyone.

On the third occasion they saw a funeral procession where the family was weeping. This also shocked Siddhartha. His servant had to explain yet again that death comes for us all.

The fourth sight was that of a mendicant. Siddhartha thought the man looked very calm and peaceful. His charioteer explained what a mendicant was. When Siddhartha returned to the palace he had decided to become a mendicant.

He saw his family once while they were sleeping and left the palace with the charioteer. He gave the charioteer everything he had and walked into the forest to become spiritual.

Life of the Buddha: Ascetic Life

He followed the traditional way of asceticism and meditation. This first teacher was **Arada Kalama** who worked with him to develop the a sophisticated spiritual stage called the *sphere of nothingness*. Kalama was so impressed that he wanted to share leadership with Siddhartha, but he knew he hadn't found the truth yet.

He then studied with *Udraka Ramaputra* who helped him attain an even higher state, the *sohere of neither perception no non-perception*. The teacher was so impressed that he offered to become Siddhartha's disciple and give him all of his disciples. Siddhartha still knew he didn't have the answer so he left.

He lived on his own in a life of great austerity. Sever food deprivation, he became so thin that when he touched his stomach he could feel the vertibrea in his back. He perfected the technique of breathing suspension. This breathing suspension was supposed to bring him alter state of consciousness. All that happened was that he got a headache that interefered with his concentration on the truth so he stopped.

Finally he was offered some food by a lay woman so he took some. His disciples thought he was giving up on his quest and left. He hadn't given up. He had instead found the Middle Path. The spiritual life is hard and difficult and needs strength. This means that it requires nourishment. Control of the senses is what is important, not just pain.

He wandered around thining about this until he finds the **Bodhi Tree** where he sat down. He vowed not to move until he had reached his goal. There he sat and meditated, he recalled a spontaneous trance he had entered once as a child when he sat and watched a farmer working.

At this point great concern was raised in the temple of **Mara**, the god of death, obstacles, and temptation. He did not want Siddhartha to reach enlightenment so he tried to get him to stop. First he sent a hoard of demons to frighten him. Then he sent beautiful women to tempt him. Finally he confronted Siddhartha. Nothing he did could stop the man and he he reached enlightenment by the end of that night.

Nirvana the state beyond birth and death, the ultimate goal for all buddhists.

The Life of the Buddha: Enlightenment, Three KNowledges

After attaining enlightenment Buddhad gained three knowledges:

- knowledge of his past lives, he could look back on his past lives to see the karmic connections
- ability to see the karmic chain of others, to understand why people had been born as they had, also why an enlightened teacher can help you to progress
- knowledge that for him rebirth had ended, the knowledge of the four noble truths, the knowledge of reality
 - reality is impermanent
 - reality is without essence
 - reality is ultimately unsatisfactory