

LIFE OF THE BUDDHA



BIRTH

Prince Gautama was born in northern India more than 2600 years ago. His father, Suddhodana, was the ruler of the tiny kingdom of the Sakyas. Naturally, he was delighted to have an heir to succeed his throne. However, he was unhappy when a wise man, Asita predicted that Gautama would either become a great ruler or a Buddha if he chose to renounce his kingdom.

King Suddhodana wanted Prince Gautama to remain in the kingdom. Hence, he tried every possible way to entertain the prince with a life of luxury and comfort so that life would be happy for the prince.



THE FOUR SIGHTS: OLD AGE, SICKNESS, DEATH AND AN ASCETIC

One day, Prince Gautama left the palace to visit a beautiful garden. On his journey, he encountered an old man. Having been surrounded by beautiful sights in his life, he was shocked by the sight of the ugly old man. In subsequent trips, he saw a sick man and a funeral procession. The sights of old age, sickness and death shocked him.

He became very concerned with the idea of suffering and how to bring an end to it. On the fourth trip to the town, he met an ascetic, a holy man: one who had given up everything to follow the religious life. Despite having nothing, this man radiated a calmness that suggested to Gautama that he had somehow come to terms with the unpleasant fact of suffering.

Prince Gautama decided to follow the example of the ascetic. He slipped out of the palace in the dead of night, exchanged his splendid silken robe for the simple orange one of a holy man, and cut off all his beautiful black hair. Then, carrying nothing but an alms bowl, he set off on his great search on how to end suffering.

