

# *Who is the Buddha?*

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The historical Buddha was born Siddhartha Gautama around 566 BC in Kapilavasto, Northern India. His father was King Suddhodana and his mother was Queen Maya. Wise men predicted that Prince Siddhartha would become a Buddha. This worried his father so, he tried to create a life so wonderful that the Prince would never want to leave. At 16 years of age, Siddhartha was married to the beautiful Princess Yasodhara.

Eventually, Siddhartha wanted to see the outside world and made four trips outside the kingdom. On these trips, he witnessed sickness, old age and death. Finally, he saw a wandering monk and decided to be like him. Siddhartha left his kingdom and loved ones behind to become a wandering monk and called himself Gautama. He studied with the wisest teachers around and, for six years, he practiced severe asceticism hoping this would lead to enlightenment. He meditated and ate next to nothing enduring extreme hardship until he realized that overdoing things can not lead to happiness.

After eating more nourishing food and regaining his strength, Gautama decided to sit under a Bodhi tree and meditate until he could find a way to end suffering. In attempt to prevent Siddhartha Gautama from becoming enlightened, Mara, the evil one, tried several ways to stop him. Mara tried to tempt Gautama by sending his beautiful daughters to lure him into pleasure. Then, he sent bolts of lightening, wind, and heavy rain. Lastly, he sent his demonic army with weapons and flaming rocks to stop Gautama who defeated them with his virtue.

After achieving enlightenment, Siddhartha Gautama realized the cause of suffering, or struggle, and how to remove it. He had now gained supreme wisdom and was able to understand everything as it truly was. From this point on, he was known as the Buddha which means The Awakened One. He is called Shakyamuni Buddha. The Buddha realized that he was not the first to become a Buddha, that there were many before him and many to follow after him. This is where many persons become confused when they see many different representations of a Buddha. For example, many Chinese restaurants have a figurine of Hotei whom they call a Buddha however, this is not the Shakyamuni Buddha. Some people from various countries and religions tend to adopt more superstitious beliefs regarding certain historical religious figures that are not part of any religious doctrine.

One of the many things Shakyamuni Buddha taught to his disciples was that "All living beings have Buddha nature and can become Buddhas." Buddha nature is our true nature, the part of us that is wise, pure, and perfect. His teachings, known as the Dharma, are about the path to enlightenment. In order for us to become a Buddha is to awaken to our true nature.