

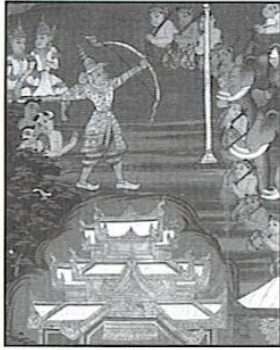


Transparency 2.3B: Siddhartha's Birth In this transparency we see the infant Prince Siddhartha being presented by King Suddhodana to a sage named Kaladvala. The sage is depicted twice, once smiling and once weeping, because he realizes he will not live to see Siddhartha reach enlightenment. Kaladvala's head is placed at the infant's feet, indicating that Siddhartha is Kaladvala's superior.

What do you see in this image? What words would you use to describe the setting of the scene? What aspects of the scene suggest that this birth is unique? Why do you think the man on the left is weeping?

According to tradition, the Buddha was born the son of powerful and rich parents, the warrior King Suddhodana and his first and most important wife, Queen Maya. This husband and wife were rulers of the Sakyan kingdom near the Himalaya mountains. One summer night, under a full moon, the beautiful Queen Maya dreamt that she was carried high over the Himalayas to a silver mountain and set upon a golden couch. A marvelous white elephant with six tusks walked around the queen and struck her right side. The elephant disappeared, and when the Queen awoke she knew she was carrying an important child within her belly. When she and King Suddhodana called for the brahmins (spiritual wise men) to interpret the dream, they all said that the baby inside Queen Maya would become a great man. "If he is raised as a prince," they declared, "he will certainly rule over the universe. But if he is allowed to see the suffering of the world, he will leave his life as a prince and wander as a spiritual seeker destined to become a Buddha (Awakened One)."

During the next 10 months, the king and queen thought about what the brahmins had said. Then in May, knowing that her time to give birth had come, Queen Maya asked her servants to take her to Lumbini, her childhood pleasure garden. There, beneath a sala tree and under a full moon, she gave birth to a baby boy. Immediately, a soft, warm rain full of heavenly flowers fell around them. The baby, who already looked a few years old, walked several steps and said aloud, "I am the leader of the world and the guide to the world." On his body were 32 marks that showed that he would become either a Buddha or a great world ruler. Five days later, King Suddhodana and Queen Maya named their son Prince Siddhartha Gautama, which means "the one of the Gautama clan who has accomplished the goal." Two days later, Queen Maya died. People believed she died because she had accomplished her purpose in life by carrying such a holy baby in her womb. From then on, the queen's sister, who was the king's second wife, raised Prince Siddhartha as her own son.



Transparency 2.3C: Siddhartha's Princely Life in the Palace

In the upper portion of this transparency, we see Prince Siddhartha displaying his skills in archery before the king and other members of the royal court, who are sitting on elephants. In the lower half of this transparency, we see Siddhartha and his bride joining hands in marriage. Behind them hang coconuts and bananas, which are offerings to the spirits. Wedding celebrations shown include a dancer, dramatic performances, and a group of musicians.

What do you see here? Why is Prince Siddhartha holding a bow at the top of the image? How large is Prince Siddhartha in relation to the elephants and other people? What does this signify? What do the details in this image reveal about Prince Siddhartha's early life?

King Suddhodana wanted Prince Siddhartha to become a great and powerful ruler. He feared that his son would fulfill the brahmins' predictions and become a spiritual seeker, or ascetic (one who abandons worldly things) if he saw the world's suffering. He therefore decided to raise his son as a royal prince surrounded by the richest pleasures and most magnificent beauty imaginable. He built three separate palaces for young Siddhartha—one each for the summer, the winter, and the monsoon (rainy) season. The young prince spent his time wandering in fragrant gardens all over his father's lands, his feet touching only soft pathways. He bathed in warm pools among sweet-smelling flowers while servants protected him with silken canopies. Siddhartha had countless servants and dozens of nurses who nursed and bathed him, washed his clothes, and carried and entertained him. King Suddhodana made sure that his son's servant girls were all beautiful and without one mistake in their physical appearance, and that each possessed many talents such as dancing, singing, and playing music. The prince himself was quite talented in all the subjects of his royal education, which included writing, arithmetic, cleanliness, military training, and sports. This easy life with servants and rich food was enjoyable for Siddhartha. However, he was always curious about the world beyond the palace walls. Siddhartha regularly took time to meditate alone beneath a roseapple tree in his father's fields and to contemplate the world beyond his reach.

When Prince Siddhartha was 16 years old, his father sent a letter to the most important Sakyan families announcing his son's readiness for marriage. The answers he received surprised him. "Your son may be very handsome," the families wrote, "but he has had too easy a life and would not be able to protect our daughters if there were a war. Show us he is worthy of our attention." Siddhartha himself arranged a competition in which he displayed his superhuman abilities in archery. Soon after, several thousand girls traveled to appear before the prince as possible brides. The most beautiful one, Yasodhara, the daughter of a Sakyan noble, was chosen to become Siddhartha's wife. The wedding feast lasted for seven days and seven nights, and afterward the young couple returned to live in Siddhartha's palaces filled with attractive, delicious, and perfect things. Twelve years of happy marriage passed, and Yasodhara became pregnant with their first child, Rahula.



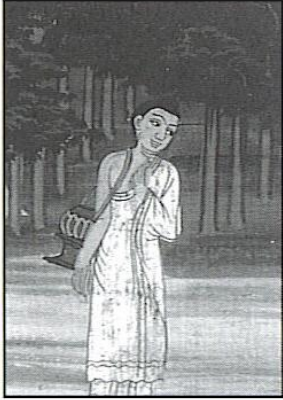
Transparency 2.3D: Siddhartha Discovers Aging, Sickness, and Death

In this transparency we see Prince Siddhartha riding in his carriage and pointing to four figures: an old man, a sick man, a corpse being pecked at by a bird, and an ascetic carrying a traditional circular fan.

What are five interesting details you see in this image? Who is the man in the carriage? Why do you think he is pointing? What might the three figures in the upper right corner represent? The figures represent old age, sickness, and death. How might Prince Siddhartha be affected by his encounter with these realities?

After Prince Siddhartha became a father at the age of 29, King Suddhodana stopped worrying that his son would leave his life as a prince. He allowed Siddhartha to travel more freely outside the palace walls. On one such occasion, Siddhartha and his chariot driver Chandaka were driving along the road when they passed a man who was thin and bent over, leaning on a walking stick. The young prince asked, “Why is that man in such terrible condition and look so weak?” Chandaka answered, “He is an old man whose long life has worn out his body, though it was once strong like yours.” Siddhartha was shocked that the body of a person could become so weak in old age, and he asked Chandaka to drive him home at once. Back in the palace King Suddhodana gave his troubled son sweet nectar to drink and silken cushions to rest upon, hoping to ease his mind. But Siddhartha decided to go out again. This time, he saw a man with red eyes who had fallen down in his own excrement and was wailing loudly from pain. When Chandaka explained that this man was sick, and that the prince could also become sick if he breathed bad air, Siddhartha became deeply saddened about the world’s pain.

Siddhartha ordered Chandaka to take him beyond the comforts of his palace a third time, and on this drive they saw a group pass by slowly. The group carried a man wrapped in white cloth who lay absolutely still. “Death,” said Chandaka to the prince, “which came to this man whose funeral we see, will come to you too someday.” Siddhartha returned home even more troubled, but he felt he must venture out a fourth time. This time, he encountered a man sitting upright and calm, with a radiant glow on his face. “How is it that you sit so peacefully when there is so much suffering around you?” Siddhartha asked him. The ascetic replied, “Only when you have given up the desires and pleasures of the world like riches and comfort, can you be free from the suffering of the world. I find my peace by helping other people find theirs.” This answer stuck in Siddhartha’s mind, and when he returned home he saw his father’s palace very differently. The sweet milk and honey drinks did not satisfy his questions about life, and the beautiful girls with the dancing bells around their ankles bored him. One night after everyone had fallen asleep following a large party, Siddhartha saw the female servants lying around him and they appeared to him to be like corpses. He then concluded that the four signs he had seen in the outside world—old age, sickness, death, and an ascetic—had opened his eyes and made it impossible for him to find happiness or peace living as a royal prince.



Transparency 2.3E: Siddhartha Leaves His Family to Become an Ascetic

In this transparency we see Prince Siddhartha dressed as a monk with his alms bowl slung from his shoulder. He is walking alone in the forest as he begins his quest for enlightenment.

What do you see in this image? How is Siddhartha dressed? Where is he? How does this compare to the previous transparencies? Why is he carrying a bowl? Why do you think he is alone?

Siddhartha realized that he must leave the palace and his worldly things in order to find peace. The words of the ascetic showed him that being a prince made him cling to such pleasures as flavorful food, and that these pleasures were temporary and ultimately could not save him from suffering.

Siddhartha felt that the first step toward *nirvana*, or the end of suffering, was to become homeless. He believed that if he was free from the worries of keeping a house, he would also be free to wholeheartedly pursue nirvana. But this meant he would have to leave his family, including his wife and his newborn son Rahula.

He arose one night under the full moon and went to the room where Yasodhara and Rahula slept. Leaning over to brush his baby's cheek good-bye, Siddhartha heard Yasodhara say, "Take me with you wherever you go." Yasodhara and King Suddhodana both pleaded with Siddhartha not to leave, but he felt strongly that he needed to go. He felt that he could only truly help others, including his family, by resolving the problem of suffering. Chandaka, the chariot driver, drove Siddhartha out of the palace, this time for a one-way ride into the forest. On the way, Mara, the God of self-deception, tried to prevent Siddhartha from becoming an ascetic. Mara promised Siddhartha that he would make him the ruler of the universe in seven days' time if he gave up his quest to become an ascetic. But Siddhartha ignored him. At the edge of the forest, Siddhartha took off his royal robes, sandals, and jewels, and cut off his hair with Chandaka's knife. He became an ascetic, putting on beggar's rags for clothes and bringing with him only one alms bowl. He left his driver and horse and went into the forest to wander in his new home.

As he wandered through forests and fields, Siddhartha met many other ascetics. These men were surprised to see such a handsome and powerful prince pursuing the same life they had chosen. Though the other ascetics thought it strange to see such a young, strong face beneath such ragged clothes, they taught him how to request money for food and to meditate daily. Siddhartha gradually grew accustomed to the simple food, hard ground, and hot sun that he had never experienced in his father's luxurious palaces. He desired to master the practice of meditation, so he sought the two greatest teachers of his day, Arada and Udraka. Under their guidance, Siddhartha soon became so skilled at meditating that his teachers invited him to become a teacher himself. But Siddhartha was not satisfied. Although he found the mental training of meditation powerful and helpful, he felt that it did not allow him or his teachers to fully understand the nature of reality. Leaving his teachers behind, Siddhartha joined five other ascetics who excelled in practices of extreme self-deprivation: fasting for many days in a row, holding one's breath for long periods of time, sitting underneath the midday sun without shelter, and standing all night long without proper sleep.

Once again Siddhartha quickly mastered these practices and became disappointed with the results. While he felt that the mental training of meditation had at least been helpful, he found that the self-deprivation practices left him weakened almost to the point of death. He realized that true understanding, the Awakening he sought, would never come through self-torture or from the rich comforts and indulgences of his youth. There had to be another way.



Transparency 2.3F: Siddhartha Achieves Enlightenment and Becomes the Buddha In this transparency we see Siddhartha as the Buddha. He is seated on a throne under a Bodhi tree after achieving enlightenment.

What interesting or important details do you see in this image? How has Siddhartha’s appearance changed? Why do you think he is sitting in this position? What might happen to him as he is meditating?

After reflecting on his experiences, Siddhartha became convinced that a middle way between pleasure and pain was the best path to enlightenment. He began to eat and sleep in a more regular fashion. When the other five ascetics saw him eating a full bowl of rice again, they thought he had given in to worldly comforts, so they left him. All alone, Siddhartha, or the bodhisattva (Buddha-to-be), begged for food daily and soon his strength and health returned. On the morning of his thirty-fifth birthday, on the day of a full moon, he bathed in the river and then sat in a grove of shady trees. A nearby cowherd’s daughter, Sujata, thought Siddhartha was a God and as an offering fed him rice boiled in cream and wild honey. The bodhisattva felt strong and good, and he rested awhile.

Siddhartha awoke with a feeling that he soon would achieve the pure enlightenment he so desired. He rose and crossed the river, passing a grasscutter who gave him a present of eight handfuls of soft grass. The bodhisattva came to a Bodhi (Enlightenment) tree near the town of Gaya and stopped—here was the place where a bodhisattva could sit to reach the final wisdom of Buddhahood. Placing the handfuls of grass on the ground, he lowered himself upon them and said: “Let only skin and bones remain, let the flesh and blood of this body dry up, but I shall never abandon this seat until I have attained supreme and absolute Enlightenment, knowing everything as Buddha!”

That night was a terribly difficult test for Siddhartha. Mara, the God of self-deception, attacked him many times to try to make him leave his seat of meditation. “Go back to your kingdom and your family where you belong,” Mara ordered; but Siddhartha did not respond. “How dare you sit in my seat, the Diamond Throne!” Mara threatened; but still Siddhartha sat. Then Mara called on monsters and beasts to howl with deafening sounds, on the forces of nature to rain fire and meteors, and summoned thick blackness to suffocate Siddhartha. Finally, the bodhisattva stated: “I have earned the right to sit on this sacred seat because of my countless generous acts. Where are your witnesses to defend you?” he demanded. Mara’s team of hideous creatures were no match for the earth’s forces, which came to Siddhartha’s aid. The whole earth shook to show how worthy Siddhartha was to become fully enlightened. Finally, Mara gave up and left Siddhartha alone.

Once alone, Siddhartha continued his deep meditation until he understood the nature of reality and how to achieve freedom from being reborn, or reincarnated. When Siddhartha spoke again in the morning, he spoke as a Buddha. The Buddha declared: "O painful is birth ever and again.... My mind has now attained the unconditioned nirvana and reached the end of every kind of craving."