

Buddhism



Context: Where this lesson fits in

- The “Axial Age” was a time when several great thinkers took different approaches to dealing with the problem of existence
- The Axial Age was from roughly 800BCE-400 BCE
- Some of these thinkers included the Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, Lao Tzu, and Socrates

What do you know?

- How does one become “good” in Buddhism?
- What do Buddhists do to practice Buddhism?
- What do Buddhists believe about the afterlife?
- What do Buddhists believe about God or the gods?



Socrates - Rationalism



Zoroaster - Zoroastrianism



Confucius - Confucianism

Great Thinkers of the Axial Age



Lao Tzu -- Daoism



Buddha -- Buddhism

Prince Siddhartha
Gautama was born
into a royal family
2500 years ago in
what is now called
Nepal



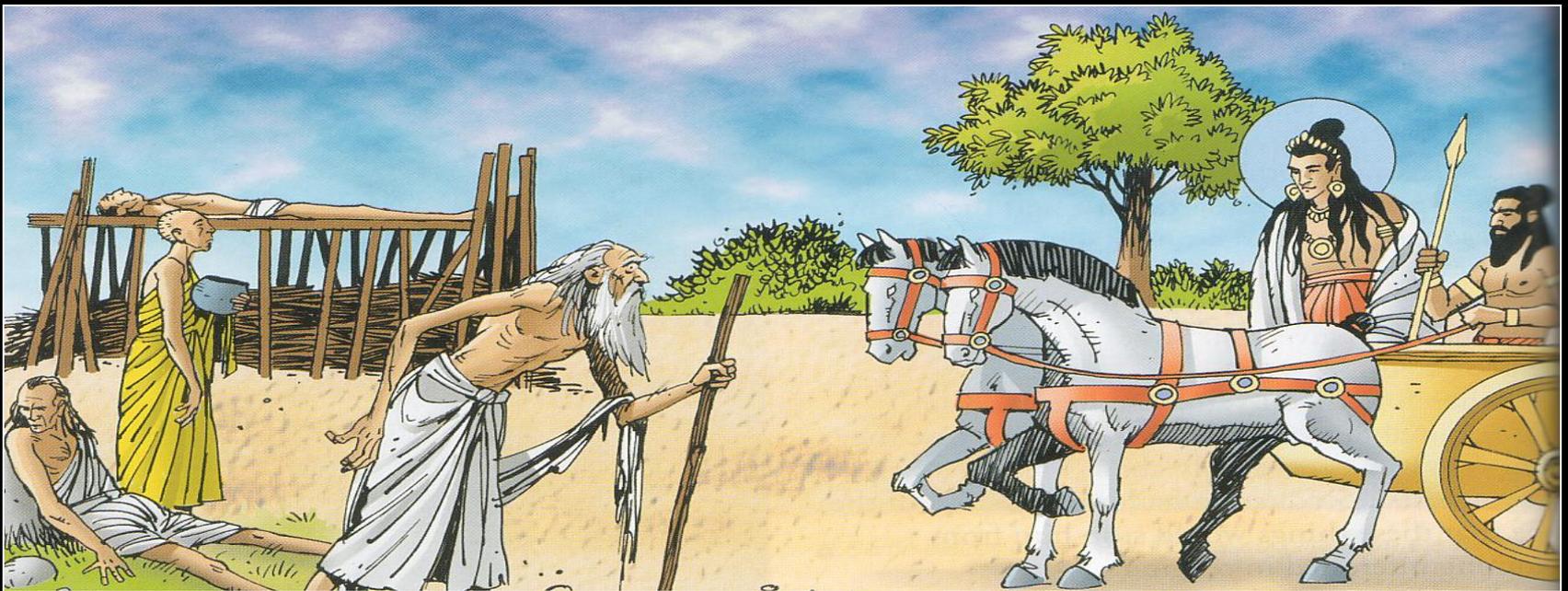
This
child will
change
the world!

When he was born a
holy man called Asita
predicted that
Siddhartha would be
either a great holy
man or a great king



Siddhartha's father wanted his son to follow in his footsteps and become a king. He did not want his son to become a holy man. So he tried to prevent Siddhartha from wanting to leave the palace by shielding him from anything that might upset him and giving him a life of luxury. The king thought that this would make him so happy that his son would never want to leave.

One day, despite his father's orders, Siddhartha decided to leave the palace grounds with his charioteer Chanda. They hadn't gone far when they came across a frail old man. As his father had kept him away from things that might upset him, Siddhartha was shocked! He asked Chanda to return him to the palace at once.



During the next three days Siddhartha left the palace three more times and each day he saw something that both shocked and perplexed him...

On the second day he saw a man lying on the roadside who was very ill.



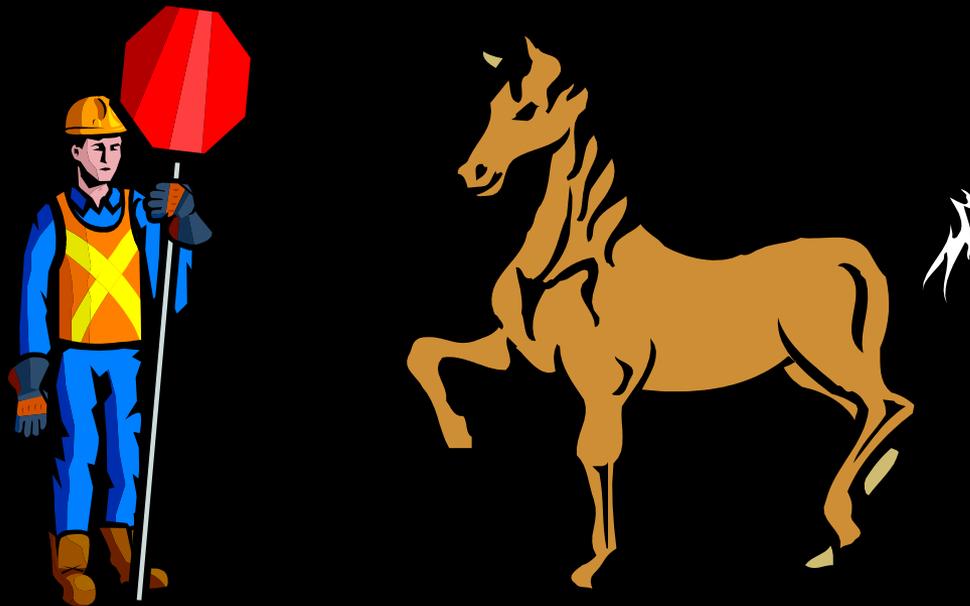
On the third day he saw a dead man being carried through the streets.



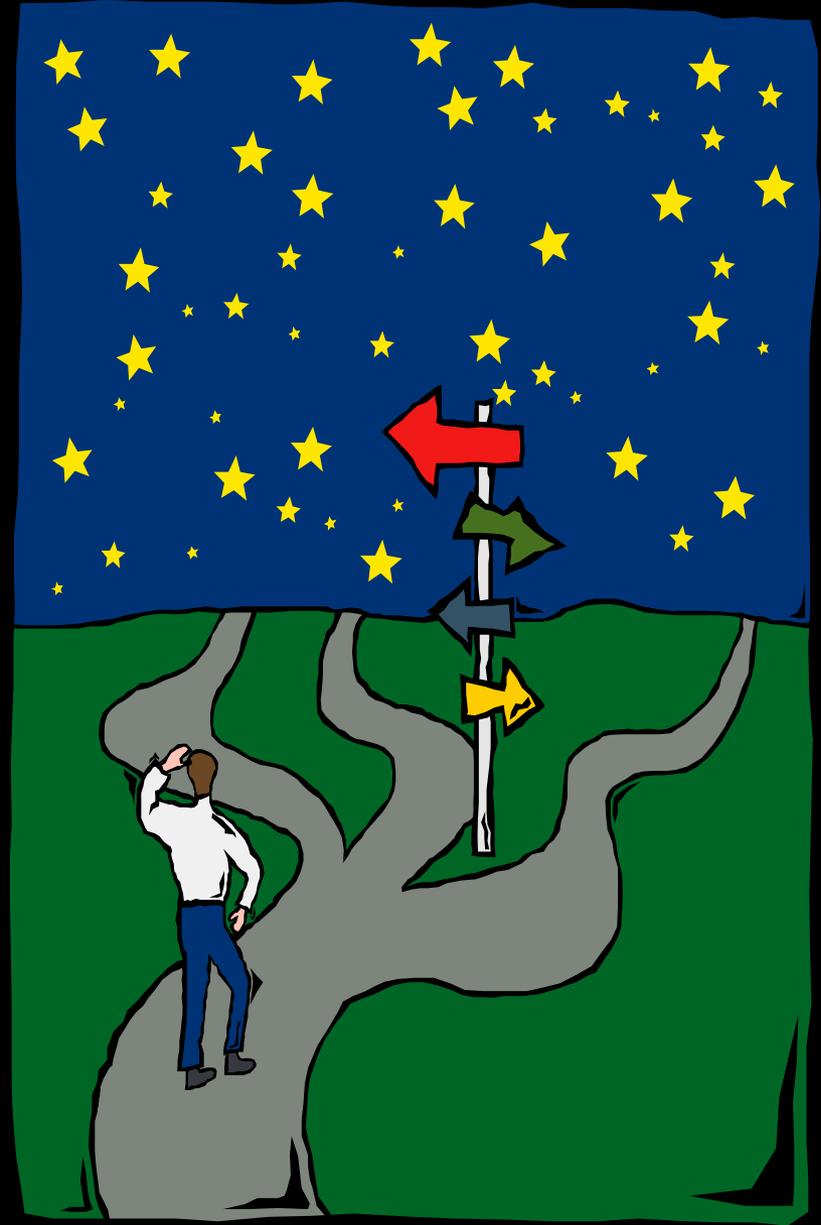


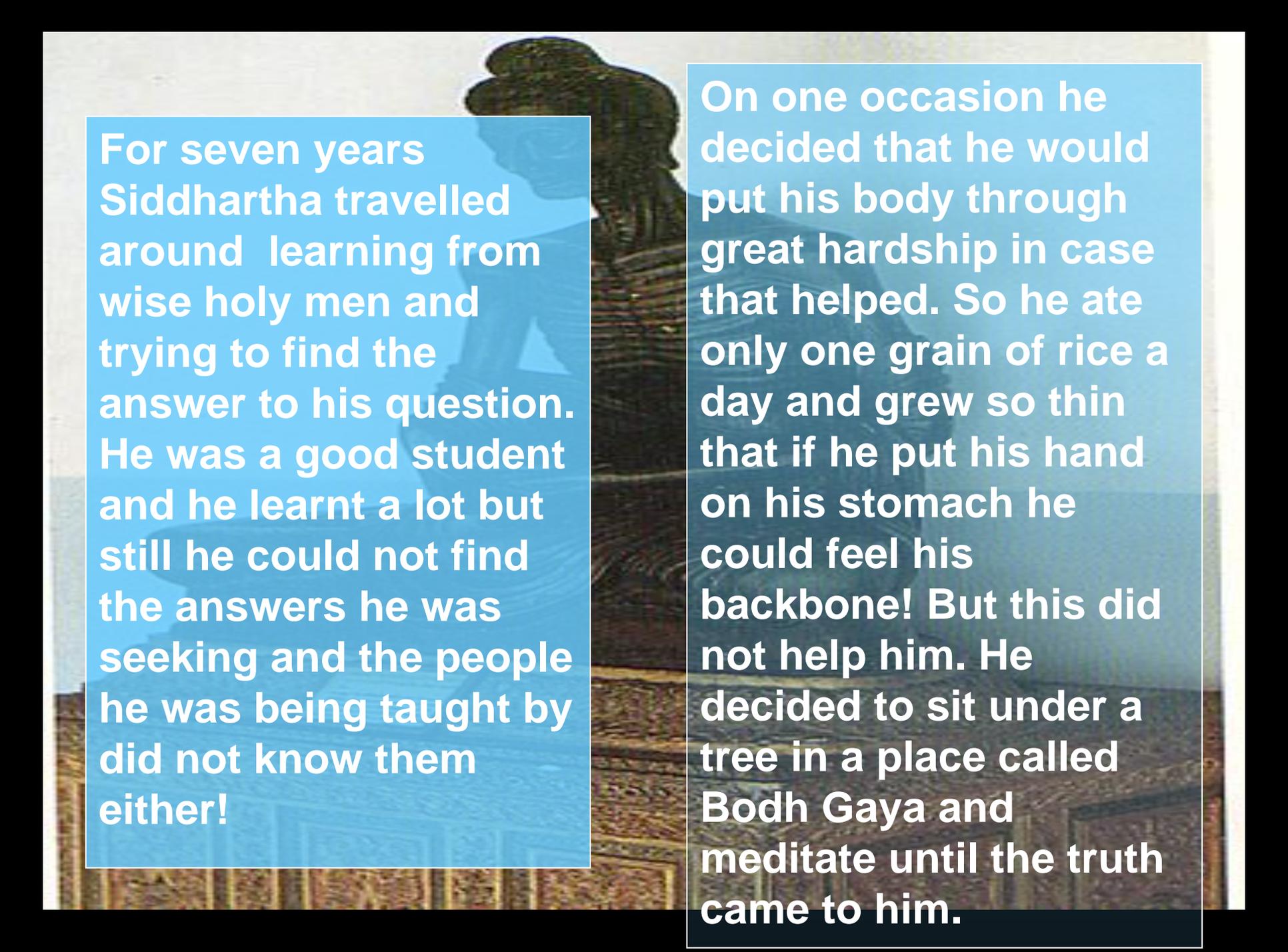
But on the fourth day Siddhartha saw a man calmly walking through the crowds, dressed in rags, carrying a begging bowl. This man was a wandering holy man who appeared content and happy even though he owned very little. This inspired Siddhartha to become a wandering truth seeker, looking for the answer to the problem of suffering in the world.

Siddhartha was inspired to change his life after seeing what Buddhists call the 'Four Sights': the old man, the sick man, the dead man and the satisfied holy man. How would you feel and what would it mean to you if you saw these four sights? Discuss each of them with the person next to you and get ready to feedback to the class.



Finding an answer to the question, 'Why do people suffer, get old, get sick and die?' became the most important thing in Siddhartha's life. To give the question his full attention he decided to leave behind his privileged background. That night he left his old life behind forever to spend his time as a wandering holy man.

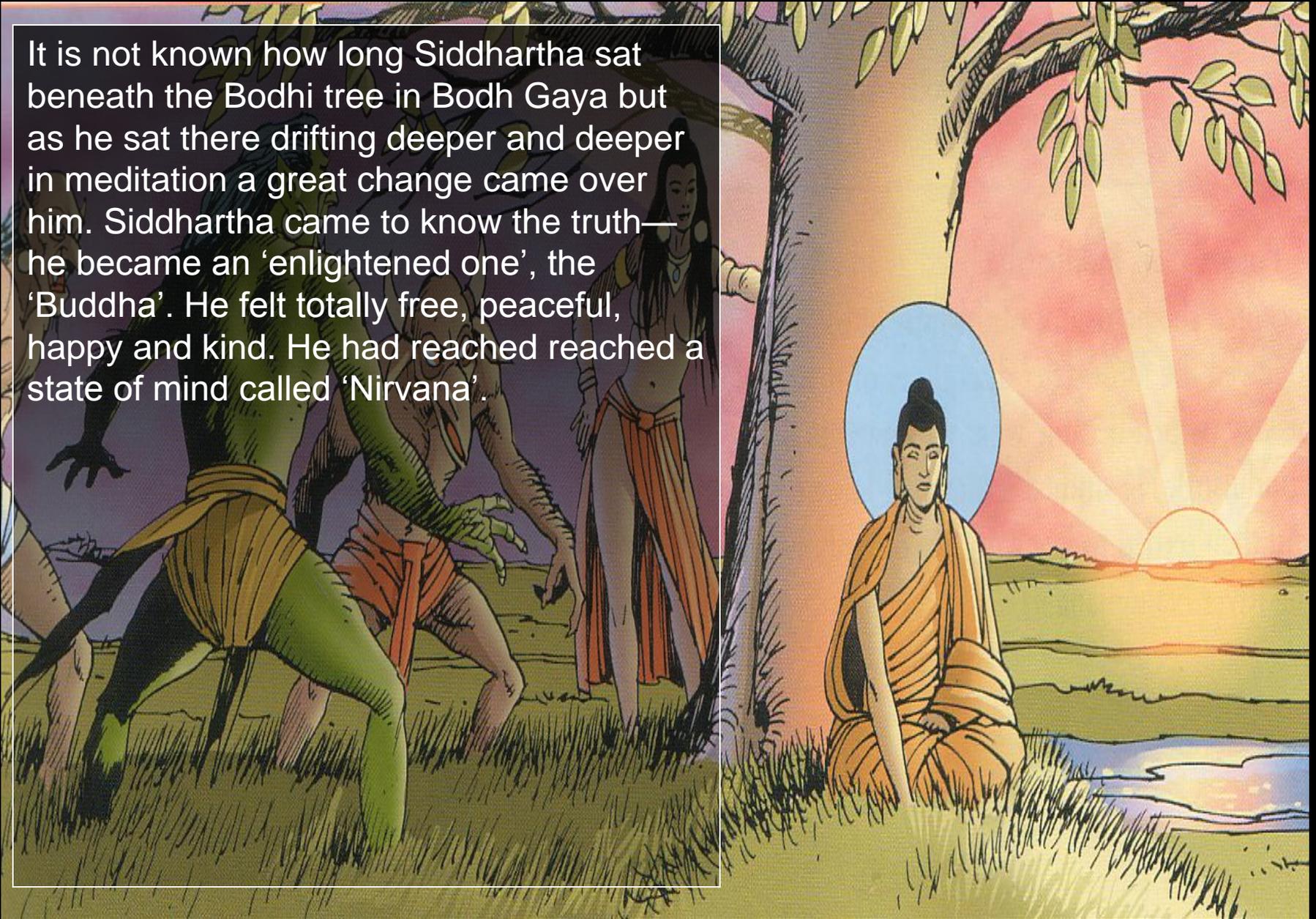




For seven years Siddhartha travelled around learning from wise holy men and trying to find the answer to his question. He was a good student and he learnt a lot but still he could not find the answers he was seeking and the people he was being taught by did not know them either!

On one occasion he decided that he would put his body through great hardship in case that helped. So he ate only one grain of rice a day and grew so thin that if he put his hand on his stomach he could feel his backbone! But this did not help him. He decided to sit under a tree in a place called Bodh Gaya and meditate until the truth came to him.

It is not known how long Siddhartha sat beneath the Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya but as he sat there drifting deeper and deeper in meditation a great change came over him. Siddhartha came to know the truth—he became an 'enlightened one', the 'Buddha'. He felt totally free, peaceful, happy and kind. He had reached reached a state of mind called 'Nirvana'.



What problems were the thinkers of the Axial Age addressing?

- What is the nature of reality? Is it static or dynamic? Or is it both?
- How does one achieve **transcendence**?
- How does one live the good life?
- To what extent does society matter?
- What is the nature of evil? (or even 'is there such thing as evil')
- What is ethical behavior?
- What are the gods? Are there gods? If there are, do they matter?

The Buddha was reacting to his environment

- Indo-Aryan religion highly ritualistic and elite
- Buddha not the first to reject caste system, elite nature of religion
- Forest Yogis shifted focus onto personal experience:
 - Meditation
 - Fasting
 - Other means of changing consciousness

The Buddha accepted some of the beliefs of the Indo-Aryans:

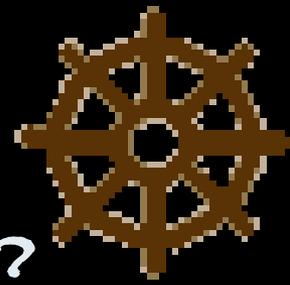
- Reincarnation and the circular nature of time
- Monism: there is no separation between creation and a god
- Karma: spiritual causation – how everything is caused by choices of individuals
- Dharma: order or law (spiritual)
- The importance of meditation and increasing awareness

The Buddha rejected some important Indo-Aryan beliefs

- The caste or varna system
- The belief in god/s (Buddha was an atheist)
- The need to dull or extinguish the senses through self-deprivation
- The belief that humans have a soul
- The First Reading: “Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Law” – the Buddha’s first sermon

But what did the Buddha believe?

- Lived for at least 40 years after enlightenment
- Never wrote anything down, but over centuries followers did
- Various “councils” decided which works were accurate
- Collection of writings known as “tripitaka”



What is the Eight-Fold Path?

Wisdom:

- Right understanding
- Right motivation

Mental discipline:

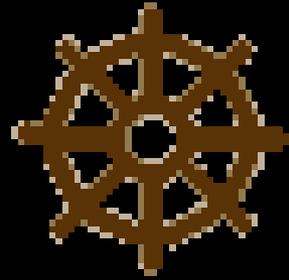
- Right effort
- Right mindfulness
- Right meditation

Moral discipline:

- Right speech
- Right action
- Right livelihood



How does Buddhism differ from Hinduism?



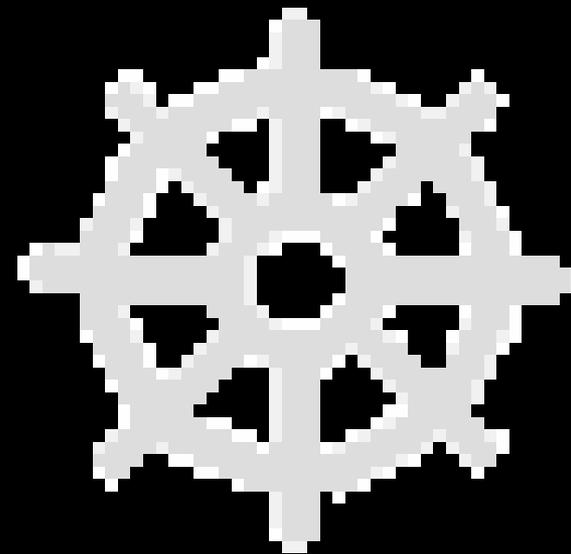
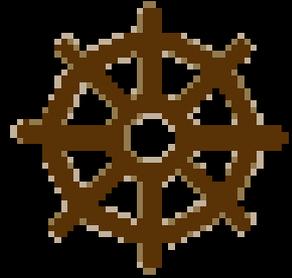
Buddhism rejects...

- Authority of the ancient Vedic texts
- The Vedic caste system
- The Vedic and Hindu deities
- The efficacy of Vedic worship and ritual
- The concept of Brahman

How does Buddhism differ from Jainism?

Buddhism rejects...

- The concept of Atman
- The practice of strict asceticism and withdrawal from the world (preferring the “middle way”)
- Vegetarianism as required



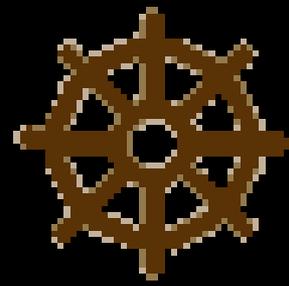
Four noble truths are:

- The truth of *dukkha* (suffering, anxiety, unsatisfactoriness)
- The truth of the origin of *dukkha*
- The truth of the cessation of *dukkha*
- The truth of the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*

Dukkha 3 Aspects:

1. The obvious physical and mental suffering associated with birth, growing old, illness and dying.
2. The anxiety or stress of trying to hold onto things that are constantly changing.
3. A basic unsatisfactoriness pervading all forms of existence, due to the fact that all forms of life are changing, impermanent and without any inner core or substance. On this level, the term indicates a lack of satisfaction, a sense that things never measure up to our expectations or standards. (Although the state of Nirvana is the one form of existence which IS satisfactory.)

What do Buddhists believe?

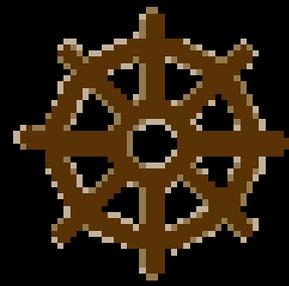


- Rebirth (reincarnation) results from attachments (karma)
- *Nirvana* is a peaceful, detached state of mind
- Achieving *Nirvana* means escape from the cycle of rebirth

Once Gautama Buddha died, after 80 years of life in this world, having achieved *Nirvana* and teaching multitudes his way of life, he ceased to exist as a distinct being

- Buddhism is non-theistic: *Buddha is not* the Buddhist God ~ he is just a revered teacher

Buddhist Metaphysics



- *Dukkha*: life in this world is filled with suffering
- *Anicca*: everything in this world is impermanent
- *Anatta*: the self/soul is also impermanent ~ there is no eternal, unchanging self (“no soul” ~ no atman)
- Suffering is a state of mind ~ achieve a balanced, peaceful, detached state of mind and suffering can be extinguished (*Nirvana*)

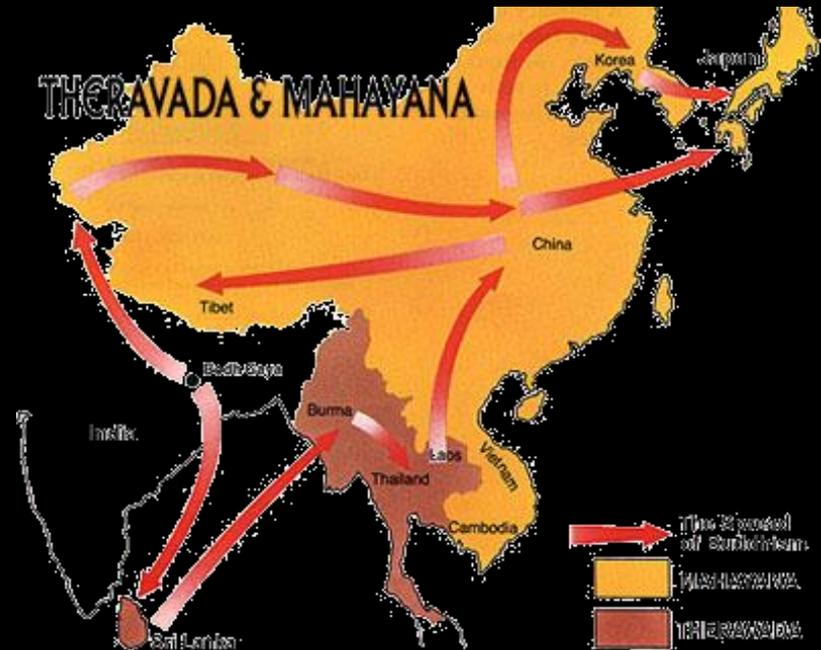
What are some Buddhist texts?

- *Tripitaka* (the *Pali Cannon*) – the “Three Baskets”:
 - *Vinaya* (“discipline”) – rules for monastic life
 - *Sutta* (“discourse”) – sermons of the Buddha
 - *Abhidhamma* (metaphysical “teachings”)
- *Dhammapada* – collected sayings of the Buddha
- Other texts used by specific schools



The Spread of Buddhism

- Within two centuries after the Buddha died, Buddhism began to spread north and east into Asia
- By 13th century Buddhism had disappeared from India

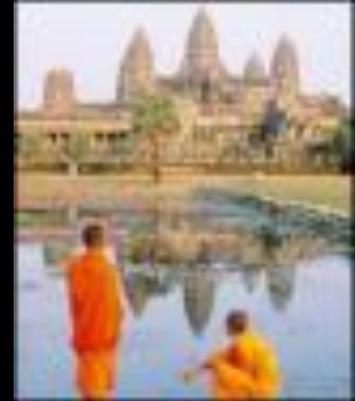


Schools of Buddhism ~ Theravada



The “Way of the Elders” (a.k.a.: the “small vehicle”)

- Oldest school of Buddhism
- Found in southern Asia (Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, etc.)
- Monasticism is the ideal life for achieving *Nirvana*
- A “do-it-yourself” approach to enlightenment
- Focus on wisdom and meditation
- Goal is to become a *Buddha*
- Fairly unified in belief & practice (some cultural differences)



Schools of Buddhism ~ Mahayana

The “Great Vehicle”

- Developed first century C.E.
- Found in Northern Asia (China, Japan, etc.)
- Lay Buddhism ~ Buddhism “for the masses”
- Devotional ~ seek guidance from *Bodhisattvas* (“wise beings”) & heavenly *Buddhas* (*kwan Yin*, *Amida*, etc.)
- Focus on compassion
- Goal is to become a *bodhisattva* and assist others toward enlightenment (the “*Bodhisattva* Ideal”)
- Diverse schools and sects including:
 - ~ Pureland, Nichiren, Tendai, Shingon, and others



Schools of Buddhism - Tibetan

Vajrayana - the "Diamond Vehicle"

- Developed 7th century C.E.
- A mix of Theravada & Mahayana:
 - Rituals (*Tantra*):
 - *Mantras* (chanting)
 - *Mandalas & Thankas* (symbolic images)
 - *Mudras* (hand gestures)
 - *Bodhisattvas*, including living *Lamas* (Dalai Lama)
 - Meditation, monasticism, wisdom & compassion
- *Bardo Thodol* - Tibetan Book of the Dead



Schools of Buddhism ~ Zen



The “meditation” school:

- Lay and monastic
- Seeks sudden enlightenment (*satori*) through meditation, arriving at emptiness (*sunyata*) and the “Buddha Nature”
- Use of meditation masters (*Roshi*)
- *Koans* (paradoxical riddles to confound reason)
- Beauty, arts & aesthetics ~ gardens, archery, the tea ceremony, calligraphy, etc.



Buddhism in the West



Over the past two centuries, especially since the later half of the 20th century, Buddhism has made inroads into the Western world through...

- Immigration of Asian peoples who have brought their diverse forms of Buddhism to the West
- Western followers who tend to adopt meditation practices and the philosophy rather than more devotional forms of Buddhism
 - ~ Many such western followers remain within their own faith traditions, finding Buddhism to be a complement to rather than in conflict with other religions

The two groups remain independent of one another