

B. Searching for the Way

1. Renouncing the Worldly Ties

Day by day, Prince Siddhartha found that all living beings were in sufferings: old age, sickness, death, etc. The prince wondered "*Whether we, all living beings, have to experience sufferings*", "*Is there a Way to relieve all living beings' sufferings?*" Prince Siddhartha consulted some contemporary religious leaders, but found no satisfying answer.

After growing up, Prince Siddhartha got married to Princess Yasodhara, a daughter of King Suppabuddha and Queen Pamita of Koliya, a neighbour country north of Kapilavatthu . The young couple had a royal life of luxury. However the sufferings of living beings were still in the prince's heart. One day Prince Siddhartha saw a monk walking calmly and serenely. He learnt that the man had left his home and had been living a detached life to seek the Truth. Prince Siddhartha asked his father, King Suddhodana, for permission to leave home to become a monk. His request was refused. Prince Siddhartha asked whether his father could save him from old age, sickness and death. The king had no answer.

When Princess Yasodhara gave birth to a son, Prince Siddhartha joyfully named him Rahula. However the happiest one was King Suddhodana, who though that, with the newly born child, the family ties would be stronger and Prince Siddhartha would forget the thought of renouncing his future kingship. On the contrary, Prince Siddhartha found his responsibilities becoming heavier. He brought Rahula to the world, and his son would soon be living in sufferings, as had been Yasodhara and King Suddhodana. The royal and luxury life could not free them from old age, sickness and death.

It was compassion and the sufferings of all living beings that moved Prince Siddhartha's heart towards the Great Renunciation. Late one night after a royal party, the prince silently made the last parting glance at his beloved wife asleep with their child in her arms. He left the Kapilavatthu Kingdom with his servant Channa, and the horse Kanthaka. After crossing the Anoma River, about 60 km South of Kapilavatthu, Prince Siddhartha stopped and told Channa to go back with Kanthaka to inform King Suddhodana of the prince's unshakeable determination. Prince Siddhartha then started an ascetic life at the age of twenty-nine.

2. Ascetic Siddhartha

After Channa and Kanthaka had left, Prince Siddhartha went into a forest to begin a hermit life. Ascetic Siddhartha learnt how to find and survive on edible wild fruits and plants. Later, following some monks' advice, Ascetic Siddhartha came to the study centres of Masters Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta to practise meditation. He reached the meditation attainment levels of those of the two masters. However Ascetic Siddhartha found that attaining these meditation levels would not transcend him above old age, sickness and death. He wanted to find a Way to relieve all living beings' sufferings: He was realising the vow of a Bodhisattva and should now be known as Bodhisattva Gautama.

Leaving Uddaka Ramaputta, his last teacher, Bodhisattva Gautama wandered in search for the Way, which eventually he thought could not be found anywhere but in himself. He waded across Neranjara River near Uruvela village and reached Dangsiri Mountain. There, Bodhisattva Gautama decided to practise extreme asceticism. Five other ascetics, Kondanna, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama and Assaji, who admired his determined effort later joined him. They practised self-mortification. They reduced their daily food. Bodhisattva Gautama even went further; he had only a few seeds of grain or nothing for days. The Bodhisattva grew thinner and thinner. Six years had passed since his great renunciation. The young prince of Kapilavatthu became little more than a living skeleton, but still he continued practising austerity and meditation. He overcame all greed and fear. His mind became clean and clear, but it was only like a glass of water with impurity still at the bottom. It was necessary to take all taints out of his mind.

Full enlightenment had not yet come: The liberation of living beings from old age, sickness and death was still the Bodhisattva's ultimate goal. One day, a jolt occurred to Bodhisattva Gautama. He remembered the peace of his mind during meditation in his childhood under the rose-apple tree. He thought that neither way, living in luxury or practising austerity, would help him to discover the Truth. He confidently felt: "This is the Path!" but he was too weak; he collapsed unconscious.