

The Story of the Buddha: Part 2

The final part of the last story was...*On the way back to the Palace Siddhartha saw a holy man. He had never seen a holy man before. When Siddhartha saw him, looking calm and peaceful, he questioned Channa for the fourth time.*

'He is a holy man,' Channa explained. 'He has left his family and possessions behind so that he can search for the truth about being happy in life.

Siddhartha thought of all that he had seen on his chariot ride. He felt very sad. How could people be happy in life, when there was so much sorrow and suffering?

He had to go in search of the answer. This was a turning point in his life, he knew what he had to do. It was time for renunciation, giving up his old life at the palace. He was 29 years old. The words of the wise men at his birth were coming true!

Can pause here and ask if anyone thinks they know what Siddhartha did next.

He took off his royal robes and put on simple clothes. He shaved his hair. He said goodbye to his wife and son and left the palace.

Siddhartha spent years travelling around northern India. He followed all sorts of advice. At first, nothing helped him find the answer. At one point he spent some time with a group of ascetic monks, they were holy men who tried to find enlightenment by disciplining their bodies who believed that to overcome suffering you should deliberately expose yourself to it. They believed that if they ate and drank as little as possible and spent a lot of time thinking they would come to understand the meaning of life. They believed if you neglect your body it will grow weak but your mind will grow stronger. Six years Siddhartha followed this way of life, he too tried to reduce his physical needs to a minimum even surviving on just one grain of rice a week. Siddhartha nearly died from starvation! One day he was bathing in the river and a young girl offered him a bowl of rice. Siddhartha realised that his ascetic practices could never lead him to full insight, he had become too weak even to meditate. So he accepted the food. His fellow ascetics thought that he was going to return to his life of luxury, they saw him as a failure and deserted him.

But, Siddhartha had learnt an important lesson. He had discovered that his extravagant lifestyle could not protect him from suffering and so could not bring him deep lasting happiness. He realised that he would only become enlightened by living the Middle Way between two extremes of luxury and hardship.

Siddhartha was 35 years old, he had experience both wealth and poverty, and now lived the Middle Way.

One day, he came to a Bodhi (fig) tree and rested in its shade determined to stay there until he found the truth. Bodhi means wisdom and the Bodhi tree is sometimes called the tree of wisdom. Some believe that for 46 days he stayed there thinking deeply and paying no attention to what was going on around him. Today, this kind of deep thinking is called meditation. During the night, his mind struggled with many different temptations,

temptations to give up his search to give in to his desires of luxuries and pleasures, to let himself be angry or get jealous. He resisted the temptations, placing a right hand on the ground as a way of showing that the Earth had witnessed his struggle.

As morning dawned, Siddhartha felt that at last, he really understood what caused people's sadness and suffering, he had found the answers to his questions. For him, it was like waking up to the truth! He understood the answers to his questions. Buddhists say that he became enlightened. From this time on, he became known as the Buddha which means 'the enlightened one'.

It is impossible to fully explain exactly what Siddhartha understood as he became enlightened, because the understanding of it is enlightenment. You would have to be enlightened yourself to take it in fully. But we can see in general the things he learned, we will find them out next week.....

For now I leave you with Siddhartha, who once enlightened went back to the place where he had lived with the monks, and in the park there he told them about what he had discovered. They understood what he was saying and became his first followers.

The Buddha lived until he was 80 years old and during the rest of his life he travelled about teaching and preaching. After he died his disciples went on travelling and teaching the things he had told them.

Today there are millions of people in the world who follow the teachings of the Buddha, today there are millions of Buddhists wanting to follow in his footsteps, and to become enlightened...