

Programme I

The Buddha

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The story of Prince Siddhartha

TEACHER'S NOTES

Buddhism arose from the Buddha's experience of Enlightenment. The title 'Buddha' means One Who is Awake. At his Enlightenment, the Buddha became awake to the truth of How Things Really Are. The Buddha was not a God, a prophet or a messiah, but a human being developed to an extraordinary degree.

The Buddha's teachings were preserved through a strong oral tradition for five hundred years before being written down in Sanskrit and Pali. The **Pali Canon** is the only surviving complete record of this oral tradition.

It doesn't contain a complete, sequential account of the life of the Buddha, but a Sanskrit work by the Indian poet Ashvaghosha (the Buddha Carita, or Acts of the Buddha) composed about a hundred years later, also provides a basis for accounts of his life.

The Buddha was born as Siddhartha Gautama, a member of a wealthy aristocratic family of the Shakyan clan, in what is now Nepal, around the year 560 BCE (Before Common Era). For twenty-nine years, Siddhartha lived a well-to-do existence, but increasingly found a life devoted to material pleasures empty and unfulfilling. He experienced a deep sense of dissatisfaction and also a desire to find meaning in life. The legend of the **Four Sights** represents, in dramatic form, a spiritual crisis or turning point. His response to this spiritual experience was to Go Forth, to leave behind security and comfort in order to be free to seek an answer to these questions for himself. The **Going Forth** and the **Enlightenment** are key incidents in the life of the Buddha.

In the Indian subcontinent there was, and still is, a tradition of wandering holy men and teachers. It was then commonly believed that the way to find spiritual truth was through self-mortification and extreme asceticism. After six years, Siddhartha realised that extreme self-denial was not a useful spiritual practice. Instead, he followed a middle way between the two extremes of denial and self-indulgence.

For Buddhists, the life of the Buddha is an inspiration. They worship the Buddha as the one who discovered the way to Enlightenment, as a teacher and an exemplar.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Suffering

Siddhartha's father tried to shield him from all the unpleasant things in life.

- Do you think that it is possible to avoid all suffering and unhappiness in your life?
- Can you say why?
- What things cause us to suffer or be unhappy?

Turning points

Siddhartha saw the Four Sights and felt that he could not ignore the questions they raised. Sometimes we see, or experience, events that make us stop and think: illness, bereavement and loss, for example.

- Can you remember such an event?
- What was it that made you stop and think?
- What did you do as a result of the experience?

Moving on

The Buddha did not find it easy to leave the comfort and familiarity of his home and family. But it was something he needed to do in order to be free to seek an answer to his questions.

The process of growing up is, to some extent, one of leaving things behind. In order to move on, we sometimes have to leave things behind. Changing classes at the end of a year or moving from junior to secondary school are examples of this.

- Why did you make the change?
- What did you have to leave behind?
- What feelings did you have? (sadness, relief, regret, etc.)
- What did you look forward to in the new situation?
- What feelings did you have about the new experience? (excitement, nervousness etc.)

Making up your own mind

When Siddhartha gave up the ascetic life and began to take food again, his five ascetic friends left him. But he was not afraid to admit that he had made a mistake and that he must carry on alone.

- Are there any occasions when you have had to admit that you had made a mistake?
- Can you relate an experience when you have had to make up your own mind?
- In what situations do you experience group pressure?
- How do you deal with it?

The Enlightenment

TEACHER'S NOTES

Enlightenment is beyond words. Nevertheless, people do need to know something about it in order to move towards it! Traditionally, Enlightenment is described in four ways; negatively, positively, paradoxically and symbolically:

Negatively, as Cessation.

An Enlightened being is free of the unhealthy mental states of greed, hatred and ignorance.

These are sometimes known as the three poisons or the three fires. Nirvana is known as the extinguishing of these fires.
(Nirvana = blowing out)

Positively, in terms of the characteristics of an Enlightened being, which are:

- supreme bliss
- profound wisdom (seeing into the nature of reality)
- infinite compassion (springing from a love for all life)
- a radiant, unlimited consciousness
- boundless energy

Paradoxically

The Mahayana texts employ paradox to describe Enlightenment in order to emphasise that it is beyond words and concepts.
e.g. - a Buddha abides in a state of non-abiding.
- Nirvana is attained by means of non-attainment

Symbolically

Enlightenment is also represented through metaphor, poetic description, or symbol.
e.g. the Cool Cave, the Island in the Flood, the Further Shore, the Holy City
- elaborate Mahayana accounts of the happy land or the Pure Land.
- the stupa, and symbolic images of the Buddha and other Enlightened beings.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Impermanence

When the Buddha became Enlightened, he understood that all things are impermanent and fully realised the implication of this.

- What signs of impermanence and change can you see in your life, or in the world around you?
- Can you think of anything that is permanent, lasting and will not change?
- What effect does thinking about impermanence have on you?
- How might recognising impermanence affect the way you live your life?

Wisdom and kindness

- Do you know anyone that you consider to be wise?
- How can you tell that they are wise?
- What is it they know?
- How did they become wise?
- Is it possible to be wise but not kind, or kind but not wise?
- What might be the dangers of being kind without enough thought behind it?

Human potential

Buddhists believe that all human beings have the potential to grow and change and eventually become Enlightened.

- What things do you think can, and can't, be changed about yourself?
- Do you believe that everyone can change for the better? Can you give examples from your own experience?
- Are there some people who cannot change? Say why.
- What do you think causes people to change?
- Do you think there is an 'upper limit' to the positive changes a person can make in themselves? If so, can you say what that upper limit is? What prevents people going beyond it?

The Buddha Image

TEACHER'S NOTES

During the Buddha's lifetime, his followers would venerate him by making offerings and coming to sit silently in his presence. After his death, or Parinirvana, the Buddha's remains were divided and housed in funerary mounds called stupas. The early Buddhists would visit the stupas to worship. Making offerings, and chanting verses of praise, they would renew their undertaking to strive for Enlightenment. The holy sites connected with the Buddha's life were also places of worship.

It is not known when the first Buddha images were made. By about the first century of the Common Era, monasteries, or viharas, incorporated a shrine room housing a Buddha image.

The image, while being a reminder of the historical Gautama Buddha, was primarily a symbolic representation of Enlightenment. Early Buddhist artists will have drawn on the traditional iconographical style to show the 'marks of a superior being' - the long ear lobes and the ushnisha, or extra crown at the top of the head, for example. As time passed, other symbolic features developed, such as mudras, and the particular posture and colour, based on the visionary experience of Buddhist meditators.

Some images of Enlightenment, from the Mahayana and Vajrayana schools of Buddhism may bear little resemblance to the historical Buddha. They can be in male or female form, look peaceful or wrathful and wear the clothes and ornaments of royalty. But all convey particular qualities of the Enlightened mind and have symbolic and ritual significance to the devotees of that school of practice.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Reminders

The Buddha image reminds Buddhists of all that the Buddha represents for them. When we love and admire someone a great deal we sometimes keep pictures or mementos to remind us of them.

- Do you have any pictures, posters or reminders of people you like or admire?
- Who are they of?
- What are they?
- What do you like or admire about that person?
- How does the picture or memento help keep them in mind?

Body language

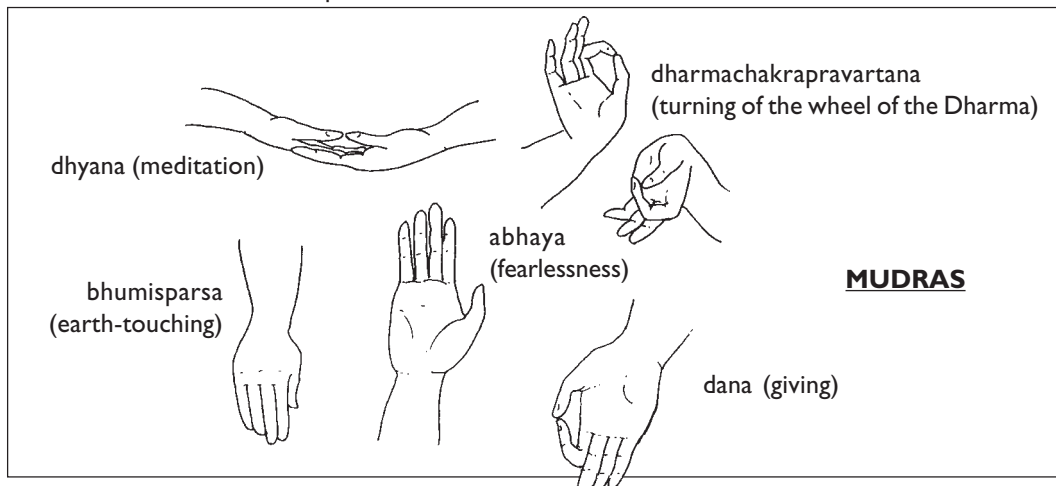
The Buddha image communicates particular qualities to Buddhists. We communicate ourselves to others through the way we dress, sit and move.

- In what ways do you dress in order to express your personality?
- How does what you wear affect how you feel?
- How does what you wear affect how other people respond to you?
- Can you tell what a person is like from looking at them?
- We communicate through 'body language' all the time. Does how we move and hold our body affect how we feel about ourselves? Does it affect how others respond to us?

Perfection

Buddhists believe that the Buddha perfected himself.

- Is Perfection possible?
- Who do you know who has qualities you admire?
- What personal qualities would you most like to develop?
- What qualities do you think a perfect person would have?
- Do you believe that it is possible to be perfect?
- If not, what stops us?
- If you think it is possible, say how you think it can be achieved.



The story of Prince Siddhartha

INFORMATION SHEET

Siddhartha Gautama was born into a royal family two and a half thousand years ago in Northern India (now Nepal).

Asita, a holy man, foretold that the baby would either be a great King or a great holy man. Siddhartha's father wanted his son to follow in his footsteps and become king. He took great care to shield his son from anything that might upset him. He wanted to prevent him from leaving home to live a religious life.

Siddhartha grew up in the palace surrounded by luxuries. When he was still a young man, he was married to the beautiful Princess Yashodara and they had a baby son.



One day, despite his father's orders, he decided to leave the palace grounds and go into the nearby city with Chanda, his chariot driver.

They hadn't gone far when they came across a frail old man. Siddhartha was so shocked at his first real experience of **old age** that he asked Chanda to take him back to the palace at once.

But the Prince returned to the city the

next day, where he saw someone lying in agony at the roadside. This second sight, too, disturbed the prince. He had never before seen **sickness**. He returned to the palace straight away.

On his next visit to the city, Siddhartha saw a dead man being carried through the streets in a funeral procession. This third sight struck him even more deeply; this was the first time that he had seen **death**. He returned to the palace stunned.

However, he still visited the city again the next day. This time the sight he saw was quite different. There, walking calmly through the crowd, was a man dressed in rags and carrying a begging bowl. The peaceful

expression of the wandering **holy man** impressed Siddhartha. He felt inspired to become a wandering truth-seeker, to find an answer to the problem of suffering in the world.

Finding an answer to this question became the most important thing in Siddhartha's life. He wanted to be able to give it all his attention. He knew that if he stayed in the palace he would easily be distracted. He decided to '**go forth**'.

That very night he got up as quietly as he could and kissed goodbye to his sleeping wife and baby son. He woke Chanda, his chariot driver, and together they crept past the sleeping guards. Silently they rode away from the palace. When they reached the river, which marked the border of the kingdom, the pair dismounted. Taking his sword Siddhartha cut off his hair, and swapped his rich clothes for the mud-stained rags of a wanderer. He gave his rings and ornaments to Chanda to take back to King Suddhodana.



Chanda watched sadly as Siddhartha crossed the river and disappeared into the darkness of the jungle.

For seven years Siddhartha lived the life of a wandering holy man. He spent time with different teachers learning all they had to

teach him. He was a good student and learned well, but in spite of this he realised that their teachings did not get to the root of the problem of suffering and sadness.

He tried living an ascetic life, subjecting his body to great hardship, hoping that this was the way to find out about the truth of things. He would sit out under the midday sun, surrounded by blazing fires. He reduced his food to one grain of rice a day, growing so thin that if he put his hand on his stomach he could feel his backbone! Even though he had become famous for these ascetic practices, and had five followers, he found that he was still no nearer to the truth. Not afraid to admit that he had made a mistake, he decided to start taking food again.

He now remembered how, as a young boy, whilst seated in the shade of a rose-apple tree, he had become absorbed in meditation. He resolved this time to pursue the truth by practising meditation. He chose a tree in a peaceful spot by a river at Bodhgaya, and sat down to meditate, vowing that he would not rise again until he had found the truth.

ACTIVITIES

- Make a list of the key events in the life of Siddhartha Gautama. Re-tell the story of his life in the form of a comic strip, with words and pictures. Make sure you include the key events.
- Siddhartha went out into the city and saw the Four Sights. Imagine yourself as Siddhartha. Describe the Four Sights as you might see them in a modern town or city. Say how you would feel as you saw each of the sights.
- Imagine you are a close friend of Siddhartha's. You see that he is sad because of the suffering he has seen and cannot enjoy his life of luxury. Write down what you would say to him and what you would advise him to do.

The Enlightenment

INFORMATION SHEET

After seeing the Four Sights, Prince Siddhartha left his comfortable palace life to become a wandering holy man. He wanted to find an answer to why there was suffering in the world. For seven years he wandered in the jungle. He studied with various religious teachers, and tried living an ascetic life, but eventually realised that he had not found the answer. He was no nearer the truth.

He remembered an incident from his childhood when his mind had become very calm and clear. He chose a tree, sat down under it to meditate and resolved to achieve his quest.

It is not known how long Siddhartha sat there in deeper and deeper meditation. One morning, just as the sun rose, a great change came over him and he knew that he had achieved his goal.

Through his own efforts he had seen into the truth of How Things Really Are. He was now no longer an ordinary human being. He felt totally free, peaceful, happy and kind. He had become Enlightened; he had become a Buddha.

The word 'Buddha' means 'One who is awake (to the truth)'.

The words **Nirvana**, Nibbana, or Buddhahood all mean the same as Enlightenment. It is very difficult to understand what Enlightenment or Buddhahood really is. It is only by becoming Enlightened that anyone can really know.

To give a clue, poetic images have often been used to describe the Enlightenment experience: for example the Cool Cave, the Island in the Flood, the Further Shore, or the Holy City.



Another way in which we can gain some idea about Enlightenment is to look at the qualities of an Enlightened person. In his **wisdom** the Buddha understood that everything constantly changes, nothing stays the same or lasts for ever. Just as a plant needs the soil, air, water and sunshine to exist, he saw that all things are interdependent. Everything depends on something else for its existence and changes when those conditions change or are no longer there. The Buddha said that this was true of people and of the world. It is even true of the stars. Nothing in the Universe is unchanging or lasts forever. The Buddha also understood that people don't want things to be like this. They want things to be permanent and it is this craving for permanence that is the cause of unhappiness and suffering.

Out of **compassion** he wanted to help others to understand this. He wanted them to be able to free themselves from suffering, just as he had. But was it possible; could others understand?



As he sat under the Bodhi tree, he looked out over the world. In his mind's eye he could see a pool; it was full of lotuses. Some of the lotuses were still stuck in the mud at

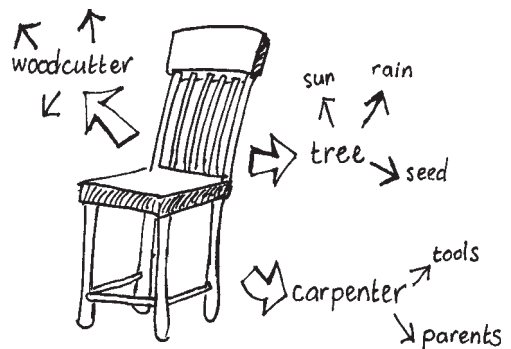
the bottom of the pool; others had buds and were beginning to grow upwards through the water. A few stood clear of the water, opening in the sunlight. 'People in the world are like lotuses in different stages of development', thought the Buddha. 'Everyone has the potential to achieve Enlightenment, and those people who are like the lotuses ready to open in the sunlight will be able to hear my teaching'. So the Buddha decided to set out and teach the world about the truth he had discovered.

ACTIVITIES

- Imagine you are Chanda, the chariot driver. You have returned to the palace with Siddhartha's jewels and ornaments as instructed. Write the story of Siddhartha's leaving home as you would tell it to the King the next morning. Explain what Siddhartha has done and why.
- The Buddha understood that all things are dependent on something else for their existence, and that all things are interconnected.

(a) Look at this interdependence web. How far can you extend it?

Plot an interdependence web for the following: a woollen jumper, a plate of chips, a car, yourself.



(b) Choose one of your interdependence webs. Will all the links always stay the same? Say what might happen if one of the links changed.

- Individually, or working with a partner, brainstorm as many things as you can that change. Can you think of anything that is permanent? Write a Haiku, or short poem, to express the truth that all things change and how you feel about it.

The Buddha Image

INFORMATION SHEET

The Buddha image is a symbol, not an actual likeness of a person. No one now really knows what the Buddha looked like.

The first images were probably made a few hundred years after the life of the Buddha. As Buddhism spread out of India into South-East Asia, China, Japan and Tibet, artists in each of these countries began to make Buddha images. These images can look very different but they are all trying to show an Enlightened being. Most Buddha images have certain features in common.

Size, as well as style, varies. There are giant sized images such as the one at Bodhgaya, and small images for use on personal shrines at home. Each Buddhist vihara or temple will have a Buddha image as the central feature of its shrine room.

When Buddhists look at an image, they remember the Buddha, who lived 2,500 years ago in India. They are also reminded of the qualities that they too are seeking to develop in their own quest for Enlightenment.

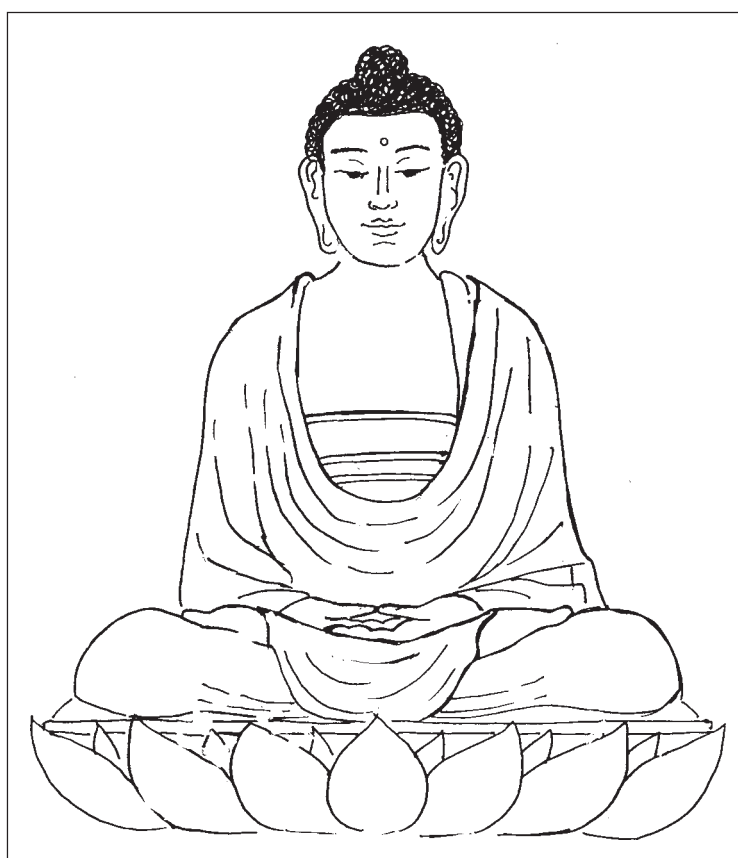
POSTURE

The meditation posture is the most common. The figure is seated in the full lotus position, legs crossed with the feet resting on the opposite thigh.

Other positions include standing and lying on one side.

HANDS

The symbolic hand movements are called mudras. Each mudra communicates a meaning. The hands resting together in the lap symbolise meditation. The hands held as if turning a wheel symbolise the Buddha as teacher. The right hand held in front of the chest is a symbol of fearlessness.



FACE

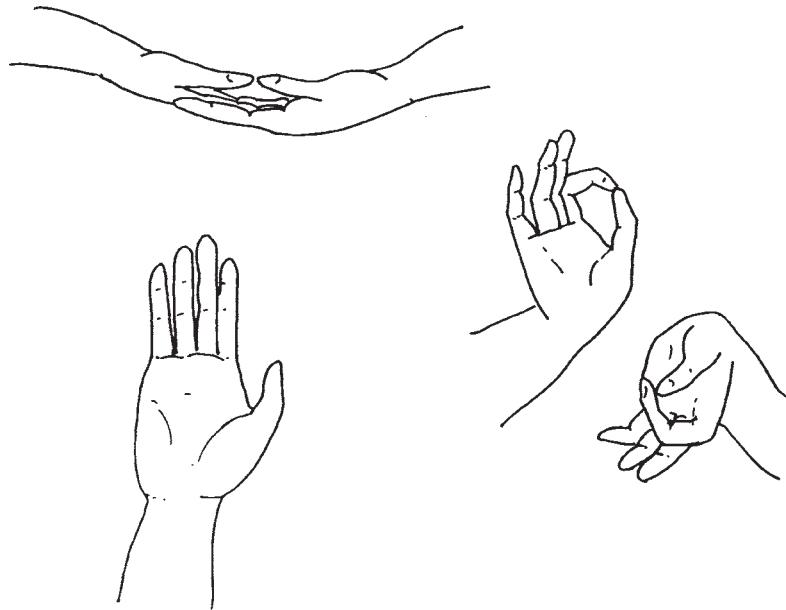
Closed, or half-closed, eyes symbolise stillness and concentration. A gentle smile shows friendliness. Sometimes a 'third eye' can be seen on the forehead. This shows that the Buddha 'sees' with his mind; he understands everything.

BODY

Buddha images are often gold-leafed. The Buddha is precious to Buddhists. Shining gold reminds them of the Buddha's beauty and radiance. The outer beauty symbolises the inner beauty of an Enlightened Being.

ACTIVITIES

- Look at a Buddha image and draw it from observation.
- Draw and label the mudras.



- We often use our hands to express ourselves. Draw some symbolic hand movements that you, or other people use. Write next to them what each means.
- Invent mudras for the following words: peacefulness, strength, caring, determination, sympathy, friendliness. Make up some more of your own.
- Think of someone you admire and aspire to be like. Draw a picture of them. Make up symbols to show their special qualities. Say what the symbols are, why you have chosen them, and what they mean.