**The Story of the Buddha: Siddhartha Gautama**

The Buddha was born as Prince Siddhartha Gautama around 566 BC to the King and Queen of Kapilavastu. Soon after his birth an astrologer predicted that Prince Siddhartha was destined to be a great religious leader or a great king. His parents wanted him to be a great king so they prevented him from being exposed to the outside world, so he would only know a life a royalty.

A young Siddhartha never left the palace and saw nothing more than the luxuries of it. His parents hoped that he would get used to the luxurious lifestyle and never give it up.

At the age of 16, his parents got him married to Yashodhara who was a beautiful daughter of a nobleman, The King had hoped that this would be another reason for Siddhartha to not leave the palace. However, as Siddhartha grew older he became more and more curious. On one particular day, he asked his servant to take him on a tour of the city. The first person they came across was an old man, weak and frail by the side of the road. Siddhartha was curious about old age and death.

The next person he came across was a sick man in great pain. Siddhartha was told that the man was not immune of diseases. He then saw the body of a dead person being carried to the cremation ground. The young Prince was told that everybody would die one day and leave the world. At the end of his city tour, Siddhartha came across a religious man who was calm and serene.

Siddhartha was upset by his first experience of the outside world. Several questions crossed his mind about life and death. He then decided that to get answers to his questions, he would have to leave the palace and give up on his luxurious life. At the age of 29, Siddhartha left the palace at night while his wife and son were asleep. He wandered far and wide and talked to many wise people to figure out the meaning of life. Then finally he reached the city of Bodhgaya and started meditating (deep thought free of worry) under a large fig tree.

After 49 days of meditation, at the age of 35, Siddhartha attained enlightenment and understood the meaning of life. From that day on he was known as Buddha or the ‘Awakened One.’ He was named after the Bodhi tree under which he meditated.

The Buddha shared his knowledge with five disciples (followers) who meditated with him. Together, they traveled across the country teaching key principles of Buddhism.

These principles were called the Noble Truths, which were: The world is full of suffering. Suffering is caused by wanting what we cannot have or being scared of losing what we do have. Suffering can be defeated by not desiring anything. Desire can be overcome by following the Eight Fold Path.

The Eight Fold Path included: Right Views, Right Thoughts, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Efforts, Right Mindfulness and Right Meditation.

Buddha preached non-violence, peace and harmony. He strongly felt that people should treat one another with compassion, forgiveness and tolerance. He encouraged his followers to follow a balanced life that was not too strict or too pleasurable.