

Life of Gautama Buddha

Gautama Buddha, also known as Siddhartha Gautama and Lord Buddha, is regarded as the founder of Buddhism; his followers are referred to as Buddhists. Gautama Buddha is also commonly referred to as Buddha, which means an enlightened one who has attained freedom from the state of suffering and ignorance, having attained the state of nirvana.

Gautama Buddha was born in a kingdom just below the foothills of the Himalayas on the edge of the eastern Indian subcontinent. Lord Buddha was born into the prestigious family of the Shakya Clan. His father was the head of the Shakya clan, and his mother was a Koliyan Princess.

Early life of Gautama Buddha

Gautama Buddha was born in the province of Lumbini, located in Southern Nepal, in 623 BC. He was born into a noble family of the Shakya Clan residing in the Himalayan foothills. The head of the Shakya clan, Suddhodana, was his father, while his mother Maya was a Koliyan princess. It is said that the court astrologers predicted that he would become a great sage or a Buddha. Buddha's father shielded him from the outside world and human suffering, and Buddha grew up with every luxury he could desire. It was after 29 years of living a sheltered and luxurious life that Buddha got a glimpse of the real world. In the streets of Kapilavastu, Buddha came across an old man, a sick man and a corpse. His charioteer explained to him that all beings are subjected to old age, sickness, and death. After hearing this, Buddha could not rest. While returning, he saw a wandering ascetic walking along the road. He comprehended that he could overcome all this suffering by becoming an ascetic and then decided to leave his kingdom in search of answers to the problems of suffering.

Buddha's path to enlightenment

In search of answers to the problems of suffering, Buddha bid a silent farewell to his wife without waking her, and left for the forest wearing a simple robe of an ascetic. He worked with two teachers: Alara Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra. From Alara Kalama, he learned how to train his mind to enter the sphere of nothingness. Udraka Ramaputra taught him how to enter the mind's concentration zone, which is neither consciousness nor unconsciousness. Eventually, Buddha left both his teachers in search of liberation.

For six years, Buddha, along with five other companions, practised asceticism by eating single grains of rice and conflicting mind against body. His five companions left him after Buddha decided to abandon asceticism.

In a village, Buddha was offered a disk of milk and several vessels of honey by a woman named Sujata. After this, he went to bathe himself in the Nairanjana river, and then sat underneath the bodhi tree, where he meditated. After seven days, he was liberated from the chains of human suffering and became "Buddha", the enlightened one.

Formation of the Sangha

After enlightenment, Buddha hesitated to speak to people about his realisation. He believed it would be too difficult for most people to understand. But it is said that God Brahma made him change his decision. Buddha went back to find his teachers Alara Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra, but they had died. Then, he went to find his five companions that left him. Buddha met his five companions in Deer Park(Sarnath), located near Varanasi, and convinced them about his awakening. This was the

first time Buddha turned the wheel of dharma. The five companions became the First Sangha, a community of men (and later, women too) who followed the teachings of Buddha. They journeyed in small groups around northeastern India, explaining dharma and practising meditation while begging for their meals.

Growth of the Sangha

Buddha walked through villages and towns of India for 49 years, preaching dharma. Many kings knew him, and they donated gardens and parks for retreats of the sangha, where people would come to them. Buddha developed a set of decrees for the sangha, preserved in various texts called Pratimoksha. These texts were recited by the Sangha every two weeks.

Last days of Gautama Buddha

Buddha died at the age of 80 after eating a meal of pork or mushrooms. On his deathbed, the monks gathered made him realise that everything is transient. He asked them to take refuge in themselves and the dharma. After some centuries of his death, Buddha was given the title of “Lord Buddha”.

Conclusion

Buddha, born in an aristocratic family with all the luxuries, decided to leave everything he possessed to find answers to the problem of human suffering. He attained enlightenment after meditating under the Bodhi tree, and eventually spread his teachings with the help of his sangha. He became the founder of Buddhism. The year of Buddha’s death is still uncertain, but the life and teachings of Buddha are still relevant after centuries of his death.