

UNIT 137 – UPSC -Indian History - Gautama Buddha

India History - Gautama Buddha

[563-483 BC]

Gautama Buddha

Sidhartha was born (c. 563 BC; Kapilavastu, Nepal) into the Gautama family of the Shakaya clan. The Shakayas were members of the priestly-warrior caste. In fact, Sidhartha's father was the head of the tribe so Sidhartha was a prince and seemed destined to rule. He lived a luxurious life and received the best education his father's wealth could provide, but his father also sheltered him from life's hardships.

He married a woman named Yashodhara and they lived in his father's house. Sidhartha was still protected from the trials of life. Yashodhara bore a son, and Sidhartha believed that he was happy.

Then, during one of his few excursions from the protection of his father's palace, Sidhartha saw three things which opened the harsh realities of life to him. He saw an old man, suffering from the frailties of age. He saw a sick man, suffering from disease. He also saw a dead man, which shocked him greatly. He finally realized that the infirmities of old age, and the pain of sickness and death caused suffering that he had never experienced. This revelation caused him to begin a search for truth that drastically changed his life, and, eventually, the lives of millions.

At the age of twenty-nine he left his home, his wife, his son, and his father. He gave up his claim to the succession of his father's throne and left the palace. He studied Yogic meditation with two Brahman hermits and achieved high cognitive states in both trance and meditation, but his desire for absolute truth was not satisfied.

For the next six years, Sidhartha placed his body under severe asceticism, which included extreme fasting and suspension of breathing. These practices almost killed him, but they did not satisfy his search for truth.

He finally ended his acetic lifestyle and began to eat. Sidhartha decided to meditate until the absolute truth would lie clearly in front of him. He meditated under a Bodhi tree where he sat facing east.

At the age of thirty-five, on the night of the full moon, Sidhartha reached enlightenment and became an "enlightened one"--a Buddha (c. 528 BC) He had at last discovered the truth he had sought, and he immediately shared it with five ascetics who had practiced near him.

After a few weeks of rest, he decided to teach the way to enlightenment to others and went to Deer Garden where he held his first sermon, "The turning wheel of Dharma." Sidhartha felt a strong call to teach others even though he could never teach the content of enlightenment, only the way of enlightenment. Buddha called his teachings "the middle way", because it was in the middle between asceticism and indulgence.

For the next forty-five years he taught as the Buddha or "*Shakyamuni*" (sage of the shakaya"). He also established a community of monks called *sanga*.

The Buddha died after forty-five years of teaching at the age of eighty.

