

Name: Date:

Class: ECS

**Buddhism, From One World, Many Religions**

***By Mary Pope Osborne***

*This story of one of the world’s major religions begins with a young prince called Siddhartha.*

“Be Ye Lamps Unto Yourselves.”

--Buddha’s Farewell Address, from the Mahaparinibbana Suttana

Five hundred years before Jesus was born, a young prince named Siddhartha Gautama was born in the country we now call Nepal. Siddhartha was raised as a Hindu. He read the great writings of Hinduism and practiced Hindu rituals.

Siddhartha had little knowledge of the world outside his luxurious palace. One day when he went out among his people, he was greatly disturbed by four sights: a very old man, a very sick man, a man who had just died, and a wandering monk, or holy man.

The first three sights sorrowed the young prince. He wondered, why do people grow old? Why do they get sick? Why do they suffer and die? Siddhartha decided that he should become a monk himself, so that he could go into the world and search for answers to his questions.

Siddhartha took off his royal garments and put on a faded orange robe. He shaved his hair and his beard. Then he left his palace forever and set out in search of wisdom.

Siddhartha wandered for six years. They one night when the moon was full, he stopped to rest under a fig tree. He vowed not to move until he had found answers to his questions.

Siddhartha sat in a cross-legged position. He closed his eyes and began practicing a form of yoga meditation. He concentrated on the great Hindu teachings. He thought about the endless cycle of death and rebirth. He thought about human pain and suffering.

During his meditation, Siddhartha had a revelation -- to him. He understood that people could find an end to suffering. To followers of Buddhism, this new and powerful insight is known as the Enlightenment. When it happened to Siddhartha, he became known as the Buddha.

The Buddha believed that other people could achieve enlightenment as well--but before they did, they had to free themselves from all their worldly desires, such as the desire for riches, for a good job, for a wife or a husband, dha’s understanding of suffering and detachment is called dharma. The dharma represents all the teachings of Buddhism.

The basic message of the Buddha’s teaching is summed up in the Four Noble Truths. They are clear and simple: All lives are filled with suffering. Suffering comes from a desire for worldly things. Suffering ends when desire ends. People can learn to end desire by following eight rules.

The eight rules, known as the Noble Eightfold Path, are:

1. *Right understanding*: Be aware of the Buddha’s teachings.
2. *Right intentions:* Try to follow these teachings whole-heartedly.
3. *Right speech:* Say nothing to harm others.
4. *Right action:* Do nothing to harm any living creature.
5. *Right livelihood:* Choose a job that hurts no living thing.
6. *Right effort:* Strive to become a good person.
7. *Right mindfulness:* Learn to control all your thoughts and emotions in order to quiet your mind.
8. *Right concentration:* Practice the deepest meditation, which leads to the highest state of enlightenment, known as Nirvana.

Nirvana is something that happens when one is completely released from suffering. It is so different from everyday life that Buddhists believe it cannot be described.

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For Forty-Five years, the Buddha walked all over the land, teaching people how to find enlightenment. As he taught, a new religion grew around him. This religion was different from Hinduism in several ways. The Buddha taught that following the Noble Eightfold Path could be done without the long fasts and difficult yoga practices of Hindu holy men and women. This less difficult path became known as the Middle Way. Another difference was that the Buddha did not believe in the Hindu caste system. And he did not believe in worshiping the many Hindu gods and goddesses. According to one legend, someone once asked him if he were God.

“No.” he said.

“Are you a saint?”

“No.”

“What are you then?”

“I am awake,” he said.

This is one meaning of the name Buddha: the Awakened One, one who has finally woken up to the truth.

At the age of eighty, the Buddha died from food poisoning. After his death, his followers saved some of his bones and teeth as relics-- sacred religious objects -- believing that his power still resided in them.

Special structures called stupas were built to house the relics. Today, there are thousands of stupas throughout Asia. Because there are a limited number of relics, most stupas house sacred writings and images instead.

Since the Buddha’s death, countless images of him have been erected inside temples and at outdoor shrines. These statues and images give worshipers a sense of the Buddha’s loving presence.

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The Buddha organized his followers into a holy community of monks and nuns-men and women who devoted their entire lives to their religion. For centuries after his death, monks and nuns kept Buddhism alive. They inscribed the Buddha’s wisdom on palm leaves and stored the leaves in baskets. Eventually, these writings became part of a huge collection of Buddhist scriptures. Buddhist monks and nuns spread the word about the Buddha’s teachings, and today there are more than 300 million Buddhists in the world, making Buddhism the world’s fourth largest religion.

**What is the Theme/Lesson of this fable?**

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