Thursday Dharma Classes – Spring 2019
***The Life and Teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha As They Relate To Us In 2019***

**Class 1
Siddhartha Gautama:** his birth, early life, up to his renunciation **Scripture:** *The Dhammapada*
The Buddha was born as Siddharta Gautama into the royal Shakya clan in Lumbini in what is now Nepal. He lived for 80 years from approximately c. 563/480 – c. 483/400 BCE and was a member of the Kshatriya Class *Kshatriya* comes from the Sanskrit *ksatra*  "rule, authority". It is one of the four social orders of society at the time: Kshatriya, Brahmin, Vaishya and shudra. Traditionally, the kshatriya constituted the ruling and military class. Their role was to protect their interests by fighting in wartime and governing in peacetime.

There are numerous legends associated with his birth from *The Light of Asia* – *The Litany of the Birth of the Buddha.*

and it is interesting to compare his life with other religious leaders including Jesus as Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh did in *Living Buddha, Living Christ*.

But there are some matters of fact.

The Buddhist tradition regards Lumbini in present-day Nepal to be the birthplace of the Buddha. He grew up in Kapilavastu. The exact site of ancient Kapilavastu is unknown. It may have been in either present-day northern India, or  in present-day Nepal.

Gautama was his family name. Siddharthawas his given name, meaning "he who achieves his aim". His father was Suddhodana. His mother was Maya, a Koliyan princess.

Legend has it that, on the night Siddhartha was conceived, Queen Maya dreamt that a white elephant with six white tusks entered her right side,and ten months laterSiddhartha was born. As was the Shakya tradition, when his mother became pregnant, she left Kapilavastu for her father's kingdom to give birth. However, her son is said to have been born on the way, at Lumbini, in a garden beneath a sala tree.

Today, the day of the Buddha's birth is widely celebrated in the Buddhist world as Wesak. In the West is generally celebrated on April 8 or in May.

Tradition holds that the Buddha's mother died at his birth, a few days or seven days later. During the birth celebrations, the hermit seer, Asita,  journeyed from his mountain abode and announced that the child would either become a great king or a great religious leader.  By traditional account, this occurred after Siddhartha placed his feet in Asita's hair and Asita examined the birthmarks.

Sudhodona held a naming ceremony on the fifth day, and invited eight Brahmin wise men to read the future. All gave a dual prediction that the baby would either become a great king or a great holy man. Kondana, the youngest, and later to be the first arahant other than the Buddha, was reputed to be the only one who unequivocally predicted that Siddhartha would become a Buddha.

Siddhartha was brought up by his mother's younger sister, Mahapajapati.  By tradition, he is said to have been destined by birth to the life of a prince and had three palaces (for seasonal occupation) built for him. His father, wishing for his son to be a great king, is said to have shielded him from religious teachings. Early texts suggest that Gautama was not familiar with the dominant religious teachings of his time until he left on his religious quest, to explore suffering and suffering’s cause. Vedic Brahminism was the predominant religion of the monarchies and those in authority; the Jain religion was a significant order of monastics. There were numerous other individual teachers and ascetic practices. Gautama grew up in princely luxury, shielded from the outside world, entertained by dancing girls and trained in archery, swordsmanship, wrestling, swimming, and running. He had, as we might say today, everything

His father arranged his marriage to a cousin of the same age named Yashodara, said to be extraordinarily beautiful, graceful, and wise. She gave birth to a son, named Rahula - his name means “fetter”.

Siddhartha is said to have spent 29 years as a prince. Although his father ensured that Siddhartha was provided with everything he could want or need, Buddhist scriptures say that the future Buddha felt that material wealth was not life's ultimate goal. Despite his father's efforts to hide from him the sick, aged and suffering, Siddhartha was said to have “escaped” the palace to enter the marketplace to see ***The Four Sights*** - an old man, a sick man, a dead man and an ascetic monk. When Channa, his charioteer, told him that all beings are subject to sickness, old age, and death, he could not rest. This insight prompted him to seek an explanation to suffering and suffering’s cause.

Having performed his filial duty, at age 29, he renounced his privileged life and family. After bidding his wife and child a silent farewell without waking them, he rode to the edge of the forest. There, he cut his long hair with his sword and exchanged his fine clothes for the simple robes of an ascetic, gave up his horse and Channa, and became a wandering seeker.

So. Where is the relevance of this life lived more than 2,500 years ago for us today in 2019? Let me suggest several ways.

He grew up with expectations. How many of us are “victims of expectations” – either our parents or family, our culture, or “the voices” that we’ve pick up along the way?

The prophecy of the wise men set the tone of his upbringing. His parents raised him, insisting that he fill their expectations – the cultural ones that went with his class (to rule) and the familial ones that went with his family (to produce a son and heir).

But he was able to pay attention to his inner voice through this all. One example is *The Ploughing Festival***:** A very remarkable incident took place in his childhood. It was an unprecedented mental experience which, in later life, during his search after Truth, served as a key to his Enlightenment.

As an encouragement to agriculture the King arranged for a Ploughing Festival. It was indeed a festive occasion for all, as both nobles and commoners decked in gala dress participated in the ceremony. On the appointed day the King, accompanied by his courtiers, went to the field taking with him, the young Prince together with the nurses. Placing the child on a screened and canopied couch under the cool shade of a rose-apple tree to be watched by the nurses, the King took an active part in the Ploughing Festival. When the festival was at its climax, the nurses stole away from the Prince's presence to catch a glimpse of the wonderful spectacle. The thoughtful child, mature in intellect though young in age, seeing none by him, sat cross-legged, and intently concentrating on inhalation and exhalation, gained one-pointedness of the mind and developed the First Ecstasy - *jhaana.*[8]

In the midst of their enjoyment the neglectful nurses suddenly remembered their duty, and when they saw the Prince absorbed in meditation, were struck with awe and immediately reported the matter to the King. He hastened to the scene and beholding the Prince in meditative posture, saluted him saying: "This, dear child is my second salutation."

Gautama was raised to be a skilled warrior and a man of power. He grew up as a warrior and learned the lessons of war. And he was able to put it to good use – he could lead monks, he could talk to General Simha and men of power in their own terms, and he could be at ease in the company of the powerful. How have we used all in our life that has brought us to this point?

As a royal child Prince Siddhattha received a good education. Being a scion of the warrior race, he was specially trained in the art of warfare, everything from use of weapons, charioteering, and battlefield strategy. He was taught organizational and leadership skills.

The expectation was that he would succeed his father, so he was taught the arts of governance.

He was at ease with people of power. In fact he really had little connection with pain and poverty.

His mother died and he was raised by his aunt Mahaprajapati. He grew up in an extended – and somewhat dysfunctional – family. How many of us can relate to difficult family backgrounds?

Devadatta was Gautama’s cousin and was raised with him.

The story of the wild bird.
The stories of violence and attempted murder.
And the Buddha’s response to the violence and attempted murder – even Devadatta becomes enlightened.

He grew up without familiarity with the dominant religious teachings of his time until he left on his religious quest: the Four Sights came as news to him. And it was these Four Sights that prompted his search for suffering’s cause that resulted in his enlightenment. What has prompted YOUR search for the cause of suffering in your life.

As I close the early part of the Buddha’s life, may I just raise a question that is often asked: Is there more than one Buddha?.

In Theravada Buddhism it is thought there is only one buddha per age of humankind; each age is an unimaginably long time. The buddha of the current age is our historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama. Another person who realizes enlightenment within this age is not called buddha. Instead, he or she is an arhat (Sanskrit) or arahant (Pali) — “worthy one” or “perfected one.” The principal difference between an arhat and a buddha is that only a buddha is a world teacher, the one who opens the door for all others.

Early scriptures name other buddhas who lived in the unimaginably long-ago earlier ages. There is also Maitreya, the future Buddha who will appear when all memory of our Buddha’s teachings has been lost.

Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions put no limits on the number of buddhas there can be. However, for practitioners of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism the ideal is to be a bodhisattva, one who vows to remain in the world until all beings are enlightened.

Jataka Tales are a wonderful source of stories about the Buddha in previous lives

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As we start our study of the Buddha’s life, I would like to bring our attention to ***The Dhammapada*.** ***The Dhammapada*** is a collection of sayings of [the Buddha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gautama_Buddha)
in verse form and one of the most widely read and best known [Buddhist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism) [scriptures](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist_texts).

Each saying recorded in the collection was made on a different occasion in response to a unique situation that had arisen in the life of the Buddha and [his monastic community](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sangha_%28Buddhism%29).

The title, "*Dhammapada*," is a compound term composed of [*dhamma*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhamma) and *pada*, each word having a number of denotations and connotations. Generally, *dhamma* can refer to the "doctrine" or "eternal truth" or "righteousness" or all "phenomena"; and, at its root, *pada* means "foot" and thus by extension, especially in this context, means either "path" or "verse". In Malayalam language 'Pada' means 'way'.

According to tradition, ***The Dhammapada***'s verses were spoken by [the Buddha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gautama_Buddha) on various occasions. By distilling the sutras, theories, rhetorical style and sheer volume of the Buddha's teachings into concise, clear verses, ***The Dhammapada*** makes the Buddhist way of life available to anyone. In fact, it is possible that the very source of ***The Dhammapada*** in the third century B.C.E. is traceable to the need of the early Buddhist communities in India to laicize the ascetic impetus of the Buddha's original words." The text is part of the [Khuddaka Nikaya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khuddaka_Nikaya) of the [Sutta Pitaka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sutta_Pitaka), although over half of the verses exist in other parts of the Pali Canon. Although the Pāli edition is the best-known, a number of other versions are known