WHO IS BUDDHA?

The word Buddha is a title that means “one who is awake” or “the enlightened one.”

There are many Buddhas, but the Buddha most people are familiar with is Siddhartha Gautama.

Siddhartha was born in the 6th century BCE, a prince in the Shakya Kingdom in what is present-day Nepal.

This is the story of his life.
LIKE MANY GREAT PEOPLE, THEIR STORY BEGINS WITH THEIR MOTHER. ONE NIGHT QUEEN MAYA OF THE SHAKYA KINGDOM WAS ASLEEP IN HER PALACE AND DREAMED A WHITE ELEPHANT OFFERED HER A LOTUS FLOWER AND ENTERED HER SIDE. WISE MEN INTERPRETED THE DREAM AND PREDICTED SHE WOULD GIVE BIRTH TO A SON DESTINED TO BECOME EITHER A GREAT RULER OR A HOLY MAN.
THE BIRTH OF THE BUDDHA AND PRINCELY LIFE

While traveling, Queen Maya grasped a Sala tree and gave birth in a garden in Lumbini, Nepal. The child emerged from her right side and took seven steps. This child is Siddhartha, the person we refer to as the Buddha. The queen died a few days after giving birth.

Being a prince, Siddhartha’s father, King Suddhodhana, had him trained in warfare, like archery. He was also educated in the arts, sciences and government.

But due to the prophecy given by the wise men saying that Queen Maya’s son would either be a great ruler or a holy man, King Suddhodhana kept Siddhartha within the city walls, to ensure he would only know of courtly life and grow up to be a king.
MARRIAGE AND LIFE IN THE PALACE

SIDDHARTHA DID WHAT WAS EXPECTED OF HIM AS A PRINCE. WHEN HE WAS STILL A TEENAGER HE GOT MARRIED TO A BEAUTIFUL PRINCESS NAMED YASHODARA. THEY WERE QUITE HAPPY AND HAD A SON NAMED RAHULA.

ALTHOUGH THE PRINCE HAD EVERYTHING HE COULD WANT IN THE PALACE, AT THE AGE OF 29, HE GREW RESTLESS WITH THE CONFINEMENT OF COURTLY LIFE AND WANTED TO SEE THE WORLD OUTSIDE OF THE PALACE.

DISOBEYING HIS FATHER, SIDDHARTHA ASKED CHANNA, HIS LOYAL CHARIOTEER, TO TAKE HIM ON A RIDE OUT OF THE PALACE AND CITY. SIDDHARTHA WENT ON FOUR TRIPS OUT OF THE PALACE AND SAW FOUR THINGS HE HAD NEVER SEEN BEFORE.
THE FOUR SIGHTS

ON THE FIRST TRIP, SIDDHARTHA SAW AN OLD MAN. THIS IS WHEN HE REALIZES YOUTH AND STRENGTH DO NOT LAST FOREVER.

ON THE SECOND TRIP HE SAW SOMEONE WHO WAS SICK. THIS IS WHEN HE REALIZES THAT THE BODY CAN EXPERIENCE DISEASE AND PAIN.

ON THE THIRD TRIP HE SAW A CORPSE. THIS IS WHEN HE REALIZES THAT LIFE IS SHORT. ALL THREE OF THESE SIGHTS ALERTED SIDDHARTHA THAT THERE IS GREAT SUFFERING IN LIFE.

AND ON THE FOURTH TRIP HE SAW A WANDERING HOLY MAN. SEEING THIS HOLY MAN SIDDHARTHA REALIZES THERE ARE OTHER PATHS IN LIFE TO TAKE, AND THAT HE DOES NOT HAVE TO LIVE THE LIFE HIS FATHER WANTS HIM TO LIVE.
Siddhartha decided to give up all the comforts and riches of his princely life. He wanted to search for answers to the problems he witnessed all around him. He knew his father and wife would try to stop him, so while his family was sleeping he took one last look and secretly left the palace in the middle of the night to live as a Holy Man searching for truth.

When he was well outside the city walls and at the edge of the forest, he stopped and got off his horse. Using his sword, he cut off his long hair.

Then he took off his heavy jewels and princely clothes and gave them to Channa to take back to his family.
Siddhartha travelled and studied under many great masters but found he was no closer to any new realization about existence. He spent six years as a wandering holy man, depriving himself of food till he was close to starvation. Finally he accepted a bowl of rice from a young girl named Sujata. Once he had eaten, he realized that denying the body of nourishment was no way to understand the cause of worldly misery.

So Siddhartha decided to reject the path of complete self-denial the same way he rejected the comforts and indulgences of his former life as a prince. He then decided he would sit under a pipal tree (also referred to as the bodhi tree) and meditate on these issues until the answer to these problems became clear.
During his long meditations, Siddhartha was tempted by the demon Mara, who wanted to prevent Siddhartha from reaching enlightenment (awakening, wisdom, or insight).

Mara sent his armies, various temptations, and even bad weather to distract Siddhartha. When those tactics did not work, he challenged Siddhartha to defend his claim of enlightenment. Siddhartha touched the earth and called the earth to witness his achievement.
The Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma

After his enlightenment he began to teach others what he had learned. He described "the middle way," which is a way of life promoting balance instead of extremism. He gave his first teaching in a deer park in Sarnath, on the outskirts of the city of Benares (also known as Varanasi, Kashi, the City of Light).

Siddhartha was given the name Shakyamuni. "Shakya" after Siddhartha's clan from Nepal and "muni" means sage. This is why we call Siddhartha "Shakyamuni Buddha." He soon had many disciples and spent the next forty-five years walking around India spreading his teachings.
At the age of 80, Shakyamuni Buddha died in Kushinagara after eating some spoiled food. He never thought of himself as a leader of a new way of life, but instead as a wise and kind friend to all. On his deathbed he told his followers not to follow another leader, but to take the dharma (the teachings of the Buddha) as their guide. When the Buddha died, he passed into the final state of nirvana, ending his endless cycle of rebirth. His body was cremated and the remains distributed among groups of his followers.
AFTER THE DEATH OF THE BUDDHA, HIS FOLLOWERS CONTINUED TO SPREAD HIS TEACHINGS AND MORE AND MORE PEOPLE BEGAN TO LEAD THEIR LIVES IN ACCORDANCE TO THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA. THOSE WHO FOLLOW THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS ARE CALLED BUDDHISTS. THESE TEACHINGS SHOW US HOW TO BE MORE UNDERSTANDING, COMPASSIONATE AND ACCEPTING.

TODAY, OVER 500 MILLION PEOPLE PRACTICE BUDDHISM, AND IT IS THE 4TH LARGEST RELIGION IN THE WORLD. THE LARGEST NUMBER OF BUDDHISTS LIVE IN ASIA, BUT PEOPLE ACROSS THE WORLD PRACTICE BUDDHISM.