

Emulating Prince Siddhartha

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The reason that we can learn the Buddhist teachings today is because over 2,000 years ago, a young prince named Prince Siddhartha decided to give up his royal life and embark on the spiritual path in search of the Truth.

What motivated him to do this was a deep sense of compassion for living beings' suffering. As a prince, he witnessed the suffering in life, and he wanted to find the Truth that could free everyone from suffering. He witnessed that life's suffering included both psychological suffering, and physical suffering such as poverty and material hardship. He also saw the suffering created by inequality in society. Back in the Buddha's time, there was a caste system in India, dividing people into different castes, within which people were treated differently. He also witnessed the suffering that everyone, rich and poor alike, had to go through—the suffering from life's natural processes of birth, aging, illness, and death. He personally witnessed how his father, despite being the king, grew old. He was the king, but like all people, he had to go through the suffering of aging.

Since all people had to go through the same life process and suffering, why was there inequality? Why were people divided into castes? He pondered this and came to the conclusion that it was because of the impurities in people's hearts, because people's hearts were filled with afflictions.

Therefore, he wanted to understand the nature of afflictions so that people could overcome them. That is why he gave up his life as a prince and took up the life of a monk. He wanted to search for a spiritual teaching that could show him the Truth—the Truth that could answer life's mysteries and solve life's problems. He sought the Truth that could liberate people from the suffering and inequality of life.

That is why Prince Siddhartha left his royal palace. He never returned to his life as a prince. That was how strong his convictions were. How grateful we are, for had he not persevered until he attained enlightenment, becoming a Buddha named Shakyamuni, we would not be able to learn from his wisdom and enlightened understanding. As we practice the teachings he gave, his personal example can also be our inspiration. Emulating his spirit, let us embrace the spiritual path and persevere on it—for our sakes and for the sake of all living beings.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks

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