

## **ZEN AND NOW – THE LIFE STORY OF SIDDHARTHA GAUTAMA**

### **CHAPTER ONE**

#### **IN THE BEGINNING - BETWEEN THE MOUNTAINS AND THE RIVER –**

As Siddhartha sat under the bodhi tree, a snake slithered close by. He called to mind everything that he could about the past, the present and the future. Perhaps he decided to begin where we all begin - in his mother's womb.

In the fertile plain of the Ganges about two thousand and five hundred years ago, in what is now Nepal, the Shakya people lived at the feet of the mighty Himalayan mountains. The Shakya had grown wealthy from the abundant rice harvests of their land and the clan had formed a fiercely independent Democratic Republic. Surrounding the Shakya were two powerful fast-growing monarchies: Kosala to the West and Magadha to the east.

Siddhartha Gotama's family were from the Shakya elite. His mother's name was Maya. His father Suddhodana, was a member of the warrior caste and one of the elected rulers of the Shakya. The family's home was in the city of Kapilavastu where they owned three palatial houses.

#### **SONG: WORLD OF THE SHAKYA**

##### **BEWARE OF WHAT YOU WISH FOR**

Suddhodana longed for a child, especially for a son to follow in his footsteps. He was delighted when his beautiful young wife Maya became pregnant. One night during her pregnancy Maya had a strange dream. She dreamed that a white elephant with powerful tusks had pierced her side.

Suddhodana had wished desperately for a child but now he feared that his wish might result in the death of his dearly-beloved wife, Maya.

Wise men and seers were called to interpret the dream and to predict the baby's future. Some said that the child would be a great warrior: others a great spiritual leader. Asita, the wisest of the seers, predicted that the child would become a Buddha, a person who finds enlightenment.

According to Shakya tradition the first child should be born at the home of the mother's family. This meant that, deep into her pregnancy, Maya and her attendants had to set out on a long and difficult journey. On the first night of her journey, Maya dreamed again...

#### **SONG – MAYA'S DREAM – THE PROPHECY SONG**

### **CHAPTER TWO**

#### **I SHOW YOU SORROW**

Fierce contractions told Maya that her child would arrive long before she reached her destination. She stopped her journey and gave birth to her son under a tree in a garden at a place called Lumbini.

The next day Maya and her attendants returned with the baby to Kapilavastu.

However, only five days after giving birth, she became very ill.

Maya never recovered from the childbirth and within a few days of Siddhartha's birth, she was clearly dying.

#### **SONG – FARTHER SHORE**

The heart-broken Suddhodanna decided to name his son Siddhartha, which means "the one who achieves what he sets out to do".

Siddhartha grew up without knowing his mother and later in his life Siddhartha dreamed of meeting his mother in heaven and being held by her.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS

Suddhodana did decide to re-marry and the wife he chose was Maya's sister, Pajapati, who became a loving stepmother to Siddhartha.

Suddhodana's great sorrow at the death of his beloved wife made him very protective of Siddhartha and he decided to try to shelter his son from all the pains and sufferings in the world.

His father surrounded young Siddhartha with as many luxuries as possible. The family had three fine houses for the different times of year. Suddhodana hoped that Siddhartha would enjoy this life so much that he would decide to stay in these palaces and follow in his father's footsteps by becoming a ruler of the Shakya clan.

Siddhartha experienced every earthy pleasure that money could buy.

Entertainment at the palace was lavish with celebrations, delicious food, music and silky dancing girls.

#### SONG: SET THE NIGHT ON FIRE

Siddhartha grew up to be a handsome and accomplished child. He played the flute beautifully. He was physically strong and excelled at many sports, including archery.

Siddhartha was an observant and thoughtful child. When not with his friends, he would often sit under the shade of a tree and daydream in peace.

*"I live in luxury. Perhaps too much luxury. There are lotus ponds in each of our houses blooming with different coloured flowers. My sandalwood and my clothes all come from Benares. Parasols protect me from too much heat and palace roofs from the heavy rain]. The people I see most are the beautiful girls who sing and dance for me. Even our servants were are well fed. I have no need ever to leave the palace."*

However, before long Siddhartha grew doubtful about his life of luxury.

*"After an all-night party I looked at the exhausted bodies strewn around the floor. Nothing was beautiful. I asked myself: What have I become?"*

#### THE SWAN AND THE ARROW

Siddhartha's life was not all peaceful. He often clashed with his cousin Devadatta.

Devadatta, whose name means, Gift of God, was also highly talented and a great archer. The two boys were natural rivals. Devadatta was determined to be a great warrior. One day as they were firing their arrows, Devadatta shot down a swan in full flight. Siddhartha found the wounded swan, extracted the arrow and nursed the swan back to health.

Tense and try not to tense

Pull back the string

Sight the target

Release

The arrow flies  
Thump into the target

The swan flies high  
Scanning and wing spanning  
The bow draws back  
Sharp barbed spiked arrowhead  
Piercing through the layered feathered chest

Blood spurts across the pure white feathers  
Swan swerves stalls plummets flutters  
Desperately beating wings regain some height some flight  
Crashes into the bank beside the lake  
Two boys running panting sweating

One pulls back the bow string  
The other cradles the swan's fragile broken body

**These childhood disagreements were to be the start of a life-long rivalry.**

## **SONG: WAKE UP DEAD CHAPTER FOUR**

### **LOVE OF MY LIFE**

When he was sixteen Siddhartha's parents arranged for him to meet the beautiful Princess Yasodhara. Her parents had seen Siddhartha win an archery contest and they considered that, as he had all the qualities of a great prince, he would make a good husband for Yasodhara. The young couple met and soon grew to love each other. Before long they were married with great ceremony.

The stories suggest that they had a wonderful love-life, once bouncing out of bed while making love and landing softly on the petals scattered on the floor around the bed.

Thus, the fortunate Siddhartha seems to have had a happy and fulfilling marriage.

### **SONG I'LL COMPARE THEE**

## CHAPTER FIVE

### BRIGHT LIGHTS BIG CITY

In spite of his father's efforts to keep him contented at home, from time to time Siddhartha inevitably became more aware of the world beyond the walls of the palace. He grew increasingly inquisitive and he finally persuaded one of his servants, the charioteer Channa, to take him outside the palace to see the world beyond. Defying his father's wishes they secretly went out at night on expeditions to explore the city.

*'Channa, I hear the guards whisper of wonders and the strangest sights outside the palace walls. They all talk of the beautiful courtesan they call Amrapali. But I want to experience all that I am missing!'*

### SONG: I'VE STRIPPED OFF ILLUSIONS

In the city Siddhartha saw many sights, some sleazy and spectacular but also many deeply disturbing. As they explored the rougher, dirtier, poorer areas, Siddhartha was shocked at the suffering he saw. For the first time in his life he saw the effects of sickness, old age and death-

Siddhartha constantly questioned Channa and he became deeply aware of how this suffering would come to everyone - including all those he loved the most.

On one of their trips outside Siddhartha also saw an emaciated holy man sitting serenely deep in meditation. This sight set Siddhartha thinking.

*"How can that man remain so calm and peaceful when surrounded by all this intense suffering?*

*There must be some secret that he knows."*

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE DECISION AND THE QUEST

Then to their delight Siddhartha and Yasodhara had a son. They called the boy "Rahula", which means "Bond". Siddhartha had a deep father-son bond with Rahula, but he also felt he would always be tied to his home by his affection for his first-born son.

#### SONG: NEVER APART

Siddhartha's wife Yasodhara was much more than a beauty. Like his step-mother, Mayapajapati, she was also committed to helping her people, and like Siddhartha, she was stirred by the conditions in which the poorer members of the Shakya clan had to live. They began to promise to do whatever was in his power to improve these conditions and reduce the suffering.

Siddhartha's heart was now desperately torn.

*"My Yasodhara. You know how much I love you.*

*Our life will be good but there will always be the shadow. We too will experience the sickness, old age and death. We must find the right way to live - for ourselves, for Rahula and for all our people. I need to leave the shelter and security of the palace to seek the truth, to find the cause of suffering and the best way to end it. This is the only way I can love and protect us all."*

Yasodhara seems to have understood his ambitious quest. She may have helped him escape from the palace against the wishes of his father. Thus one night Siddhartha with Channa the Charioteer left the palace, quietly kissing farewell to Yasodhara and Rahula and promising to return when his quest was accomplished.

#### SONG: AFTER TOMORROW

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### WHERE IS THE GOOD LIFE?

At that time the Ganges plain was so fertile that the farmers produced a food surplus. This enabled towns to grow with merchants and craftsmen now living an urban life. Meanwhile, outside the walls of the towns and cities in scattered villages and in the surrounding forests there were not only outlaws, outcasts and wild animals but also many people who were willingly or unwillingly living on the margins of society. These included philosophers and holy men, ascetics and seekers all looking for answers to life's fundamental questions and for alternative ways of life.

### SONG WHERE IS THE GOOD LIFE?

*"What do I find?*

*The Brahmin say we must perform rituals and sacrifices.*

*They ensure that most of the people believe in the caste system with the Brahmin at the top.*

*Others persuade the simpler people to trust in folk wisdom, in astrology and magic spells.*

*The philosophers can argue forever. Some say everything is fixed by fate; others that we are ruled by Karma. The sceptics say everyone else is wrong.*

*There are many teachers of yoga and meditation, all with slightly different techniques."*

### INSTRUMENTAL SANCTUS

*"Which of these impress me?*

*After my indulgent childhood. I find the ascetics most interesting.*

*Unlike the Brahmin and the sellers of potions the ascetics have no obvious selfish motives.*

*They sacrifice only themselves. They live like other-worldly skeletons on tiny amounts of food.*

*They have the courage to torture themselves to overcome the temptations of the flesh.*

*There must be some wonderful reward for all this self-inflicted pain.*

*Perhaps they know the secret."*

Siddhartha decided to experiment by trying out the path of renunciation. As a symbol of his change of life he cut off his long, beautiful hair and gave away all the possessions he had brought from home. He dressed in the robes of the lowest caste, the untouchables.

With five other friends he joined the extreme ascetics and he put his own body through all sorts of pain and deprivation. In his determination to test this path to its limits he experimented by eating less and less food. His bodily systems began to collapse.

*"I ate so little that my buttocks became like a camel's hoof, my backbone protruded like a line of spindles, my ribs corroded and collapsed like the rafters of an old and rotten shed, the gleams of the pupils in my eye sockets appear deeply sunken and my scalp became wrinkled and shrunken.*

*When I pressed the skin of my belly, I could feel my backbone; when I stroked my limbs with the palms of my hands to soothe my body the skin and hair came away from my body."*



## CHAPTER EIGHT

Siddhartha was saved from death by a simple act of kindness by a young girl, Sujata the milkmaid.

Sujata's day had begun badly with a row when summoned by her parents.

*"Sujata. You must stop brooding about that boy. He is not suitable. He is not worthy.*

*Take this offering of milky rice to the altar of the gods at the edge of the forest.*

*Don't spill a drop. Afterwards come straight home.*

*If you want to be worthy of your family, do as we say."*

### SONG: MISUNDERSTOOD

With the container of milky rice held securely in her hands, Sujata made her way to the forest. On the way she passed a big tree. Under it sat a man, emaciated and starving. She wondered if this was a spirit.

*"I'm supposed to offer every single drop of this to our forest gods, but the altar is already brimming with food. The gods have grown fat from all the offerings. If this this is a man, he needs it more...."*

When she saw the starving Siddhartha, Sujata decided to disobey her parents.

Siddhartha never forgot that he owed his life to this simple act of kindness.

Having been fed on milky rice by Sujata, Siddhartha steadily recovered his strength.

As he recovered, he reflected on what he had learnt.

*"I have tasted the life of luxury and indulgence. I have felt the most intense pain and been close to death.*

*I have studied many ways, but none seems right.*

*My quest so far has failed."*

Every day of his recovery, Sujata brought him food and fruit and drink and soon she brought her friends to meet him and to sing and dance for him.

One of Sujata's friends, a young musician was tuning up a stringed instrument. Sometimes the strings were too tight and sometimes too loose. But when the strings had exactly the right tension the sound was resonant and beautiful.

### SONG: MAGNIFICAT

The music and dance set him thinking. All the philosophies and practices he had tried seemed not quite in tune. None of them hit the right note, the perfect pitch. When many notes were played together sometimes the sound was jarring but then came the moment of perfect harmony.

Siddhartha decided to find the perfect harmonious way that combined all that was best in what he had learnt. He realised that he could not rely on anyone else's fixed system. He would have to research and discover for himself. His method will resonate with many scientists.

*"I will not believe in anything simply because it is said by many.*

*I will not believe in anything simply because it is written in religious books.*

*I will not believe in anything merely on the authority of teachers and elders.*

*I will not believe in traditions simply because they have been handed down for many generations.*

*Instead I will observe and reflect, and when I find anything that agrees with reason and is conducive to the good of one and all, then I will accept it and live up to it."*

Siddhartha chose a good place beneath a spreading fig tree and he vowed to meditate under there until he could understand clearly the best possible way of life and how to bring an end to all destructive suffering.

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE NIGHT OF LIGHT

Siddhartha sat still. He had travelled far. Now he entered a new phase of his quest: to explore the inner space of his mind. He knew that whatever he might discover must be the complete truth, nothing must be left out.

Siddhartha had mastered many ways of entering deep meditation and now he tried to bring everything he knew to mind. He considered all his own past and everything he had learnt. He tried to trace back through countless generations all the complex interweaving forces which had led to the present moment, leaving his mind open to all that was, is and will be, determined to search for truth wherever that took him.

*"As night drew in and the snakes slithered around me, at first I experienced an intense waking nightmare.*

*I saw sickness, cancers, ugly, and humiliating diseases.*

*I felt the power of floods, fires, storms and tempests as they tore through the land.*

*I thought of the man-made horrors. How we kill - not only animals on an enormous scale but also how at times of war we torture and hack to pieces men women and children. At times we can burn with hatred and revenge. We can indulge in every type of cruel fantasy.*

*The potential viciousness of man seemed to have no limits.'*

### SONG: EVERYMAN IS VULNERABLE

Siddhartha did not flinch or try to escape. He struggled to understand the forces at work in generating all this evil.

In the legends such Evil is personified in the figure of Mara. Siddhartha sat still - absorbing and accepting the truth of all this cruelty and pain.

*"Mara attacked all night long with images of horror. Mara also used her daughters to try to seduce me into escaping into a world of sensual delight and fantasy. I saw how love can be twisted; kindness can be crushed by violence. How fierce vicious circles can tighten like a vortex, a whirlpool, a spinning black hole of hurt, anger, bitterness and pain.*

***How was it possible to transform this into a source of good?***

***I began to understand the power of the mind to shape all our experiences. I saw that whenever we think that we are alone, separate and isolated, we can behave badly, clinging desperately to our separate possessions. If we shatter the illusion of separateness, vicious circles could be transformed into virtuous spirals. I invited Mara to sit with me."***

The stories say that the weapons and arrows fired at him by Mara eventually transformed into flowers.

***"After this great encounter with the forces of evil I experienced a deep and all-encompassing sense of bliss. As the illusion of separateness dissolved, I felt the overwhelming peace and delight of being embraced by the whole Universe. Totally surrounded and suffused by a loving, compassionate Cosmos. It was as if the power of the darkness was broken and the dawn broke on a new day."***

**SONG SIMPLE SONG**

## OVERTURE TO SECOND HALF

### CHAPTER TEN

#### SETTING THE WHEEL IN MOTION

When Sujata and her friends brought him fruit and flowers the next morning Siddhartha was transformed.

*“You’re different this morning. What has happened?”*

*“It was the milk and the music. Thanks to your kindness and your friends’ search for harmony, I think I now see everything more clearly.”*

*“Have you found what you were looking for?”*

At first, he hesitated.

What could he say?

*“I decided to speak first with the friends with whom he had tried out the ascetic ways of life. Here I had a problem. Some of these no longer trusted me as I had clearly abandoned the intense ascetic practices on which they placed so much reliance. Nevertheless, some of my former friends responded warmly. Some have only a little dust in their eyes. These friends convinced me that I should try to share what I had seen.*

*But what could I say to the rest of my people?*

*Most of us are addicted to pleasure; at the mercy of the senses; enthralled by the eye and charming objects; we follow our natural desires; eating his full of sensual pleasures; welcomes praise and fame; resents obscurity and blame; is capable of doing serious harm; can cause dissent; is often lustful and greedy; resents ill fortune; is distressed and bewildered by pain; is frequently disappointed; dislikes the sight of disease, old age and death; when old age comes he mourns, pines and is tormented with sorrow; he does not reflect consistently or deeply.*

*Asita asked me what I would say.*

*“The main insight was so fundamental and so basic that it is hard to describe. There is an illusion so close and so powerful that it affects our experience of life every moment of every day.”*

SONG: NOW AND FOREVER solo

*“In deep meditation under the bodhi tree it has become so clear. There is one loving interwoven cosmic reality flowing through us all. Ultimately, there is no such entity as a separate isolated self.*

*We have the illusion of that each of us is separate and isolated and this damages our experience. Whereas life lived in compassionate awareness of the whole interacting unified cosmos is deeply satisfying. All that is good can be harmonised.”*

It was as if Siddhartha had seen that the tiny pronoun “I” can lead to much suffering. “I” the smallest word like the smallest atomic particle contains enough energy to destroy the world.

SONG: LISTEN MY PEOPLE

Siddhartha started to travel and meet with many more people and to debate and answer their questions.

*“One way I tried to communicate was to use a medical metaphor to give a diagnosis of the human condition and a cure.*

*Are we sick or well?*

*When we are sick, what is the disease?*

*What is the cause?*

*What is the remedy?”*

*My quest was to find a cure for a fevered world – to find the truths for leading a noble life.*

#### **TRUTH ONE**

*Life is sweet but also bitter. In our experience of life, however sweet, there is often some suffering, stress or anxiety involved - if only that the sweetness will not last.*

*Beauty fades. Loved ones die. We age and die. There’s a shadow hanging over me.*

*Our experience flows from causes. Every moment is the result of all that has gone before. Everything interacts, interweaves, interplays, everything that has ever been flows through the present moment which in turn begets the future. There is Karma.*

#### **TRUTH TWO**

*There are causes of the suffering. One of the reasons we suffer unnecessarily is because we cling to the delusion that each of us is separate. We wrongly identify with a false image of an isolated ego. Then in trying to defend our separate selves, we try to cling on to experiences which will soon pass. Craving for and clinging onto what is ephemeral is self-destructive. If you hold on to your breath, you die.*

#### **TRUTH THREE**

*There is a cure. We are free to respond differently. We should not try to grasp and cling onto passing things that are always transforming. Grasping can destroy what is good. We can awaken to your interconnectedness with all things in a fundamentally loving Universe. We can certainly stop adding to the suffering.*

#### **TRUTH FOUR**

*There is a path. If you have faith that you are held by a loving cosmos you will naturally behave well. You will set up countless virtuous cycles and break countless vicious circles. If you have the right spirit of love and trust in the universe, you will naturally follow the best path.*

*Having the right mind set, the right attitudes, communicating honestly, acting lovingly, working for a better world, striving with determination, living mindfully and identifying with the everlasting light of love all set up self-reinforcing spirals which build up a rainbow civilization for us all.*

*What is the best spirit in which to live? What should our minds be full of?*

*Like a goldsmith we can turn our lives into works of art refining and improving all the time.*

*The theory could be tested by living and experiencing life. We can all give evidence."*

Now he had a theory, a way

How would this be tested?

What were his biggest challenges?

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### HATE IS THE GATE

On his travels Siddhartha visited a village where the people lived in terror.

They told him that they were afraid to walk the roads and that their children were taken away at night. They told him the killer's name was Angulimala.

*"Angulimala is a terrifying sight. Around his throat hung a necklace of severed human fingers.*

*Some of the fingers had dried now to bleached white bone: on others the flesh still hung loose and bloody."*

Angulimala had once been a very clever student of a famous guru who led one of the ascetic sects. Some of the other students, who were jealous of his success and his alleged powers, poisoned the relationship between him and the teacher. They persuaded their guru that Angulimala had betrayed him.

In his anger the guru set Angulimala a near impossible challenge: to go and collect and then bring to him one thousand fingers.

Why did he set this particular gruesome task? Gurus often say that as the ultimate truths cannot be contained in words, any teacher is a like a finger pointing at the moon. Many students see the teacher's finger but not the moon and thereby miss the point. His guru told Angulimala that if he collected a thousand fingers, he might at last be able to tell the difference between the pointing fingers and the real moon.

However cruel the challenge may seem to be, Angulimala was determined to prove himself and he decided to accept the challenge. For a while he picked his victims from isolated travellers. As he grew more desperate, he would attack villages at night looking for victims.

In attempting to achieve this task, he first became a violent robber, then an addicted killer - a notorious murderer.

After each killing, he would chop off the fingers of his victims and he made the fingers into the famous necklace which he wore all the time around his throat.

After a few years he had collected 999 fingers. The King had now been told of this dangerous murderer and had sent soldiers to find and kill him. Angulimala's own mother was horrified by what he had become and when she heard that soldiers were hunting him, she also went looking for his hiding place to beg him to give himself up.

When Siddhartha was told of the serial killer in the area, he also decided to find him

The next day all three were on the same stretch of road. Angulimala and his mother were walking straight towards each other. He had promised to kill the next person he met and to collect his final thousandth finger.

At that moment Siddhartha walked between them. Angulimala saw Siddhartha and yelled at him to “stop”. Siddhartha showed no fear. He looked straight into Angulimala’s eyes and stood his ground. As Angulimala raised his sword ready to kill him Siddhartha replied, *“I have stopped why haven’t you?”* The two men stood face to face.

#### SONG: HATE IS THE GATE

Siddhartha’s fearlessness seemed to paralyse Angulimala’s will-power and he hesitated before striking him dead. Siddhartha’s calm acceptance shocked Angulimala. As they talked Siddhartha offered him a new vision - a way to live and a way to reconnect with all that was good – and a way to start to make amends for the harm he had caused.

After the encounter Angulimala became a devoted friend and follower of Siddhartha. The king was willing to trust that he would be rehabilitated with Siddhartha’s help and he did not execute him.

Years later, Angulimala was a completely changed man. On one occasion he saw a heavily pregnant woman struggling by the roadside and he helped to deliver the baby. People began to admire him and some local women would pray to his spirit to help them with childbirth.

When challenged about his past, he was always completely honest about the terrible harm he had caused.

Once when he was attacked and severely beaten by families of his former victims, he accepted this beating without retaliation. At least one cycle of violence ceased.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### SO MANY WAYS TO DIE THE PROBLEM OF DEATH

#### THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

#### THE STORY OF KISA GOTAMI

Kisa Gotami, the young widow, clung on tightly to the bundle which she carried in her arms as she wandered aimlessly around the paths on the edge of the village. Every so often she pulled back the sheet and stared once again into the dead eyes of her baby.

Kisa Gotami had recently given birth to her longed-for child but her baby had soon died. Kisa was so distraught with horror at the death of her son that she could not let go of the lifeless body. She carried him around begging for medicine or for some miracle worker who could raise him from the dead. Her family and friends suggested she talked to Siddhartha the wise Buddha who was staying nearby. Kisa went to him and begged him to raise the child from the dead.

Siddhartha told her that he could not reverse the events that had led to the death of her child but that he would listen to her and share a meal with her. He asked her to help prepare for the meal by asking for food and at least some mustard-seeds from every nearby house. The one condition was that she was only to collect food from the houses where no loved person had ever died.

Kisa went from house to house; everyone was willing to give her food or at least some mustard-seed but when she asked if any loved one from their home had died, she heard their stories. So many different experiences of deaths – of parents, husbands, wives and children.

#### SONG: SO MANY WAYS TO DIE

She returned to the Buddha and they began to talk.

*“I cannot bring your child back to life, but we can learn the way to live.”*

Although still heart-broken at the death of her beloved child, her transformation had begun. By sharing in the suffering of so many others, eventually she was able to let go of her tight hold on her dead child.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### DEVADATTA THE POISON TREE

**What happened to Devadatta?**

#### **DEVADATTA**

The plan to murder to Siddhartha had been fermenting in his mind for many years.

Siddhartha and his cousin and brother-in-law Devadatta had had a difficult relationship since childhood.

When they were younger Devadatta liked to hunt and once shot and wounded a flying swan. Siddhartha found it and pulled out the arrow and nursed the swan back to health.

Thirty years later they were still rivals. Siddhartha was now known as a Buddha and had many followers.

Devadatta had also become the leader of a dedicated group of ascetics. He insisted that his followers adhered to a strict discipline and an austere regime.

*“Siddhartha.*

*You have failed to impose the rules that we need to discipline our appetites.*

*You have angered the Brahmin. You make people doubt the need for their sacrifices.*

*You say the brahmin rituals are based on illusions.*

*You are old. I suggest that I take over control of the Sangha.”*

*“Devadatta.*

*We search for the harmonious way.*

*The rules may help some people some of the time. They need not be imposed.*

*Many rituals are harmless, but we should question whether they are effective.*

*The Sangha does not need a Leader and it need not follow your rigid path. “*

Not surprisingly Devadatta took this as a personal affront and his hatred for Siddhartha grew more intense until eventually his anger overwhelmed and Devadatta decided to kill.

#### **SONG: YOUR MOTHER ...**

Devadatta looked for allies. Siddhartha had become a close friend of the King Bimbisara of Magdala, a powerful iron-rich Kingdom. However, Bimbisara’s son Prince Ajatasatu clashed often with his father and was hoping to depose him.

Devadatta cultivated the friendship of Prince Ajatasatu, the frustrated and unhappy heir to the throne.

*“My Prince we have two mutual enemies. Your father and my brother-in-law Siddhartha.”*

Devadatta persuaded Ajatasatu to send some mercenaries to assassinate Siddhartha.

*"I thank you for agreeing to the assassination, but we need to ensure that nobody can trace the killing back to us."*

However, when the assassins found and confronted Siddhartha he faced them without fear.

They were unwilling to kill such a calm and holy man. Siddhartha talked with them and they left without harming him.

Devadatta tried at least twice more to kill Siddhartha: once by trying to ensure that a wild elephant attacked him on his journey through a forest and once by creating an avalanche of boulders and stones on a mountain path where Siddhartha was walking. Both attempts failed.

The stories about how their relationship ended are varied. It may be that Devadatta played some part as you will hear in Siddhartha's eventual death. Others say that the childhood rivals were eventually reconciled.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

### **A NEW CIVILIZATION; POWER POLITICS A NEW WORLD A RAINBOW CIVILIZATION**

#### **NO MAN IS AN ISLAND: THE SANGHA AND THE BIKKHU**

Siddhartha's vision was to create a new transformed civilization in which every living being could flourish. His vision of enlightenment was both personal and communal. As Buddha travelled and met with more and more people the Sangha, grew. The Sangha in various ways were followers of the Buddha, admirers of his vision and sharers in the way of life he inspired.

As his fame and influence grew Siddhartha now had the chance to relate not only to other searchers for truth but also with the powers that be in the political world around him - including the monarchs of the most powerful kingdoms. Some of the rulers offered him hospitality and some asked The Buddha for help or advice or offered him positions in government.

Siddhartha refused all offers of power for himself, but he was well-aware of the realities of politics.

The Kings of two powerful nearby cities King Bimbisara of Magadha and King Pasandi of Kosala became friends and protectors of Buddha.

However, politics rarely remain harmonious for long. As the kingdoms grew in power, they became increasingly competitive and this threatened the smaller republics including the Shakyas.

The clouds were gathering.

In our own time we are intensely aware of the power of political rivalry and bitterness to divide communities. A knee-capping in Belfast; machetes hacking down in Rwanda; suicide bomber strolling into a crowded street; in many parts of our world neighbourhoods can descend into whirlpools of violence.

#### **SONG: STONE WALLS OF DERRY**

At his time Siddhartha was invited by the local Kings to debate their political decisions.

Behind every state there was a vision of how life should be.

Where is the good life to be found? What is our shared vision of the future world?

After the Revolution. the New Deal, A Land fit for Heroes, the victorious Fatherland, the Big Society, the Golden Age...

#### **SONG: MAGADHA**

Siddhartha tried to share a vision for a global civilization. A Harmonious Rainbow Community combining all that was best. with an underlying shared vision that we should all live in the spirit of love and peace and all adhere to the basic moral precepts of avoiding all unnecessary violence; we should all seek and speak the truth and respect all living beings. A flowing together of all the best traditions and practices could produce a steadily improving planet for all living beings.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### PHILOSOPHY RELIGION PSYCHOTHERAPY

#### THE COURTESAN - FIRE AND FLOWER

One particular admirer of Siddhartha was the beautiful Courtesan Amrapali. She often invited him to stay in her house and to teach in her gardens. It was in these gardens that Siddhartha entered into many of his most famous dialogues. Here he met the fire worshippers.

#### FEED THE HUNGRY GHOSTS

##### A FIRE STORY

The day had been biting cold and the wind was often fierce making the leaves whistle and howl. Agni was frustrated and angry after a hard day's work. His wife was preparing the meal cooking over the fire watched by their children. He had been drinking. He tripped and cursed, and his temper boiled over. He kicked out at the fire and sparks flew. Some burning logs set fire to the bits of furniture. Agni's wife begged him to be careful. He lashed out hitting her below the left eye causing a swift purple bruise to swell up. His son screamed. The strong wind whipped up the flames and soon the house was on fire.

I am bound upon a wheel of fire that mine own tears do scald like molten lead.

The sun burns. Its energy fuels the earth.

One of the most powerful forces we know is the light and heat of the sun. Naturally, people have always been fascinated by the power of fire. At Siddhartha's time many religious ceremonies were based on fire.

#### THE FIRE WORSHIPPERS and THE FIRE SERMON

As well as the ascetics the most powerful religious figures of the time were the brahmin. Their sacrifices made use of the symbols which always inspire mankind, especially the element of fire.

On the top of a high hill Siddhartha spoke to a large crowd of these fire-worshippers.

Here Buddha gave the fire sermon.

*"Our senses are on fire. The passions enflame us. The spark of anger or jealousy and hatred can quickly lead to our being engulfed. The way we react to the world often creates a painful burning craving.*

*Although fire symbolised power, and although the sun's energy was essential to life, for all sentient beings burning fire could also be destructive.*

*Without heat, however, life died.*

*We need to find the harmonious balanced optimum way of responding to our passions and deepest desires.*

*If fire is fanned by strong winds it leads to a dangerous conflagration but if the flames are controlled and guarded, they provide warmth and comfort.*

*If we learnt how to control and restrain the fire would give us life. Just as there are times when wearing a mask restrains us from spreading the virus of hatred greed and delusion.*

*Human consciousness could be liberated from the grip of craving and obsession. This craving is often buried deep in our hearts and minds. Nirvana describes the state of coolness after fever of gentle warmth after burning fire."*

#### **THE FLOWER SERMON**

The flower sermon. Siddhartha understood the limitations of words. Words impose a matrix on our experience of reality. Words divide the world into nouns verbs adjectives adverbs. The whole universe flows on undivided.

One day when he was expected to teach the Buddha said nothing. He simply held up a white flower. The followers who understood smiled in response. Direct experience of liberation is what matters. This is zen.

Angels fly because they take themselves lightly

The flowers do have power

**SONG: PROMISED LAND**

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### KEEPING THE PROMISE - THE FAMILY

What happened to his family?

#### **WIFE, SON AND FATHER**

**After his experience of enlightenment Buddha often returned to his family as he had promised.**

**Suddhodana, his father had always wanted his son to be a powerful ruler. He was shocked by his son's rejection of power and by the simple life led by many of his son's community.**

*"I don't really understand why you did what you did but I think your mother would have understood."*

**In contrast to his father, Siddhartha's wife, son and his stepmother all appreciated his teaching of the Harmonious Way and all became followers.**

**Buddha never did resume the life of a householder, but he enjoyed loving relationships with all his family. In this way, he had achieved what he had set out to do many years before.**

#### **SONG: SEEMED LIKE A DREAM**

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### LEADING UP TO DEATH

The Buddha taught the Harmonious Way where all that was good in all traditions would be respected. However, he clearly thought that what some sects proposed were destructive illusions. Some of his teachings were regarded by his contemporaries as radical and sufficiently challenging to provoke hostility.

Although he was befriended and been admired by the three most powerful political figures in his part of the world, he knew that in these courts there were political intrigues, betrayals and murders.

Within his own community, he was also challenged by Devadatta's attempt to take over and lead the Sangha, which Siddhartha had firmly rejected.

So now we come to the end of his life and the mystery surrounding his death.

He may have been killed because of the ambitions of one of the local kings and the pride of his own Shakya clan.

Ironically the Buddha probably owed the challenges of his last months—and his eventual death—to the same king who had previously helped him reach the heights of influence: King Pasenadi of Kosala, the monarch of the most powerful kingdom north of the Ganges. The King and Siddhartha, the son of a Shakya chief—had met for the first time when they were both about the age of 40. Hearing of his renown as a teacher, the king paid a visit to the Buddha's retreat outside his capital city of Shravasti. At first sceptical, Pasenadi was soon won over by the Buddha, and asked to learn more about him and the harmonious way. This was a key moment in Siddhartha's rise to fame. With Pasenadi's support, the Buddha's welcome in Shravasti was assured, and for the next 25 years, he spent many rainy seasons here in a grove gifted to him by a rich admirer, and here he gave many of his teachings.

King Pasenadi, however, had previously been a paranoid and tyrannical ruler, notoriously impaling his enemies—imagined or real—on stakes. His friendship with the Buddha, which lasted for the next 25 years, seems to have had some mellowing effect on Pasenadi. He followed his advice on basic matters of health and became slimmer and fitter himself. However, the friendship did not remove the king's suspicious nature.

Some 15 or more years after they first met, the king and the Siddhartha turned from friends into relatives. Hoping for a male heir, Pasenadi decided to marry a bride from the Buddha's home tribe, the Shakya. The king approached the Buddha's cousin, Mahanama, who had taken over the governorship of Shakya after the death of the Buddha's father. The marriage plan was partly intended to honour the Buddha's own family, but there was a problem. The notoriously proud Shakyans secretly refused to allow any pure-blooded woman of the clan to marry into the family of an outsider. Thus, Mahanama deceptively sent to the king the illegitimate daughter of a slave-woman, passing her off as a noblewoman. It was a trick that was dangerous and unwise, and it would lead one day to a genocidal bloodbath.

The deception, however, worked for many years. The slave girl not only gave birth to a son, Prince Vidudabha, but was able to evade all questions regarding her precise background until her son was 16, when she finally relented and let him go on a visit to the Shaky city of Kapilavastu. Prince Vidudabha's visit went off uneventfully, until his departure. One of his soldiers, returning to the Shaky guesthouse to retrieve his sword, overheard a woman talking as she scrubbed with milk the seat which Vidudabha had used: *"This is where the son of the slave-woman sat!"* The soldier reported what he had heard, and the pride and honour of the prince was deeply offended. The young prince vowed: *"When I gain my throne, I will wash it with the blood of the Shakya."*



When King Pasenadi heard of the Shakyans' treachery, he directed his fury against his wife and his son, stripping them of their royal positions, shaving their hair, and returning them to the condition of slavery. The Buddha pleaded with the king on their behalf. He persuaded the King to spare their lives, but from this time the King would no longer offer his protection to Siddhartha.

Meanwhile in Magadha, King Bimbisara, who had been Siddhartha's first royal patron, was forced to abdicate by his ambitious son Ajatasattu, who imprisoned his father and then starved him to death.

From then on, the Buddha was in an increasingly dangerous and precarious position without the security of two of the palaces where so many had come to meet him and from where he spread his teachings. Political ambitions and rivalry threatened the Sangha on many sides.

#### SONG: TIME WAS

Through all these challenges he seems to have remained calm and gentle, trying to respond without recourse to violence. However, the realities of politics tested him profoundly. He taught that the vicious circles generated by hatred and cruelty could persist for many hundreds of years unless people chose to follow the harmonious way of non-violent response to threat and aggression.

When Siddhartha reached 80 years old his health was declining. *"My body is like an old cart held together with straps."*

The Buddha in the last months of his life had to respond to many deaths of his friends and family: both Sariputta and Moggallana, two of his closest and most trusted followers, died within two weeks of each other—Moggallana having been viciously murdered by a band of thugs.

In Magadha the new King Ajatasattu was keen to expand his territory and planned to cross the Ganges and invade the Vajjian republic. Although Buddha's advised him against such a hostile invasion he went ahead anyway.

For the Buddha his last few months were thus full of challenges. The society in which he'd worked and spread his teachings was still capable of descending into violence.

Worst of all, when he became the new king of Kosala, Vidudabha, carried out his long-standing threat and attacked the Shakya, Buddha's own homeland.

In the massacre that followed, the Kosalan troops were ordered to kill every Shakyian they saw, "sparing not even infants at the breast".

As ever Siddhartha's response to the news was not to resort to violence or retaliation.

#### SONG: IF THEY KILL ME

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### DEATH: EYES CLOSE - EYES OPEN

How did he die?

Not long after the massacre Siddhartha decided to visit his homeland Kapilavastu for the last time. He was accompanied by some of his closest followers. They stopped at the town of Pavi, about 75 miles from home, where he stayed at the house of a man called Cunda who was the local blacksmith.

The precise details of Buddha's death remain a mystery.

Cunda provided a meal for the Buddha and some of his main followers, including Ananda.

One of the courses contained some sort of meat. From the moment it was offered to him, it seems that Siddhartha realised that something was wrong with this dish.

Some say as a guest in a relatively poor man's house he was simply too polite to refuse bad food.

According to the texts, the Buddha told his host: *"Serve the course to me, and different food to the others."* When the meal was over, he said to Cunda: *"You should bury the remains of that course in a deep pit."* He also told his followers never to put any blame on Cunda and he insisted that whatever happened it was not Cunda's fault. The Buddha immediately arranged to continue their journey and leave for the nearby town of Kusinara.

As soon as they set out Siddhartha became seriously ill.

Why did he eat the bad food himself and yet prevent the others from eating it?

One convincing theory is that he suspected the food had been deliberately poisoned before being given to Cunda. Siddhartha certainly had serious enemies in the area. This is where only a few months before, his friend Moggallana had been killed by hired assassins and there had been attempts to assassinate Siddhartha before.

The best revenge the Buddha's enemies could have taken on him was not only to kill him but also Ananda, his most trusted follower. After the deaths of Sariputta and Moggallana, Ananda had the closest relationship with Siddhartha and had the fullest knowledge of his teaching.

His enemies may have thought: *"If we kill Ananda, we kill the teachings of this Buddha."* By insisting that he alone ate the suspicious looking food and asking for the leftovers be buried, the Siddhartha prevented Ananda and the others from being poisoned and he tried to stop any blame attaching to Cunda.

Thus the Buddha may have hastened his own death in order that his teaching would survive. And we are talking about his teaching now, 2,500 years later.

When they reached Kushinagar the dying Siddhartha was helped to rest under a tree. He asked Ananda and his followers if they had any further questions or if there was anything more he could do for them. He spoke for the last time about the transience of the body and encouraged them all to strive ceaselessly to bring light to the world. He asked them not to follow idols but to follow the teaching. Siddhartha died peacefully surrounded by friends, family and followers. In his final words he reminded them to be a light to themselves and all the people they met. *"All created things transform. We all play our part to build a more harmonious world."*

### SONG: NOW AND FOREVER

**Every act and every thought by everyone transform the universe. The life and spirit of Siddhartha lives on throughout the world both Zen and Now.**

## POSTSCRIPT

After his death the sangha continued to embody his spirit and his teaching. Inevitably by many people he has been misunderstood, misinterpreted and many bad things have been done by people wrongly claiming to be his followers.

In his own time Siddhartha a scientist, a philosopher, a psychologist, a therapist, a revolutionary who sought to find the optimum way of life for all people. All that is good in science, the great traditional religions and philosophies of mankind is compatible with the teachings of the Buddha. Some think of Buddhism as a religion: some as the antidote to religion. This is what Albert Einstein said:

*“The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that could cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.”*

Siddhartha was not a God but a human being who was peaceful, kind, compassionate, thoughtful, honest and deeply loving. His spirit and story have much to contribute to all of us today as we try to build a fully humane compassionate civilization.

There is not one Buddha. There are an infinite number of enlightened beings. There is a spectrum of light. We are all on the spectrum. You may be one of the most enlightened. You are almost certainly surrounded by many Buddhas. Your child, your partner, your cat.

Your worst enemy may be an Angulimala and your hate may show you the gate. We all worship something. We all take refuge somewhere. You may be addicted to your country, your team, your profession, your family or some part of yourself. All these are worthy of love but the universe is wider and greater than all. If you cling to them, you turn them into idols and ultimately you will destroy each other. The symphony plays on, the song is sung, the drama is played out. Even the darkness of death reveals the light. You can trust that if the universe has a spirit, it is the spirit of love. If it has no spirit, we can make it in our own image. If you think it is malign, why trust in your distrust?

Two hundred years after Buddha's death the Emperor Ashoka learnt of his teaching and was inspired to transform his way of ruling. As Ashoka ruled much of what is now India the teachings of Buddha spread widely. Three hundred years before the birth of Jesus some of his teaching will have started to influence the more radical thinkers of the Middle East.

You are trillions of cells constantly interacting with the environment of all the forces of the cosmos. Each second trillions of changes take place. You can play your part in shaping these changes. Every second of every day of every life thoughts and words and actions shape the world. You are always of universal significance. Life is worth living. We all play our part.