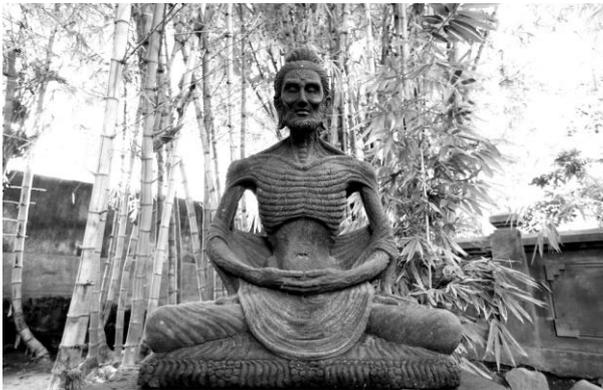


# THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF SIDDHARTHA GAUTAMA

In our last story, we saw Siddhartha experience **the Four Sights**. These made him realise that the world was full of suffering and inspired him to become a holy man. He realised he could not do this surrounded by the luxury of his father's palace. He took off his royal robes and put on simple clothing. He shaved his hair. He said goodbye to his wife and son, and he left the palace in the hope of finding truth by living as a holy man.

The life of a holy man at that time was not an easy one. They lived in what is known as an 'ascetic' way. This meant they lived almost in poverty with few possessions, limited food, and very little sleep. The point of this was to avoid worldly distractions so they could focus on the life of their spirit more than their bodies. They were trying to tame their desires of hunger, pleasure, and the need for lots of stuff.



Siddhartha spent 6 years travelling around northern India. He spent time with some monks (holy men) who believed that if they ate and drank as little as possible and spent time going without things that they would come to understand the meaning of life. Siddhartha tried this. He lost weight and grew hungry, but he did not find the meaning of life. So, he left the monks and travelled on in search of the truth.

He saw that neither a life of great luxury nor a life of great poverty had helped him. **There had to be a middle way between these two extremes...**

Finally, Siddhartha came to a Bodhi tree and rested in its shade. For 49 days he stayed there concentrating deeply and paying no attention to what was going on around him. This kind of deep stillness is called **meditation**.

As he sat and meditated, he realised that he had understood the answers to his questions. **Buddhists say that he became enlightened. He had become the Buddha- the enlightened one.**



From the outside, there was no obvious change in his appearance. It was as if nothing had happened at all. Inside, however, everything had changed. **Siddhartha could now see the world clearly and understood it fully.** This event is sometimes called the 'Great Awakening'. From this point on, Siddhartha was known as the Buddha, meaning 'Enlightened One'. It was like someone had turned on a big light switch in his mind and he could see why people suffer and how he could help them.



Buddha knew that he must help others by spreading the knowledge he had learnt. He therefore took up the life of a travelling preacher, spreading his knowledge to as many people as he could.

He first went back to Benares, the place where he had lived with the monks, and in the deer park he told them what he had discovered. They understood what he was saying and became his first followers or disciples. The Buddha lived until he was 80 years old. He spent the rest of his life travelling about teaching and preaching about what he had discovered.

After the Buddha died, his disciples went on travelling and teaching the things he had told them. Today there are millions of people in the world who follow the teachings of the Buddha.