

Lesson 1 – RESPECT - Birth of Prince Siddhartha

About 2600 years ago, in a town called Kapilavasthu at the base of the Himalayan mountains in a place now located in Nepal, lived the Sakya clan, ruled by King Suddhōdana. He had two wives, Queen Mahamaya and her younger sister, Māhapajāpati Gotami.

One night, Queen Mahamaya dreamed that she was carried by four heavenly beings to the Himalaya Mountains, where she bathed in a lake, dressed in heavenly clothes and was adorned with flowers. She lay on a couch, with a silver mountain nearby. A white elephant appeared, holding in its trunk a white flower. He raised his trunk and trumpeted loudly, walked around the Queen's couch three times, and then disappeared inside her. While she was having that dream, the Bodhisattva – which means a great being who will become a Buddha - came from a heaven-world called Tusita, or the Heaven of the Contented, and became Queen Mahamaya's child. When she awoke, she told the king about the dream.

She felt especially happy and healthy from that time on. Ten months later, she traveled with some friends to her parents' home to give birth, as she knew the baby soon would be born. She was carried on a palanquin, which is a covered seat held up by two long poles on the shoulders of four men. On the way, as they approached Lumbini Park, where there was a garden, the queen wanted to stop and relax. She walked to a huge Sala tree and reached out for a branch to hold onto for support. As she stood there, she gave birth to the Bodhisattva.

Four deities immediately held the new baby and presented him to the queen, saying, "Rejoice, O Queen, a son of great power has been born to you!"

The newborn Bodhisattva was no ordinary baby. He stood firmly on the ground on his tiny legs. And he walked – he took seven steps toward the north, and at each step, a lotus flower appeared under his foot. With a white umbrella held over him, he looked in the four directions and said,

"I am the highest in the world, I am the best in the world, I am the foremost in the world. This is the last birth, there will be no future lives for me."

A powerful light went through the whole universe, including the heaven-worlds and even the darkest areas of the universe.

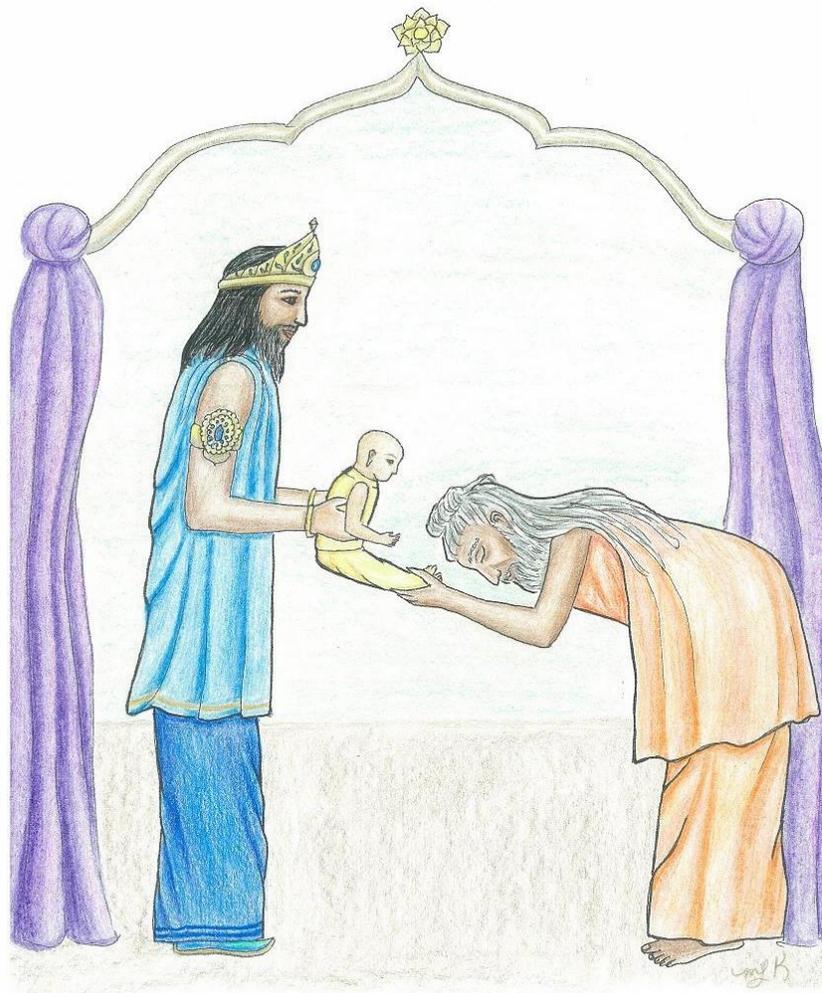
The new mother and baby, along with their traveling companions, returned to the palace.

The news of the baby prince - the son of King Suddhōdana and Queen Mahamaya - traveled throughout the kingdom and beyond. In the Himalaya mountains, a wise holy man named Asita, deep in meditation, could see that the gods of a heaven-world called Tavatimsa, the Heaven of the 33 Gods, were full of joy. When he asked them what was the reason for their great joy, they said that a

being who will be enlightened has been born to the Sakyan people in the land of Lumbini.

Asita, who was a teacher and advisor to King Suddhōdana, went to visit the king, knowing it must be his baby son who has been born. When Asita arrived at the palace, he sat down and immediately asked, “Where is the boy? Show him to me.”

Queen Mahamaya presented the baby prince to Asita, who saw immediately that the baby was pure and brilliant. He felt deep joy looking at the little child. The queen held the baby with his head bowed toward the holy man, according to the custom of everyone - including kings and queens – to bow to holy men. It is common in many Asian countries, in ancient as well as modern times, to bow to the feet of a person for whom one has very great respect.



But surprisingly, the baby prince turned his feet toward Asita!

Then the king held the baby with his head toward Asita, but again the prince turned his feet toward Asita. The king directed the baby's head toward Asita two more times, but the baby did the same thing each time.

Asita told the King not to stop the baby from turning, but to allow him to bow to the baby's feet.

And the old, wise holy man bowed to the tiny baby. This was appropriate, because, as Asita

noticed, the baby prince had certain signs of the greatest of holy beings, including long arms, long thin fingers, golden color skin, long thick eyelashes, a circle of white hair between his eyebrows, large heels, and the shape of a wheel on his feet.

Glowing with great happiness, Asita said, “Among the human race, he is unique.”

Then Asita remembered his own age, and tears ran down his cheeks. He looked very sad. The royal family became very worried seeing the holy man’s tears, and asked,

“Is there some danger to the prince?”

Asita replied, “As I foresee, no harm will touch the boy, nor is there any danger that awaits him. But he is not an ordinary person. He will reach the ultimate true knowledge. With purity and compassion for many, he will set the Dharma Wheel turning and spread his life of holiness, teaching the Dharma. But very little of my life remains, and I shall die before that, so I will not hear this great hero teaching the good Dharma. That saddens me; that loss distresses me.”

A few days later, the king invited some astrologers to the palace. They could predict the prince’s future by calculating from the position of the planets at the time of his birth.

They predicted that if the prince has a family, then he will be the most powerful king, the king of the world, but if he chooses not to have a family and instead to be a holy man, then he will become the most holy being, the Enlightened One, and will teach truth to the world.

The baby prince was named Siddhartha, and the name of his family was Gautama.

When Prince Siddhartha was seven days old, his mother Queen Mahamaya died and went to Tusita heaven-world, the Heaven of the Contented. From that time, her sister Māhapajāpati Gotami took care of him as a mother.

Questions:

1. What does “Bodhisattva” mean? (a great being who will become a Buddha)
2. What did the baby prince do as soon as he was born? (he stood and walked, taking seven steps to the north, and said that he was the highest and best in the world, that this was his last birth, and that he would have no more lives)
3. What did Asita do when the baby prince turned his feet toward Asita? (bowed to the baby prince)
4. Why was Asita so happy seeing the baby? (the prince was a great holy being who would be a great teacher of the Dharma)

5. Why did Asita feel sad? (he would die before the prince would teach the Dharma)
6. What did the astrologers predict about the baby's future? (if he had a family, he would be the most powerful king but if he decided to be a holy man, he would be the Enlightened One and teach truth to the world)

What the Buddha said:

“Pūjārahe pūjayato, Buddhhe yadi va sāvake, papañcha samatikkante, tiṇṇa sokapariddave. Te tādise pūjayato, nibbuta akutobhaye, nasakkā puññam sankhātum, imettam iti kena ci.”

“He who reveres the worthy ones, the Buddhas and their disciples, who have overcome all challenges and unhappiness, he who reveres such peaceful and fearless ones has more merit than can be measured.”

Dhammapada 195-196 (14:17-18)

Dharma Discussion - Respect:

When you see someone bow to another person, what do you think?
For some of us, we don't see people bowing very often; we see musicians, dancers and actors do a little bow thanking the audience after finishing a performance. For others of us, especially in Asian cultures, it is quite normal to see people bowing to monks, nuns, and others who are dedicated to a holy life. Bowing is a way of showing great respect.

What do we mean by “having respect” for a person?
What kinds of thoughts and feelings might you have toward the person when you have respect for them? Admiration, gratitude, and appreciation.
For example, when you bow to your audience after you perform, you are showing appreciation and gratitude to the audience for coming to the performance and applauding.

Bowing to a monk means that we respect the monk as if he is the Buddha, because, like the Buddha, he teaches us the Dharma – what the Buddha taught. The Dharma is the best guidance on how to live a peaceful and happy life. When we bow to a monk, a nun, or a Buddha statue, we are admiring the Buddha's good qualities - like his compassion and wisdom - and feeling thankful that he gave us the Dharma, so we can learn to have a peaceful, happy life . This is how we respect the Buddha.

We hear the word “respect” also in other contexts, in many different situations. Can you think of some situations where you must show respect?

We must respect our parents and teachers, respect the rules, respect other people's opinions, have respect for other people's belongings, and have respect for others' personal space.

What does it mean, to "have respect" in these situations?

Caring about others, not wanting to disturb others, being kind.

It also means being considerate of others, being polite, and following the rules.

Sometimes we see other people being disrespectful, not having respect for others. They shout, say unkind words, refuse to follow rules, or act rudely or selfishly.

They complain or argue loudly without a good reason, or insist on doing whatever they want to do while ignoring the needs of others.

How do you feel when you see others being disrespectful? Many of us feel uncomfortable or uneasy, especially when adults are disrespectful.

Why are they disrespectful? Maybe they haven't learned to be polite and respectful. Or they're feeling stressed or angry. Or they're just having a bad day.

Sometimes, we might forget to have respect.

We tend to forget to have respect for others when we are feeling irritable, upset, angry, uncomfortable or stressed.

We are so focused on our own discomfort that we don't notice others so much.

When we're feeling this way, we have to make an extra effort to be aware of others and to be respectful to them.

We know how to have basic respect. For example, what do you do when someone greets you, saying "hi" or "good morning"? What do you say when someone gives you something? What do you do when you have made a mess?

Sometimes classmates or others around us are not behaving respectfully, not being polite and kind. We might feel tempted to "fit in" with their behavior.

When that happens, remember that it shows that you are strong, with self-confidence and courage, when you are a good example to others rather than just being a "follower," falling to the lower level of behavior that others have.

Going to a Buddhist temple is a good way to practice respect.

What are some ways that we show respect at a temple?

We remove our shoes before we go in.

We don't run around, shout, or behave in ways that annoy others.

We put our palms together when we greet a monk or nun, and when we look at Buddha statues and other religious statues; maybe we bow to them.

Sometimes we make offerings such as flowers, food, incense, candles or lamps.

We handle Dharma books and offerings very carefully, not dropping them, stepping on them, or putting them on the floor.

We patiently stand in line to receive food. We clean up after ourselves.

We look for ways we can help and offer to help when we see an opportunity.

We are kind, friendly and welcoming to others.

This helps the temple maintain a peaceful atmosphere that everyone can enjoy.

When everyone is respectful to each other, then everyone feels comfortable, peaceful and happy.

Activity - Word Search - Find and circle 10 words from the story:

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(Lotus, Lumbini, Mahamaya, Siddhartha, Asita, Sakya, feet, Sala, Nepal, bow)