# The Four Sights

The man who came to be called Buddha was born Prince Siddhartha in India over two and a half thousand years ago. The prince was kept protected in a life of comfort inside his father's palace, he enjoyed the best food and the finest clothes. He did not know that outside of the palace people did not have food to eat or even that people struggled to have clothes to wear.

Until one day, when he was a fully grown man, he was taken outside the gates of the palace with his charioteer Channa and he saw four people or ‘sights’ that alerted him to the sufferings of life that awakened his wish for more understanding.

The first person that the prince saw was a man suffering from a disease. He asked Channa why the man looked the way he did. Channa explained that the man was ill and looked like he did because he was in pain. They journeyed on a bit farther and they saw an old man walking slowly at the side of the road. Siddhartha had never seen an old and infirm person before. He asked Channa once more why the person was walking so slowly. Channa replied that the man was old and that we will all grow old one day. Next the prince saw a funeral procession. Some men were carrying a dead body through the streets. Relatives of the dead man were following weeping and crying. Siddhartha asked Channa about what he had just seen. Channa replied dutifully that everyone dies and that friends and family weep and mourn the person that had died. The pair continued on their journey until they saw a man sat under a tree. He was wearing robes and had a shaven head. The prince asked Channa about this man’s looks. Channa replied that the man was a monk, that he had given up all of his wealth and possessions. That he would wander from place to place searching for the truth. That he would wander around and ask for food to eat, since he had no money to buy food or no land to grow vegetables.

The prince thought deeply on the four people that he had seen. Even though he returned to the palace and tried to enjoy delicious food prepared for him and fine clothes, the four sights still troubled him

From this experience, Siddhartha decided to leave his life as a prince and set out to discover the cause of suffering and how the world works.

From his endeavors, which included travelling and learning from various wise people and meditating he eventually came to a point of complete understanding (he became awakened to what is important) of the nature of the world and the cause of and how to stop the suffering within it.

Buddhists follow the same approach that Prince Siddhartha did of seeking an understanding of the world and how to overcome its sufferings. But they are also guided by the knowledge left behind by Buddha himself. It's that level of knowledge they are aiming for in their search for truth. The **four sights** are four encounters described in the account of Prince Siddhartha's life which led to his realisation of the unhappiness in the human condition.

So, curiosity about the nature of human existence and the cause of suffering is a starting point for all Buddhists. Then gradually gaining knowledge through applying the investigative methods provided by Buddha leads them towards their own level of greater understanding of themselves and others.

This path of investigating and discovering the nature of existence and its meaning is now practiced all over the world by all kinds of people.