**The Life and Story of Siddhartha or the Buddha**

Buddhism is one of the world's oldest religions. At its core are the quests to understand life and to help people overcome their basic sufferings. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism traces its origins to the teachings of Shakyamuni, who is said to have lived some 2,500 years ago. Known as Siddhartha Gautama in his youth, at age 19, he was a royal heir in India. His palace life was far removed from the everyday life of common people. Siddhartha went outside the royal enclosure where he lived. When he went outside he saw, each for the first time, an old man, a sick man, and a corpse. This greatly disturbed him, and he learned that sickness, age, and death were the inevitable fate of human beings - a fate no-one could avoid. When he discovered how people suffered outside the palace walls, he set out to find out how to overcome the roots of basic human suffering.

Siddhartha had also seen a monk, and he decided this was a sign that he should leave his protected royal life and live as a homeless holy man. Siddhartha's travels showed him much more of the the suffering of the world. He searched for a way to escape the inevitability of death, old age and pain first by studying with religious men. This didn't provide him with an answer.

He made it his life's purpose to find solutions to the inescapable sufferings of life. He sought the foremost teachers of his day and practiced the extreme forms of asceticism they advocated as the means to realize the ultimate reality of life. Asceticism encourages a life of extreme self-denial and discipline. After following their teachings for several years, and on the point of death from fasting, Siddhartha realized that their path was too extreme. Siddhartha also practised meditation but concluded that in themselves, the highest meditative states were not enough.

He awakened to the wisdom of the "middle way," neither the extreme of austerity nor of indulgence. He abandoned the strict lifestyle of self-denial and ascetism, but did not return to the pampered luxury of his early life. Instead, he pursued the Middle Way, which is just what it sounds like; neither luxury nor poverty

After accepting food from a young girl, he sat down under the "Bodhi" (a pipal) tree. There he entered a profound meditation and finally attained enlightenment and became the Buddha, meaning the “enlightened one.” The Mahabodhi Temple at the site of Buddha's enlightenment is now a pilgrimage site. He began at once to teach anyone who would listen. He would engage admirer and objector alike in dialogue and discourse to convey his awareness and insight into the human condition. Buddha set in motion the wheel of teaching: rather than worshipping one god or gods, Buddhism centres around the timeless importance of the teaching, or the dharma.

For some forty years following his awakening at age 30, he imparted to others portions of his own enlightenment. During the final eight years of his life, he expounded his ultimate teachings, which were later compiled as the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra is unique among the teachings of Buddhism because it affirms that the attainment of enlightenment is possible for all people without distinction of race, gender, social standing or education. Buddhism, as epitomized in the Lotus Sutra, is a powerful, life-affirming, egalitarian and humanistic teaching.