When the Buddha left the palace

A life of self-denial

Siddhartha encountered an Indian ascetic who encouraged him to follow a life of self-denial and discipline.

The Buddha also practiced medication.

Siddhartha followed this life of extreme asceticism for six years, but this did not satisfy him either; he still had not escaped from the world of suffering.

The middle way

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 was neither luxury nor poverty.

Enlightenment

One day, seated beneath the Bodhi tree (the tree of awakening) Siddhartha became deeply absorbed in meditation, and reflected on his experience of life, determined to penetrate its truth. He finally became enlightened and became the Buddha. Buddhist legend tells that at first the Buddha was happy to dwell within this state, but brahma, king of the gods, asked, on behalf of the whole world, that he should share his understanding with others.

Teacher

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 the next 45 years of his life the Buddha taught many disciples, who became Arahats or ‘noble ones’, who had attained enlightenment for themselves.