

The Origins of Buddhism – Siddhartha Gautama

Background:

One of the world’s major religions was founded by a prince born in a small north Indian state in 563 B.C. According to Buddhist tradition, Siddhartha Gautama enjoyed a sheltered and delightful youth, full of luxury and comfort. At the age of 29, he ventured out beyond his palace and had a series of encounters that would change him profoundly and lead him on a six year spiritual quest, which resulted in him finally achieving a state of “enlightenment.” He spent the rest of his life teaching about his discovery and establishing a small but growing community of followers whose members came to see him as the *Buddha*, the Enlightened One.

You are going to read 3 passages from Buddhist texts about these encounters Siddhartha had. For each source, answer the following questions:

	Seeing Old Age	Seeing Sickness	Seeing the Dead
Who does he encounter?			
What does he ask his charioteer?			
What is his <i>reaction</i> to the charioteer’s response?			
How does this encounter affect him?			

Book III: Seeing Old Age

2. Having heard of the delightful appearance of the city **groves** beloved by the women, he resolved to go out of doors. 3. The king, having learned the character of the wish thus expressed by his son, ordered a **pleasure-party** to be prepared, worthy of his son's beauty and youth. 4. He **prohibited** the encounter of any afflicted common person in the highroad; 26. However, the gods, dwelling in pure abodes, having beheld that city thus rejoicing like heaven itself, created an old man to walk along on purpose to stir the heart of the king's son. 27. The prince having seen him overcome with decrepitude and different in form from other men, asked his driver. 28. "Who is this man that has come here, O **charioteer**, with white hair and his hand resting on a staff, his eyes hidden beneath his brows, his limbs bent down and hanging loose, is this a change produced in him or his natural state or an accident?" 29. Thus addressed, the charioteer revealed to the king's son the secret that should have been kept so carefully 30. "That is old age by which he is broken down, the ravisher of beauty, the ruin of vigor, the cause of sorrow, the destruction of delights." 32. Being thus addressed, the prince, startled, spoke these words to the charioteer, "What! will this evil come to me also?" and to him again spoke the charioteer: 33. "It will come without doubt by the force of time through multitude of years even to my long-lived lord; all the world knows that old age will destroy their comeliness and they are content to have it so." 34. Then he, the great-souled one, was deeply agitated when he heard of old age, like a bull who has heard the crash of a thunderbolt close by. 35. Drawing a long sigh and shaking his head, and fixing his eyes on that **decrepit** old man, and looking round he then uttered these distressed words: 37. "Since such is our condition, O charioteer, turn back the horses, go quickly home; how can I rejoice in the pleasure-garden, when the thoughts arising from old age overpower me?" 38. Then the charioteer at the command of the king's son turned the chariot back, and the prince lost in thought entered even that royal palace as if it were empty. 39. But when he found no happiness even there, as he continually kept reflecting, "old age, old age," then once more, with the **permission** of the king, he went out with the same arrangement as before.

Question:

What is the prince afraid will happen to him as he gets older? Describe what the prince sees that makes him think this.

Book III (part 2): Seeing Sickness

40. Then the same **deities** created another man with his body all afflicted by disease; and on seeing him the prince addressed the charioteer, having his gaze fixed on the man: 41. "Yonder man with a swollen belly, his whole body shaking as he breathes, his arms and shoulders hanging loose, his body all pale and thin, who, pray, is this?" 42. Then his charioteer answered, "Gentle Sir, it is a very great **affliction** called sickness, which has made even this strong man no longer master of himself." 43. Then the prince again addressed him, looking upon the man compassionately, "Is this evil peculiar to him or are all beings alike threatened by sickness?" 44. Then the charioteer answered, "O prince, this evil is common to all." 45. Having heard this account, his mind deeply distressed, he trembled like the moon reflected in the waves of water; and full of sorrow he uttered these words in a low voice: 46. "Even while they see all this calamity of diseases mankind can yet feel calm! 47. O charioteer, be turned back from going outside, let's return straight to the king's palace; having heard this alarm of disease, my mind shrinks into itself, **repelled** from pleasures." 48. Then having turned back, with all joy departed, he entered his home, **absorbed** in thought; 50. Once more the king arranged for his son all kinds of worldly enjoyments to their highest point; 51. But when his son found no pleasure in the several objects of the senses, sweet sounds and the rest, he gave orders for another progress outside, **thinking** to himself, "It may create a diversion of sentiment."

Questions:

What made the prince return to the palace?

What did the king do to try to stop his son's suffering?

Book III (part 3): Seeing the Dead

53. Then the royal road being specially **adorned** and guarded, the king once more made the prince go out, having ordered the charioteer and chariot to proceed in the opposite direction (to the previous one). 54. But as the king's son was thus going on his way, the very same deities created a dead man, and only the charioteer and the prince, and none else, saw him as he was carried dead along the road. 55. Then spoke the prince to the charioteer, "Who is this carried by four men, followed by **mournful** companions, who is adorned but no longer breathing?" 56. Then the driver, himself knowing the truth, uttered to his lord this truth also which was not to be told: 57. "This is some poor man who, bereft of his intellect, senses, vital airs and qualities, lying asleep and unconscious, like mere wood or straw, is **abandoned** alike by friends and enemies after they have carefully swathed and guarded him." 58. Having heard these words of the charioteer he was somewhat startled and said to him, "Is this an accident peculiar to him alone, or is such the end of all living creatures?" 59. Then the charioteer replied to him, "This is the final end of all living creatures; be it a mean man, a man of middle state, or a noble, destruction is fixed to all in this world." 60. Then the king's son, as soon as he heard of death, immediately sank down overwhelmed, and pressing the end of the chariot pole with his shoulder spoke with a loud voice, 61. "Is this end appointed to all creatures, and yet the world throws off all fear! 62. Therefore, O charioteer, turn back our chariot, this is no time or place for a pleasure-excursion; how can a rational being, who knows what destruction is, stay here, in the hour of **calamity**?"

Question:

Why does the prince become distraught?