

C: Hello everybody, and welcome to the 2<sup>nd</sup> episode of Buddhapod. I'm cat!

A: Hello, I'm Andrew, and today we'll be talking about the life of the Buddha.

c: When a lot of people think about the life of the Buddha, they just think about the part where he meditates for 49 days and he becomes enlightened and he's the Buddha, but actually he's a human being just like every one of us. And today I really want to go into before he became the Buddha the types of hardships that he endured and the types of decisions that he had to make that made him who he is today. And I think that those of you who are listening will really be able to hear a lot of parallels in your life, because it's a story of someone growing up I would say.

So how about Andrew you start, because we're both really familiar so lets talk about the first part of the story.

A: sure. So what I wanted to start with is that this is going to be a 2 episode sort of miniseries. Today we'll only get up to the point where the Buddha attains awakening and actually becomes the Buddha. So this is gonna cover his childhood as a prince, renouncing his palace life and becoming a wandering ascetic and begging for food, and then eventually meditating and practicing and then finding the middle way and becoming the Buddha. And the reason why we wanted to start with life of Buddha so early on in the podcast is because Venerable Master Hsing Yun, in the *Biography of Sakyamuni Buddha*, says that we can have a general understanding of what Buddhism is through the buddhas words and actions. And I think this is very true, by looking at the life of the Buddha, what he said what he taught and what he did, we can understand how the Buddha himself practiced and how we can use that as a model for our own practice.

I think we should start with the context in which the Buddha lived. And of course the Buddha lived in a time much much earlier than us, 2600+ yrs earlier, but there are a lot of things about this time that still hold true today. And although during the buddhas time he lived in ancient India where people were born into 4 social castes and so these castes were social positions that people were locked into because of beliefs at the time. And although we live in America and the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the land of the free where we are supposed to pursue the American dream, I think this issue of social inequality is very very much true today. I don't think theres any denying that people who are born into poverty are more or less stuck in that poverty and those who are born into wealth are generally going to be continuing that wealth. So even though the social context today is diff, its not too much diff and I think we still hold a lot of similarities and we can use that to understand the buddhas situation.

C: so I wanted to start with the childhood of the Buddha, because he was actually born into the 2<sup>nd</sup> social caste level, which is the rulers and the kings, and he was born to become the king someday. And with that comes great responsibility because during his time he had to study 7 subjects and he also had to be good at martial arts and archery and things like that, and his dad, King Śuddhodana, put a lot of pressure on him to do well because obviously he wants someone great as a leader. But Prince Siddhartha – that's Buddha's name before he renounced – he didn't crumble under the pressure of

having to do well all the time because he understood that this is his position, this is his role, but on the other hand I would see – people don't usually deal with pressure as well as he would have, so I think on the part of the Buddha he actually accepted this responsibility and earned his parents' trust, and when I read this part in his story, it really reminded me of me as a child of an immigrant – we have to fulfill these expectations our parents have for us because they made so many sacrifices. I don't know if - is that the same case for you Andrew?

A: oh yeah, it's totally the same case for me. So my parents are also 1<sup>st</sup> gen immigrants, they came over here after the Vietnam war and they made a lot of sacrifices along the way. So growing up I always felt that I had to make all of those sacrifices worth it and I really had to excel in school and get a good job to repay them for all of the things that they had to sacrifice over the years and bring us out of poverty and sort of change the family's future and all that, so it's a lot of pressure

C: yeah, and I feel like amongst all of that I kind of didn't feel like - sometimes it would be like, well this is my life and this isn't their life, why are they putting so much pressure on me to go to a good school, a name-brand school, but I think in hindsight they just want us to have a good future and this is something that the Buddha, or prince Siddhartha realized really early on, that's why he excelled at everything that he did, being this awesome prince.

A: yeah, and moving on though from that time in his childhood, there were also other times in his childhood, these were times when he saw what the world was like, and some of these times were very cool, so there were times when he would see birds eating worms that were freshly released after the plowing season so all of the soil would be tilled and worms would come out and birds would come to eat them. And so he saw how vicious parts of life were, and how it was a really cutthroat environment out there.

C: it's really like survival of the fittest, and during that - according to the book written by Venerable master, the *Biography of Sakyamuni Buddha*- I saw that he was wondering why it had to be this way, there was this endless cycle of competition and who survives who wins who loses, and so him observing that made him really uneasy and unsatisfied, and also going back to the caste system, it was during an archery competition I think he was viewing it with his father and he saw that the Sudra – the lowest caste – they had to be the servants and they had to be working in the fields and sweating while he and his father were just having a good time. This inequality was also unsettling to him because he didn't think that this was normal, and I think that throughout our lives we definitely can see a lot of these things.

A: oh yeah, I think looking back into my childhood there were definitely times early on when I noticed inequalities, I noticed that first of all some kids would have things that I didn't have, for ex I had always really wanted a Gameboy advance at the time and that wasn't something that I had until much much later on. and it was just because of financial diffs bw families, but then there were other things, like oh why does that person not necessarily have a lunch today, or why does that person always bring lunch from

home, and so there were things that as a kid I had noticed that there were differences amongst us students but I didn't necessarily know the causes behind it and I didn't know everything that led up to it, so a lot of times I would just ignore it or not quite understand the whole situation.

C: right, I think when it's not concerning us it's easy to ignore, and also adults will tell you this is the way it is, this is the status quo, so you shouldn't worry about these kinds of things like inequalities or unfairness but that wasn't the case in the case of the Buddha because he just thought a lot about it, but he didn't necessarily do something about it then, he just kept it in his mind and as he grew up into an adult that's still in his mind, like it never went away. And moving onto his next stage in his life is when he is starting to take the throne.

A: so as he's growing up his dad is the one that's shielding him from a lot of the negative parts of life, so the Buddha grew up as a very sheltered kid. His father the king is giving him all of these wonderful palaces and all of these wonderful environments to grow up in, so he's not really exposed to things like the death of close ones and things like that. And of course the Buddha's mom actually passed away 7 days after the Buddha was born, but that was at a time when the Buddha was still an infant and didn't necessarily register what was going on. So his dad had protected him from a lot of these things, and I think for any parent that's a very natural thing to do whether or not you're a protective king. As a parent you don't want your kids to necessarily see all of the terrible things that go on in the world. It's very instinctual for parents to cover their children or turn them away when a car accident happens because that's not something that they want their children to see. And I think at this part we can kind of understand where Siddhartha's father, King Śuddhodana, is coming from, and what his idea is.

C: yeah, he saw his dissatisfaction with the world around him and the only way that King Śuddhodana knew how to live his life was to be a king, so he was doing the best that he could to make sure that Siddhartha became the king that he will be in the future so he wants him to follow in his footsteps because that's where he has experience and while his methods are kind of questionable - King Śuddhodana basically threw dancing girls and temptations at him to make sure that he was never bored about anything materialistically - it didn't ease the Buddha of his dissatisfaction, but it did create the illusion that everything is ok and the palace is a constant thing, it'll always be this wonderful place where nothing bad ever happens in there.

A: but unfortunately that's not always true. So as he got older, there were times when he was finally allowed to leave the palace and just as things would have it, each time he left the palace he saw something different. so there were 4 times when he left the palace, and on these 4 trips he saw things like an old person, and upon seeing someone like that, which he had never really seen before, he would ask his chauffeur - well the chariot driver but chauffeur at the time - what is going on here? Who is that, why does the person have white hair, why is his back all crooked and why does he use a cane? And his chauffeur, his driver, would say to him, my prince that's an old man, your father's going to be like that one day, you are going to be like that one day. And upon hearing

this, it was a complete shock to him, because he had grown up in such a sheltered environment it never really occurred to him that at one stage in his life he would grow old and weak and decrepit and everybody he loved would also go through the same thing. The same thing happened with a sick man as he was walking through the city, he encountered a sick man and the same conversation happened, what is that whats going on here, and then that's a sick person your also going to end up like that someday, your family's going to end up like that someday, everybody you love is gonna get sick at some point, and so he was shocked by that too and then eventually coming across a dead body at a funeral and realizing that no matter what, everybody had to get old, get sick, and eventually pass away.

But it's on his last trip though that's the positive one because he saw a wandering ascetic, and you can kind of think of this as a monk in a sense, someone who lives an ascetic lifestyle sort of in the forest, meditates, has very spiritual practices, but not necessarily a buddhist monk because buddhist monks didn't exist at the time, but I think in our conception I think we can think of it as something rather similar. And so he saw a monk and he asked why this monk seemed so carefree and happy and the monk replied that he was on a spiritual journey and he was trying to find the end of suffering. And prince Siddhartha was really inspired.

C: yeah he definitely was. I think there was no one around him in his life that could do that for him, offer him that other way out – well not a way out but an alternate path for how his life could be, and I think upon seeing the four sights – or the first three – he realized that this world isn't permanent, it isn't going to be like partying all the time and there are in fact people that are suffering an all of these things are going on in the world, and that's what really – like you said, the inspiration that allowed him to really think about this path. And I think in our process of growing up theres going to be something like that, where theres going to be a big event that impacts your life where you think, oh I'm definitely going to do this, but it's keeping that motivation that is the hard part so there are some challenges that ensued for him when he went to go talk to his father about this.

A: definitely, and I think that tying it back to how I've been going through college right now, I think a lot of my experience has been going through school, going through this normal average lifestyle but then also thinking about these questions like well this still will happen, I'll still get old I'll still be sick I'll still pass away, and all of this is festering in my mind of course, but then what I wanted to focus on is actually the role model part, and I think it's always very helpful to have that sort of inspiration and have that sort of role model, and to be honest a lot of my role models are monastics, they are a lot of the Venerables that I meet at the temple because they do so much and they're so happy doing what they do that I'm just really taken aback by that and I'm really inspired, and I admire them.

C: yeah for sure, the Venerables at the temple don't get paid, they are working OT all of the time yet they don't look forward to the weekend because there is no weekend, they are always working but it's for the betterment of the devotees, the people and Buddhism in general so that is something that I definitely – a lot of my role models are Venerables

at temple as well, because they work tirelessly for other people their whole life, so that's something that to us is the equivalent of what the Buddha saw and he was really inspired and he wanted to pursue that. And he thought that that was the ultimate way to reaching happiness but also happiness for other people.

A: and so as prince Siddhartha is thinking of this after he's been inspired by this wandering ascetic, he's thinking of leaving the palace and becoming an ascetic himself, and so at this point he goes up to his father who's trying to get him to stay and he asks his father if he can be granted or at least guaranteed that he won't die, that he won't get old, he won't get sick, and that all of his possessions would stay with him. And this wasn't something that his father even as king could guarantee and upon realizing that the prince says well then you can't really keep me here.

C: I think at this point in the story what I really saw is that he realizes that his father can't do everything for him, and the Buddha he decides he's going to help himself, he's going to change and go on this path and it's definitely not a path popular with the palace because they're losing an heir to the throne. And I think that sometimes in the midst of meeting our parents' expectations and their wishes for us, we have to realize what we're passionate about and really just go with it, or go with your passion and not be limited by the parents because in Buddha's time there wasn't a Buddha yet, there was no one to do that job for him or anyone he could look to except maybe the ascetics in society, so he had to go to pursue his dream, and he felt so strongly that he's going to leave everything behind and go find the ultimate truth.

A: mhm, and so upon deciding this, he ends up leaving his wife and newborn child to become an ascetic and I think this part sounds really odd to a lot of people but it sounds like the Buddha is just having a midlife crisis and running away from home, but we have to really remind ourselves that this wasn't an easy choice for him, he didn't just drop everything and run. He really thought about this for a really really long time and decided that it was the best decision not just for himself but for the people around him too because he wanted to find the solution for all of them.

C: and I think being sheltered for so long, like being sheltered in the palace really made him realize that this isn't the life that he wanted. The easier path would have been to stay in the palace and take over his responsibility, what he thought his responsibility was when he was younger, but he decides to revolutionize himself and go through with this crazy plan. People thought of this plan as a crazy plan, they didn't think that – how could you give up being a prince? And I'd like to remind everyone that this is a place of privilege, like it's good to be a prince, you'll live a good life, but his compassion towards others was so strong that he couldn't just leave them behind, he couldn't just not care about those things, so that's why he decided to do this – not because he doesn't love his wife and newborn son, but because he cares about all \_\_\_\_ (23:11) human beings, like he has a compassionate heart towards all \_\_\_\_ beings, therefore he decided to make this very hard decision.

A: when he becomes and ascetic and when he goes off into the forest, he's going from being really high up in society, being a prince to being a beggar. He doesn't know where his next meal is going to come from because it depends on whether or not the villagers give him anything the next day. So he's really leaving a lot of his life behind.

C: and I feel like being from that high of a status to lowering your status, it takes a lot of strength to lower your pride and beg for food when before his life was servants, they come at the snap of a finger, so I feel like that's also an interesting parallel to in our lives when we are the babies of the house but then when we go out into society we're treated diff because not everything is about us anymore. I mean I have siblings, so I'm not really that sheltered and I'm not really the baby of the house, but I know that Andrew is an only child, so would you mind sharing your experience with us?

A: oh yes, thank you for the jab at my only-childness. Shout out to any only children who are listening to this. Because I definitely felt that, so I grew up as an only child, definitely spoiled, definitely got everything that I wanted, all of my cousins are like yeah your spoiled, which yeah I am

C: must be nice

A: but then when I started volunteering at the temple I wasn't special anymore, I was put to do things that I never had to do around the house, so actually one day the Venerable asked me if I could help mow the lawn and I looked at him and he saw my face and he said pls don't tell me you've never mowed the lawn before. And I told him I'm sorry but I've never mowed the lawn before. And he shook his head and was like well I guess your learning something new today.

C: oh wow

A: he was like let me show you

C: yeah it's like being thrown into a whole new environment there

A: but it was definitely very uncomfortable for me at first to go to a new place and be completely unfamiliar with the things that I was doing there and all of the chores I had to do around the temple and all the positions I was put in at the temple, and then I do feel like it was really helpful for me though because it built me up to who I am today and I think me myself this is true to a very small extent but to the Buddha as he was going through his ascetic practice he was letting go of all of these habits that he had accumulated as a prince and all of the expectations that he had as a prince, and just letting go of all of these one by one by one. And as he's doing so he's also learning from a lot of teachers, learning things like meditation and a lot of the other spiritual practices at the time.

C: right, and that requires really strong mental power. You really need to be strong. Ascetic practice is really hard on the body because at the time he was eating one grain of rice per day and he also had to be strong mentally so that he wouldn't collapse and

that reminds me of Olympic athletes. So the winter Olympics was recently in February, and a lot of these athletes when they share their story they talk about the training they had to go through, the training and the discipline, and I kind of question what is this all for, but it's for that one day when they can earn a medal, and this is the kind of strength that's comparable but I feel like is really just I can't even imagine because I don't live in a place where there's food scarcity or anything, so that part of the story really inspires me because the easier way out would be to just return to the palace and tell his dad yeah you were right, this is really hard, but he pulled through and eventually - spoiler alert - he realizes that this is not the right way, he realized that the middle way is actually the ultimate path to liberation. It's just that this is a necessary part for him to become who he is today.

A: yeah, so at this point when he realizes that he's not going to become awakened through self starvation and essentially self torture, he decides to accept an offering of rice porridge from a local shepherd girl and in doing so he starts eating again, he starts bathing, he starts regaining his energy, and lives a very moderate lifestyle, and I think this stage really shows the importance of being able to accept someone's help too.

C: sometimes I feel like we get tunnel vision like when you're trying to do something, achieving a goal per se, like you're trying to say "oh I did this all by myself, and I wanna achieve this and achieve that," but in Buddha's case this was at a time when he had no physical strength and he really did have to accept that porridge, but it doesn't mean that he's any less than the person who is offering it to him, because without Buddha accepting the porridge, the shepherd girl could not have offered this porridge to the Buddha-to-be. So they're equal in that case and I think that accepting someone's help is not a bad thing, it helps us realize that we're all relying on each other for things to be done and it's not something that we should turn away from, like it's okay to rely on other people and not be self-reliant all the time.

A: mhm, if we were self-reliant this podcast wouldn't exist, and I think that's a very good example of that, all of the things that go into this podcast, all of the things that keep it going, we don't live in a vacuum.

So after accepting the offering we slowly move to the climax of the story and the Buddha having now regained his energy sits down under the bodhi tree and starts to meditate. And as he's doing so, Mara, which is often translated as the demon which is essentially a personification of his inner fears and doubts and all these things coming out, starts to attack him. And so Mara starts by offering him lots of rewards like think of all the power that you'll have if you just leave and go back, think of all the wealth and all the companionship, all of these people are waiting for you at the palace and you'll live so happily, but the Buddha looks at all of these and thinks they're not permanent anyway and so those fade away. And then he gets hit with a bunch of threats, like oh if you don't leave I'm going to kill you, I'm going to do this, I'm going to hurt you and all of these things, all these fears, but the Buddha also is not moved. And I think this really reminds me of a really high stress situation where we have a lot of self-doubt and we think oh I should just quit, I shouldn't be here, I shouldn't be here, and a lot of times this

is usually during an exam, during a test, or even during a performance when I'm just so terrified and I'm creating my own stress, my own fear at that point.

C: yeah, we put a lot of mental walls up because in our perception we don't think that this is going to be done, we put a lot of stress on ourselves, and I think that those fears are really just based on our attachment to the result and our attachment to are other people gonna like this or am I gonna do well, but in the long run – and it's also very shortsighted, so I guess my point is Buddha saw through this because he saw in the long run, in the really big picture, these things don't matter anyway, so that's how he was able to conquer and that's how he was not fazed by all of these things because obviously all these temptations are tempting but he sees that this is only right now, it's only for a short amount of time, but he could change his perspective and realize that in the big pic reaching enlightenment is his goal and he's not gonna let these inner fears stop him.

A: and so I think this is also – there's another aspect that people can relate to and that's the point where all of these fears fall away and for me this is the other part of the test when once I get into the test once I start filling in bubbles or writing in the answers and things r coming to me I get to a state of focus where I'm only focusing on the test, I'm going to answer the questions, I'm going to do all of this, and I'm going to finish it. And once I switch my attention to that, all of these fears sort of drown themselves out and they become part of the background noise and I work through it and I conquer this test, I'm done, I turn it in, and hopefully ill do the same thing tomorrow when I do my final. Finals season is rough

C: it is definitely - that week I think my eye bags went three shades darker, it's so bad. As you were talking about that though I was thinking about – let's use this final exam as an example. I feel like the Buddha did his homework, he did his studying, so all of that ascetic practice, the meditation, he did his studying b4 the test so when the test comes, he's not - there's that initial anxiety but he's not afraid when it comes. But you know I don't study so like – I just get the test I freak out and theres nothing i can do if you do badly on it. So I think the Buddha's story is also a story of diligence and perseverance like you really have to keep your initial mind and make sure that all of your conditions are right for your success. So it is all in your control it's not because the test is too hard, it's not because the prof is unfair, you really gotta do your own homework.

A: and it's something that I think is very similar to Buddhism in that no one can do it for you, no one can study for you, no one can prepare for this for you. you have to do that work yourself and it really pays off in the long run because once you do put in all of that effort it shows on the exam, it shows on that final paper, and you're able to succeed when the time comes.

C: yeah, definitely. Okay so this -

A: we have Sakyamuni, his enlightenment or his awakening.

C: yeah this is actually going to be a 2 part miniseries so next episode, we'll talk about how he taught and his life after enlightenment.

A: yeah and so before we close for the day I just wanted to say thank you to all of our fans, we hit 101 likes within a week of this podcast being released, I am so grateful for all the warm support that has come from all of you.

C: thank you so much. I was really surprised and i know some of my friends are listening and I just cant thank everyone enough for the support. Again if you have any questions or comments feel free to email us or leave us a message on our Facebook page we really appreciate it

A: And again this is Buddha pod.

C: I'm Catherine

A: I'm Andrew, see you next week!

C: Bye!