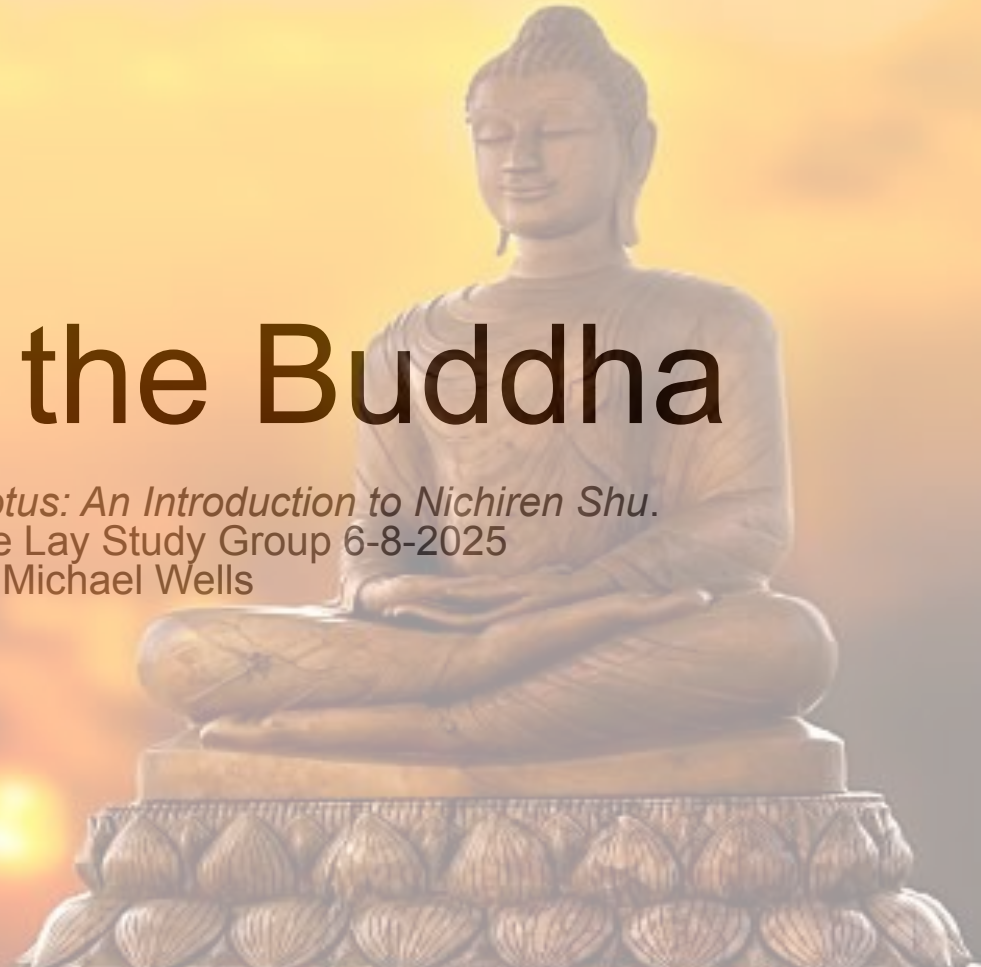


The Life of the Buddha

Chapter 3 of *Awakening to the Lotus: An Introduction to Nichiren Shu*.
Nichiren Buddhist Temple Lay Study Group 6-8-2025
Presenter: Michael Wells



Early life



- Born April 8th around the year 500 BCE to the Sakya clan in northern India
- He was a prince whose father sheltered him from life's harsh realities, forcing him to reside in the royal palace
- As a young man, Siddhartha Gautama snuck out of the palace and observed the *four sightings*.
- The first three sightings were of old age, disease, and death, which he had never encountered before
- The fourth was of an ascetic dedicated to a contemplative life
- Siddhartha was moved by these sightings to give up his royal inheritance and attempt to overcome suffering
- He secretly left the palace and began his search for enlightenment

Student days



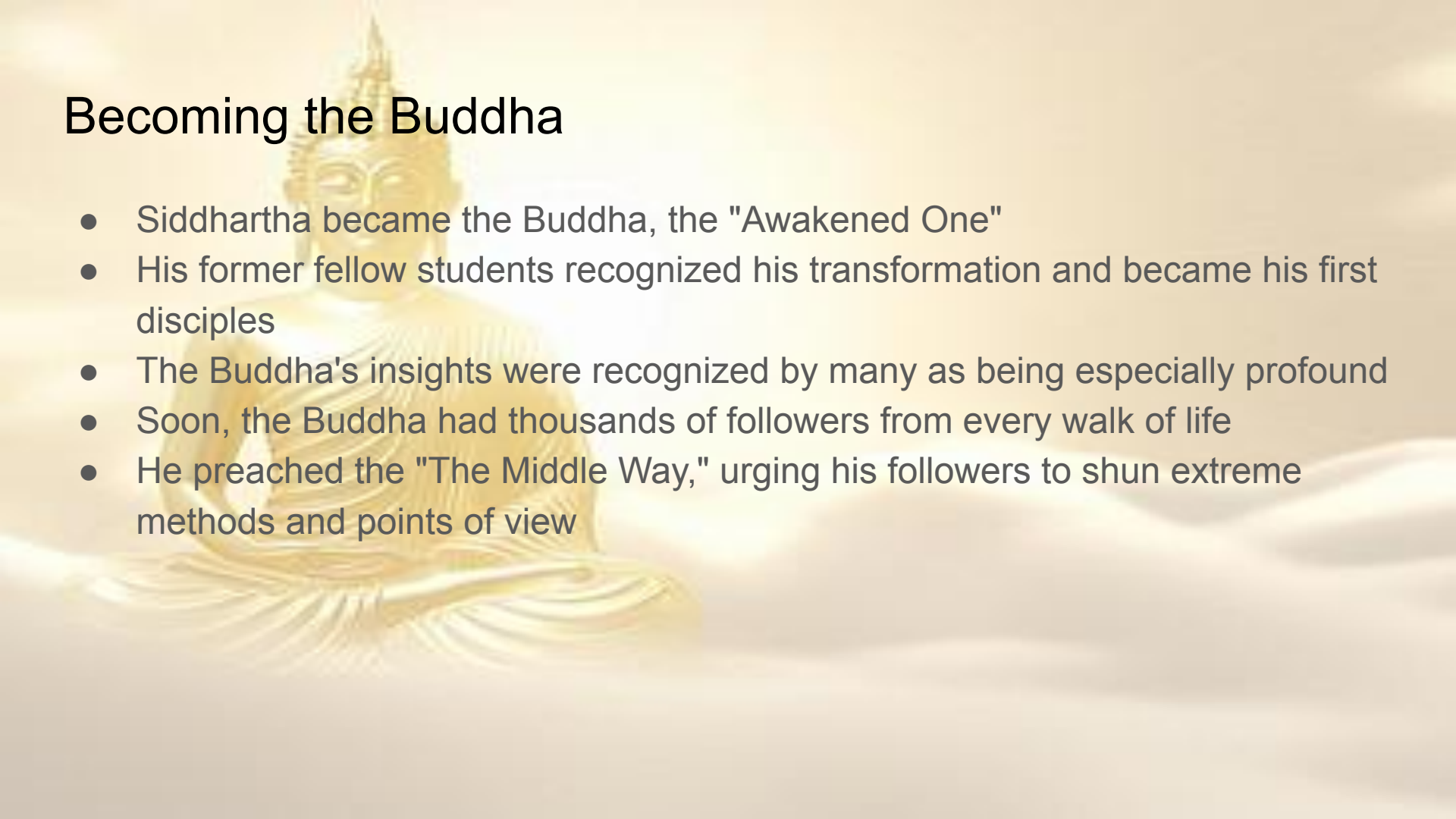
- Siddhartha sought out a reputable guru and studied under him
- He rapidly learned all the guru knew, and, unsatisfied, sought out another guru
- Once again, he learned all the guru knew, so he and five other students left to achieve enlightenment on their own
- They chose to practice asceticism, forgoing worldly pleasure, as was common at the time
- Siddhartha became weak from lack of food and nearly starved to death, but was saved by the daughter of a lowly herder
- This experience taught him that asceticism was not the path to enlightenment

Achieving enlightenment



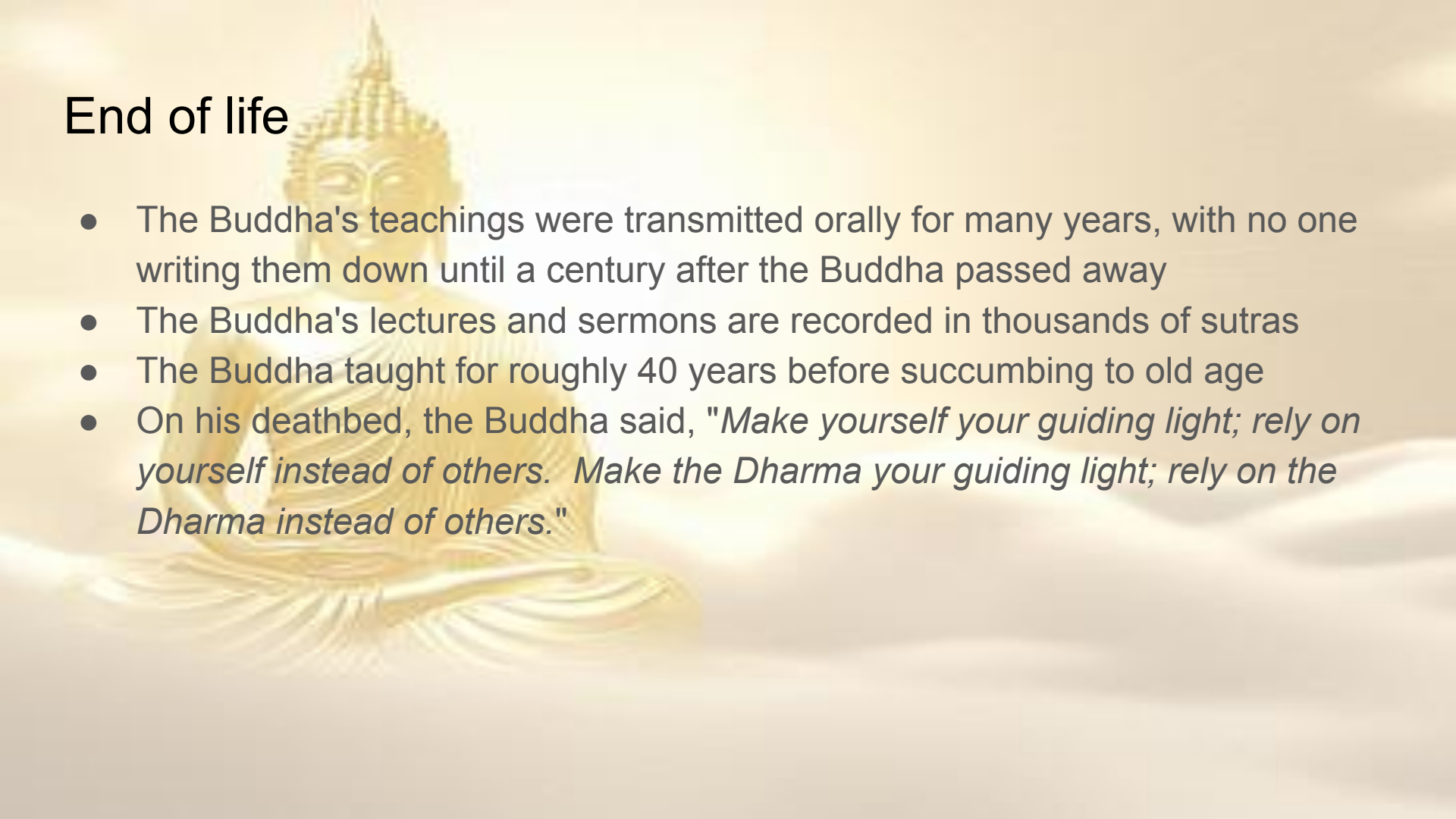
- The Buddha meditated beneath the Bodhi tree for a long span of time
- His former fellow students encountered him, noticed he had discontinued his practice of asceticism, and held him in contempt for what they assumed was abandoning the path to enlightenment
- One night during his meditation, he encountered Mara, "the Evil One," the embodiment of human frailties like egoism, doubt, hedonism, hatred, and ignorance
- Siddhartha overcame his demons and consequently realized the laws of the universe, including the law of cause and effect, or *karma*
- He understood that entities do not have independent existence, but instead depend on all other entities in the universe
- He also came to understand the reasons for, causes of, and path to ending suffering

Becoming the Buddha



- Siddhartha became the Buddha, the "Awakened One"
- His former fellow students recognized his transformation and became his first disciples
- The Buddha's insights were recognized by many as being especially profound
- Soon, the Buddha had thousands of followers from every walk of life
- He preached the "The Middle Way," urging his followers to shun extreme methods and points of view

End of life



- The Buddha's teachings were transmitted orally for many years, with no one writing them down until a century after the Buddha passed away
- The Buddha's lectures and sermons are recorded in thousands of sutras
- The Buddha taught for roughly 40 years before succumbing to old age
- On his deathbed, the Buddha said, "*Make yourself your guiding light; rely on yourself instead of others. Make the Dharma your guiding light; rely on the Dharma instead of others.*"



Selected parables from *The Lotus Sutra*

- The parable of the burning house in Chapter 3:
- A rich man owns a house in which his children are playing. A fire breaks out, but the children are so distracted by their toys that they do not hear the man yelling "Fire!" The man devises a plan to promise his children even better toys to play with if they exit the house. He saves his children in this way
- The burning house represents the world afflicted with old age, disease, and death
- The children are sentient beings distracted by the daily routines of life who do not sense danger
- The Buddha leads sentient beings to enlightenment by promising them Nirvana

Selected parables from *The Lotus Sutra*

- The parable of the poor son in Chapter 4:
- A son is intimidated by his wealthy father and runs away from home, becoming destitute
- Many years pass, and the son ends up working for his father in a lowly position. The son does not realize that his boss is his father
- The father understands he cannot tell his son the truth immediately, so he uses skillful means to help his son develop as a person for many years
- The father on his deathbed finally reveals to his son that he is his father, and that the son will inherit his wealth. At this point, the son is ready to hear the truth
- The wealthy man is the Buddha using skillful means to gradually lead a struggling follower to the truth
- It emphasizes skillful, indirect methods that meet students where they are and gradually raise their level of understanding over time

Selected parables from *The Lotus Sutra*

- The parable of the magic city in Chapter 5:
- A leader takes his people on a difficult journey to obtain rare treasures
- His people grow tired part-way through and wish to turn back
- To compensate for this, the leader conjures a magic city nearby and suggests that this is the end of their journey
- His people travel the short distance to the city. There, they rest and are refreshed. The leader then dispels the city, and the people are able to continue the rest of the way
- The Buddha will "conjure" lesser teachings that are meant to bring followers closer to the ultimate goal of awakening
- This is necessary so that students of Buddhism won't become discouraged by the difficulty of their practice and abandon it

References

- Watanabe, Hoyo. *Awakening to the Lotus: An Introduction to Nichiren Shu*. Nichiren Buddhist International Center, 2003
- Reeves, Gene. *The Lotus Sutra: Translation and Introduction*. Wisdom Publications, 2008

