The distinct characteristic of the Buddha is that he was a human being with no connection with a God or any other supernatural being. He was a man, but an extra-ordinary man (*accariya manussa*). He was beyond the human state inwardly though living the life of a human being outwardly.

The Buddha says *“Even as, monks, a lotus grown in water, stood above, un-smeared by water, so the Tathāgata, monks, born and grown up in the world, yet lives the world without coming together with the world.”*

There are three values of paramount importance that emerge from the life of the Buddha – renunciation, love and compassion, and wisdom. These values stand out very clearly in many episodes throughout his life.

It is no coincidence that these three, taken together, are the essential requisites for the attainment of Enlightenment. According to the Buddha’s teaching, there are three afflictions which cause us to be reborn in the cyclical existence namely, attachment, aversion and ignorance. These afflictions are eliminated by the correctives of renunciation, love and compassion, and wisdom, respectively.

**1) Renunciation**

* Renunciation is the recognition that all existences are permeated by suffering and it causes us to look for something more or something different.
* At the age of seven, while watching the annual ploughing proceedings, the young prince noticed a worm being devoured by a bird. This casual observation led Siddhartha to contemplate the realities of life – to recognize the inescapable fact that all living beings kill one another to survive, and that is a great source of suffering.
* Seeing an old man, a sick man and a corpse led him to develop a sense of detachment from the ephemeral pleasures of this world and prompted him to seek the ultimate truth about existence.
* It is important to note that the prince’s renunciation was not prompted by despair occurring in the ordinary course of life. He enjoyed the greatest possible happiness and privilege known in his day, and yet he recognized the suffering inherent in sentient existence and realized that, no matter how much we may indulge ourselves in pleasures of the senses, eventually we must face the realities of old age, sickness and death.
* He was encouraged by the fourth sight, that of an ascetic and was moved to renounce the life of a householder and to seek ultimate truth for the benefit of all living beings.

**2) Love and Compassion**

* Buddha’s early manifestation of the attitude of love and compassion can be seen in the episode of the wounded swan.
* Once the prince and his cousin Devadatta were wandering in the park that surrounded the royal residence when Devadatta shot down a swan with his bow and arrow. Both youths ran toward where the swan had fallen, but Siddhartha, being the faster runner, reached the place first. The young prince gathered the wounded bird up in his arms and sought to allay its suffering.
* Devadatta reacted angrily to this, insisting that the swan belonged to him, inasmuch as he had shot it down. The youths took their dispute to the wise man of the court, who decided to award the bird to Siddhartha on the ground that life rightly belongs to him who would preserve it and not to him who would destroy it.

* Another example is the Buddha took it upon himself to nurse the ailing monk Tissa. He was attacked by a malignant skin disease, and his body became so offensive that he was put aside and left uncared for. The Buddha resolved to lead by example, personally cleaned and cared for Tissa’s diseased and decaying body, thereby alleviating his suffering.

It was when the monk was clothed in dry garments with his body refreshed and his mind calm, that he received the teaching about the body from the Buddha. He then attained Arahantship and died.

**3) Wisdom**

* Wisdom opens the door to freedom, and it removes ignorance, the fundamental cause of suffering. It is said that while one may sever the branches of a tree and even cut down its trunk, if the root is not removed, the tree will grow again.

Similarly, one may remove attachment by means of renunciation, and aversion by means of love and compassion, as long as ignorance is not removed by means of wisdom, attachment and aversion are liable to rise again.

* The principal instrument through which wisdom may be gained is meditation.
* The Buddha precocious skill in concentrating the mind is evident in his early life. Immediately after witnessing the unhappy incident involving the worm and the bird at the ploughing ceremony, the prince sat under a nearby rose-apple tree to mediate, achieving the first level of meditation by concentrating his mind on inhalation and exhalation.
* When he renounced the householder life, he studied meditation under two renowned teachers Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta. But he left them in question because he found that meditation alone could not permanently put an end to suffering. It has to combine with wisdom.
* For Buddhism meditation is like sharpening a pencil. We sharpen a pencil in order to write. Similarly, by means of meditation we sharpen the mind for a definite purpose that is wisdom
* The relationship between meditation and wisdom has also been explained with the help of the example of a torch. Suppose we want to see a picture on the wall of a darkened room with the aid of a torch. If the light cast by the torch is too dim, or if the hand holding the torch is unsteady, it is impossible to see the picture clearly.

Similarly, if we want to penetrate the darkness of ignorance and see into the real nature of existence, we will be unable to do so if our minds are weak, distracted and unsteady as a consequence of habitual indolence, emotional and intellectual disturbances.

* On the night of his Enlightenment, he made his mind concentrated, one-pointed, by means of meditation, directed it to the understanding of the real nature of things and comprehended the truth.
* Another dimension of wisdom exemplified in the life of the Buddha is the understanding of the Middle Path – the avoidance of the extremes of indulgence in pleasures of the sense and tormenting the body.

This is illustrated in the life of the Buddha by his very own career and experience. Before his renunciation of the life of a householder, Siddhartha enjoyed a life of luxury and sensual pleasure. Later, when he renounced, he spent six years practising self-mortification.

Eventually, he understood the futility of such practices as well as the meaninglessness of his former life of indulgence, and discovered the Middle Way.

**Other important episodes in the life of the Buddha are:-**

**4) Omniscience of Buddha**

* Twice a day the Buddha ‘surveys the world’ and extends his ‘net of knowledge’ over all. At Sāvatthi, on surveying the world in the morning, he observed at Âlaví a poor farmer who was ripe for conversion. He therefore decided to go and preach there.

The farmer’s ox had strayed away and he was all day in finding it. Nevertheless he decided to go and pay his respects to Buddha and set off without taking food. At Âlavi, Buddha with the monks had received a meal, but he waited until the farmer come before returning thanks which consisting of giving a discourse. On the farmer’s arrival, Buddha ordered that he should first receive some food. After seeing that his wants were relieved and his mind had become tranquil, Buddha gave him a discourse on the Four Truths and established him in the fruit of entering the stream.

* A similar story is told of a weaver’s daughter, who three years ago heard a discourse from Buddha on meditation on death. Hearing that Buddha was going to preach again at Âlaví she wished to go, but she had first to finish a task for the father.

For her sake, Buddha had come thirty leagues, and he waited for her before preaching as he had done for the poor farmer. He knew that her death was at hand, and he wished her to be converted so that she is certain of her future state.

Owing to her previous meditation she was able to answer questions that the others did not understand, and attainted the stage of entering the stream. When she returned home, she was accidentally struck and killed by the falling part of the loom.

**5) Seduction of Mara’s Daughter**

* At Kosambi, a brahmin wanted to offer his daughter Māgandiya to Buddha, but in vain.

In Māgandiya sutta, Buddha tells how he had escaped from the seduction of Mara’s daughters:-

*Having seen Craving, Aversion and Lust,*

*No desire had I for the pleasures of love;*

*That body filled with urine and dung*

*Even with my foot I did not wish to touch.*

**6) Plough and Sow**

* At the village of Ekanālā in the Magadha country, a brahmin farmer Kasibhāradvāja was ploughing and distributing food. Buddha came and stood for alms, but the brahmin said, *“I plough and sow, and having done so I eat. Do you, ascetic, plough and sow and then eat?”*

Buddha replied that he did so, and the farmer said, *“We do not see Gotama’s yoke or plough or plough-share or goad or oxen.”* Buddha replied in verses:-

*“Faith is the seed, penance the rain,*

*Wisdom is my yoke and plough;*

*Modesty the pole, mind the yoke-tie,*

*Mindfulness is my ploughshare and goad.*

*Guarded in action, guarded in speech,*

*Restrained in food and eating,*

*I make truth my hoe to cut away,*

*Tenderness is my deliverance.*

*Exertion is my beast of burden*

*That bears me to the state of peace,*

*Without turning back it goes,*

*Where having gone, one grieves not.*

*Even so is this ploughing plough;*

*Its fruit is the immortal,*

*Having ploughed this ploughing*

*One is freed from all pain.”*

**7) Uplift women’s status**

* In ancient India, women were treated as low caste. The Buddha did not humiliate women, but only regarded them as feeble by nature.
* Woman holds an honourable place and plays an important role in Buddhism. Being filial to mother is regarded as a convenient ladder to ascend to heaven and wife is considered the best friend of the husband.
* With persistence and determination, Mahapajapati Gotami pleaded for the admission of women into the Sangha. At first Buddha refused to the request but later gave in to Ananda’s intervention and founded the order of nuns. Thus, the first society for women with rules and regulations was formed and the status of women was lifted.
* The sutta mentioned the great part played by women such as Ambapāli and Visākhā who was responsible for the conversion of all the members of her in-law’s family to Buddhism.

**References:**

**(1) The Life of Buddha by Edward J. Thomas**

**(2) The Tree of Enlightenment by Peter Della Santina**