

AVOID BAD INFLUENCES

Question before the story: Has a friend ever persuaded you to do something and after you did it you found it was a bad idea?

THE CROCODILE WHO WAS AFRAID TO SAY “NO”

The king of the monkeys, a big and strong monkey, lived near a river. In the river, a big crocodile lived with his wife. One day the wife crocodile was very hungry, and she heard that the heart of a monkey was a delicious delicacy. She said to her husband, “My dear, I want to try that wonderful delicacy, monkey’s heart. I want a nice big one, from the king of the monkeys.” The husband crocodile said, “My dear wife, I live in the water, and he is on land. How can I catch him?” The wife whined, “Somehow, he must be caught -- if I don’t get him, I’ll die.”

The husband was worried about trying to catch that big monkey. He thought it was not a very good idea. But, he thought, “She might be unhappy with me if I don’t do what she wants.” He imagined how disappointed she would look if he told her “no.” Maybe she would even be angry with him. So he did not want to tell her “no.” Instead, he said, “OK, don’t be upset. I have a plan. I’ll give you a heart to eat.” He imagined how happy she would look if he gave her the monkey heart.

The monkey king went to the river bank to drink water. The husband crocodile swam up to him and asked, “Sir monkey, why do you live on bad fruits in this muddy place? On the other side of the river are wonderful mangos, very sweet fruits! Isn’t it better to cross the river and eat good fruit?” The monkey king replied, “Dear crocodile, the river is deep and wide. How can I get across?” The crocodile suggested, “If you want to go, get on my back and I’ll carry you.” The monkey king agreed, so the crocodile said, “Come here, then, climb on my back.” The monkey king got on his back, and the crocodile glided out toward the middle of the river.

Then the crocodile twisted his back, so the monkey was up to his chin in water. The monkey cried, “My friend, you are letting me sink! Why are you letting me drown?” The crocodile snarled, “You think I am carrying you because of my pure heart? No. My wife wants to eat your heart and I am going to get it!” The monkey king thought quickly, and brightly responded, “Oh, dear friend, how nice of you to tell me. What do you think would happen to our hearts if we jump around the trees while our heart jumps around in our chest? If monkey’s hearts were inside us when we go jumping around the trees, it would bounce out and break into pieces.” The crocodile was surprised, and asked, “Where do you keep it?” The monkey king pointed to a fig tree, with clusters of ripe figs hanging from it, and said, “See, there are all the monkey hearts hanging. We hang them there.”

The crocodile, remembering what his wife had requested, said, “Well, if you show me your heart, I won’t kill you.” The monkey, still on the crocodile’s back in the river, urged him, “Take me to the tree and I’ll point it out.” The crocodile carried him to the riverbank, and the monkey jumped off his back and quickly climbed up a tree. He scolded the crocodile, “Silly crocodile, You thought monkeys keep their hearts in trees! I have outwitted you. You keep your mango fruit to yourself, I don’t need mangos. I am happy and content with figs. They are good enough

for me.” The crocodile felt miserable. He had thought that he could do what the wife crocodile wanted, but he had to return to her with nothing, having been fooled by the monkey.

Questions:

1. What did the wife crocodile want?
2. What was she trying to do to her husband when she said “Somehow, he must be caught -- if I don’t get him, I’ll die.”
3. What did the husband think about when she said that?
4. Why didn’t the husband crocodile just say “no” when she asked for the monkey heart?
5. Do you think the crocodile would have tried to kill the monkey if the wife crocodile didn’t ask for the monkey heart?
6. How did the husband crocodile feel at the end of the story?

Quotation of the Buddha:

“Those who see something to fear where there is nothing to fear,
and see nothing to fear when there is something to fear,
with wrong views, they go to states of unhappiness.”

Dhammapada 317

Discussion of avoiding bad influence of others:

When the wife crocodile said “Somehow, he must be caught -- if I don’t get him, I’ll die,” the husband crocodile thought she would be disappointed or angry. Do you think he was afraid of her? Yes, he was afraid that if he refused to get the monkey heart for her, she would criticize him, insult him or be angry with him. Maybe he was afraid that she would be unkind or not like him anymore. He was afraid of saying “no” to her. Do you think he was afraid of catching the monkey? Yes, he was worried about trying to catch the monkey. Why was he afraid? Maybe he was afraid of getting hurt trying to catch the monkey. Maybe he was afraid of feeling embarrassed if he couldn’t catch him. Maybe he was afraid of doing something that is wrong, killing the monkey. But what was he more afraid of, his wife or killing the monkey? He was more afraid of his wife being disappointed or angry with him than of killing the monkey. He saw something to fear in saying “no” to his wife -- he was afraid of saying “no” to his wife -- when there really should be nothing to fear. He should not be afraid to just say “no” and persuade her that it is a bad idea. At first he tried -- he said “I live in the water, and he is on land, how can I catch him?” but then he gave up. He didn’t try to persuade her. He didn’t feel much fear in trying to kill the monkey, when there was something he should be afraid of, there was something to fear: killing another being is really something to fear – you will get a very bad result from such a bad action. So, he did the wrong thing and ended up being very unhappy.

Have you ever been afraid to say “no” to someone? Has anyone ever dared you to do something and you didn’t want others to think you are afraid? Has anyone ever told you to do something that might offend someone, but you felt pressured to do it? Has a friend ever told you to do

something that you thought was wrong, but you thought that your friend might not like you as much if you didn't do it?

A person may be afraid to do something risky, and persuade you to do it. A person may want something and they don't want to get caught, so they try to talk you into doing it. Or the person may want to find out if you are brave enough to do something. Sometimes a classmate might ask you to do something wrong, hoping that you will get caught and they can enjoy seeing you get in trouble. Should you just do it?

We have a healthy fear – a good fear – of doing wrong. We have a compassionate good fear of hurting or offending someone else. We have a natural good fear of harming ourselves. That good fear protects us from doing wrong things; it protects us from hurting ourselves or others. But sometimes we might think it is more important to please a friend or classmate than to do what is safer and really better for ourselves. We imagine that she will smile and like us more if we do what she wants. We might even persuade ourselves that it will be fun, when deep inside we worry that it might be a mistake. That means we are making our good protective fear go away. And we have instead an unhealthy fear of a friend or classmate rejecting us or getting angry at us if we don't do what they want. This is a wrong view; we get confused about what is really the right thing to do, and what is really the wrong thing to do.

So we need to pay close attention to these situations. Avoid letting another person talk you into doing something which you have not carefully considered, or which you think is a bad idea. Think carefully before you act. Are you like the husband crocodile, worried that the wife crocodile would be disappointed in him if he didn't do what she wants him to do? Are you worried that your friend will reject you or think you are weak or afraid if you don't do it? Is there a chance that you may hurt someone if you do it? Are you going to risk getting hurt yourself? Might you get in trouble if you do it?

When we find ourselves in that kind of situation, we should say "no." But sometimes we might feel uncomfortable just saying "no." It might be difficult to say "no" when we are unsure whether to do it or not, or when the person might question us and make us feel embarrassed. How do we say "no" in a way that is doesn't sound awkward? What if the person gets angry when we say "no"? What if he keeps insisting that we do it? What if we don't have a good explanation of why we don't want to do it? It might be easy to say "no" when it is obvious that we shouldn't do it. But there are other times when it is not so easy to say "no." It is good to observe how other people say "no" in different situations, so we can learn to feel comfortable whenever we need to say "no."

Group Activity:

Students divide into pairs and each pair demonstrates to the rest of the class how to say "no" in different situations. The first student from the pair thinks of something that is not a good idea, and then tells the other to do it. The other student refuses to do it, saying words (not just the word "no") that are appropriate to the situation. The first student then tries to pressure the other student to do it anyway. The other student continues to resist. Then the two students swap roles. The teacher and class can give feedback on whether each student was effective in refusing to agree.

If needed, suggestions of “bad ideas” for the first student are: “Can I copy your homework?” “Ask your friend for some money,” “Push her out of the way,” “Just make up a lie so she will leave us alone,” “Take his book - he won’t notice,” “Make her carry the big bag.”

Individual Activity:

Make a small poster with a list of 20 different ways to say “no.” Suggestions are “I don’t think that’s a good idea,” “I don’t want to do that,” “Why are you asking *me* to do it?” “I don’t feel like doing that,” “We might get in trouble,” “No way!” “Are you crazy?” “Don’t ask me to do that,” “that is just wrong,” “I am not going to do something that I think is wrong,” and “Bad idea.”