

Lesson 14 – AVOID POSSESSIVENESS

Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.

Question to think about before the story: If we own many nice things, will that make us happy?

Story: Bhaddiya the Happy Monk

After the Buddha came to Kapilavasthu, many princes of the Sakya clan had become Buddhist monks. But two princes who were brothers, Mahanama and Anuruddha, had not. They were living in their palaces, enjoying entertainment. Mahanama one day said to Anuruddha, “Many Sakyan princes have become monks with the Buddha as their teacher, but no one in our family has. I wonder whether I should become a monk, too. What do you think?” Anuruddha said, “I have three palaces and all the comforts I want. I cannot become a homeless monk. You go be a monk.” Mahanama said, “Let me tell you about household life when you become an adult. You must plough the field, plant the seeds, water the plants, drain away the extra water, pull out the weeds, cut and harvest the plants, gather and stack them, remove the straw, remove the chaff, sift it, store it, and then start all over again. The work never ends.” Anuruddha said, “When is the work finished? When do we relax and enjoy what we get?” Mahanama said, “The work never finishes. There is no end to it. Our grandparents died before their work was done. I am going to become a monk.”

After hearing that, Anuruddha went to his mother and said, “Mother, I want to become a monk. Please give me your permission.” His mother said, “You two sons of mine are so dear and precious to me. If you die, I would lose you but I could not do anything about it. But why should I give permission to leave me when you are still alive?” When he asked again, she said, “If Bhaddiya the royal Sakyan becomes a monk, then you may do so too.” She said that because she knew that Bhaddiya, who was the governor and a friend of Anuruddha, would not want to be a monk. Anuruddha went to his friend Bhaddiya, and said, “I can only become a monk if you become a monk also.” Bhaddiya said, “You go become a monk when you want to.” Anuruddha pleaded, “Come, let’s both go away from the householder’s life and become monks.” Bhaddiya stubbornly said, “I can’t. I would do anything else for you, but I can’t do that. You go become a monk.”

When Anuruddha told him what his mother said, then Bhaddiya told him, “Wait seven years. At the end of seven years both of us can become monks.” Anuruddha said, “Seven years is too long, I can’t wait seven years.” Bhaddiya suggested six years, then five years, four years, and so on but Anuruddha would not wait that long. Finally Bhaddiya and Anuruddha agreed to wait seven days to become monks. On the seventh day, two cousins of the Buddha named Ananda and Devadatta, and two other princes and Upāli the barber went along with Anuruddha and Bhaddiya to become monks.

When they arrived and greeted the Buddha, the princes said, “We are proud Sakyans. Upāli the barber has attended on us for a long time. Let him be ordained first so we can bow in reverence to him, and our Sakyan pride will be humbled. So the Buddha ordained Upāli, the princes bowed to Upāli, and then Buddha ordained the princes.

During the rainy season, the monks learned Dharma and practiced meditation, and Ven. Bhaddiya gained great wisdom. Ven. Anuruddha gained the divine eye like the Buddha, so he could see what others cannot see. Ven. Ananda became a sotapanna, and Ven. Devadatta got some superhuman powers.

But Ven. Bhaddiya started doing something peculiar. Whenever he went into the forest, under a tree or in an empty room, he constantly exclaimed, “Oh, happiness! Oh happiness!” Some bhikkhus could not understand this behavior and told the Buddha, “He must be unsatisfied with the monk’s life, or maybe he is remembering his former position as a ruling prince.” The Buddha asked Ven. Bhaddiya about it. Ven. Bhaddiya said, “Bhante, when I was a royal prince, there was a guard inside and outside the palace, inside and outside the city, and inside and outside the district. Although I was so guarded and protected, I was afraid, anxious, suspicious and worried. But now, Bhante, when I go to the forest or under a tree or to an empty room, I don’t feel afraid, anxious, suspicious and worried at all. I live relaxed, in quiet, just dependent on the food others give us, with my mind happy and peaceful.” The Buddha understood, and said, “When you don’t have conflict in your mind, you have no fear or sorrow, you are blissful.”

Questions after the story:

1. Why didn’t Anuruddha want to be a monk at first?
2. What made him decide to become a monk?
3. Why do you think that Bhaddiya did not want to be a monk?
4. Why did the Sakyan princes want Upali to be ordained first?
5. Why was Ven. Bhaddiya so happy when he was a monk?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

“Susukhaṃ vata jīvāma, yesaṃ no natthi kiñcanaṃ, pītibhakkhā bhavissāma devā ābhassarā yathā.”

“We who do not possess anything live so happily. We live by joy like the Radiant Devas.”

Dhammapada 200 (15:4)

Application of the moral(s) in the story to our daily lives:

Why do you think that Bhaddiya was afraid, anxious, suspicious and worried? Bhaddiya was a governor, and had many responsibilities. He had to protect and take care of many people; he was responsible for their safety and welfare. If he made any mistake or failed to do something, what would happen? Many people would suffer or be angry. Some people were envious of his wealth, power and

beautiful things. They would act polite and kind, but he could not trust them. People were friendly to him because they hoped to get gifts or a job from him, or become popular with the wealthy people. Greedy people wanted to take things away from him. He had so many people who depended on him or wanted something from him. So, he worried that he might forget to do something or might make a mistake, or that someone may attack him, steal from him or ruin his things. He had many guards, but even so, he did not feel secure and happy.

When we own (possess) valuable things, we may feel happy when we get them, but how long does it last? Are you happy forever when you get something you like? No. We always will get upset, worried or angry about something sooner or later. As we have learned, life is dukkha. We worry about whether our things may break or get lost, damaged or stolen. Or, or we get bored with them. We may think, like Bhaddiya, that some of our friends are not genuine, and that other people don't like us because they are envious. When we are adults, we must work so hard to get nice things that we don't have enough time to really relax and enjoy them, just like Mahanama told Anuruddha. Even the wealthiest people have dukkha. If we only want to get expensive things in life, but we work so hard to get them and we are still not very happy, then are we really getting what we want from life? Mahanama, Anuruddha and Bhaddiya didn't think so, and they thought that the only way to avoid that is to become a monk.

Is that true? The Buddha mentioned "we who do not possess anything live so happily." Does that mean that only monks and homeless people live happily? No. It is the *attitude* of not being possessive that makes a person happy. Possessiveness means having thoughts like "That's mine!" "My things are better than yours," "Don't mess up my things," and "Don't touch my stuff." It means worrying about our things getting lost, broken, damaged or taken away from us, and anger or sadness when that happens. Possessiveness means having too much attachment to our things.

Suppose someone gave you a real baby elephant to keep as your own pet. You may be thrilled, but worried about where you can keep him, what you will feed him, what if he gets sick, what if someone steals him, what if he gets out of his pen. So many worries! But suppose that, instead, a wild baby elephant would walk up your street every day, so you could see him often near your home. Wouldn't that be fun? You could enjoy him without the worry – without the possessive feelings and worries of owning him. So, we can enjoy what we see without thinking "That's mine."

How can we have an attitude of *not* being possessive? How can we learn to have less attachment to our things? First, pay attention to our possessive thoughts: our worry that our things not get damaged, broken, lost or stolen. Pay attention to our possessive words: "Mine," "be careful with my things," "don't use my things," and "don't touch"; Notice our possessive actions: hiding our things from others and not sharing. Second, we determine whether it is reasonable to share or not, thinking "is there a good reason not to share it?" or "would my parents

allow me to share it?” If it is reasonable to share, then we practice detaching from it, thinking, “Nothing in the world is mine forever; everything will be broken, damaged or gone at some point. If I think and behave according to Dharma, then good things, protection and happiness will come to me. It doesn’t matter what happens to this thing. It will not keep me happy and will not end my dukkha.” If we know from the time we are young that our things will not keep us happy, then we don’t get so upset in the future if our things are lost, broken, damaged or stolen. Then we can experience the type of peace and happiness that Bhaddiya had.

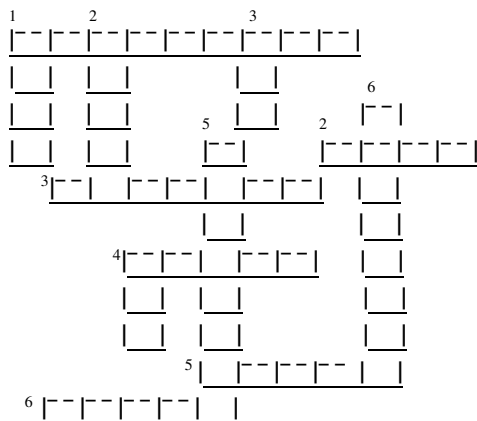
Activity to reinforce the lesson: Crossword Puzzle - Review

Across:

1. How Baddhiya felt when he became a monk and gave up his possessions
2. Prince Siddhartha saw an old man, a _____ man, a dead man, and a renunciant.
3. How Sanjay felt when Moggallana and Sariputta left him to go to the Buddha.
4. The Buddha became enlightened under the _____ Tree, then looked at it for a week.
5. The Four _____ Truths.
6. _____ was going to get married but when the Buddha ordained him he was not happy.

Down:

1. To show our gratitude, we can _____ our parents.
2. Kassapa had too much _____ before he learned to be humble.
3. Everything that arises must _____.
4. To show reverence to the Buddha and to the monks, we _____ to them.
5. The first Arahant was Ven. _____.
6. What Sujatha offered to Siddhartha on the day he was to become enlightened.



Word Box:

MILKRICE	BODHI	JEALOUS	END	KONDANNA	NOBLE
BOW	NANDA	SICK	HAPPINESS	HELP	PRIDE

Closing chant: Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā! May all beings have happy minds!