

Lesson 19 - OBEDIENCE

Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.

Question to think about before the story: When you really want to do something but your parents don't allow you, what do you do?

Story: Nāgasamāla and Meghiya

One day the Buddha was walking on a long journey with Ven. Nāgasamāla. At one point, the road split into two directions, so they had to decide whether to follow the road going toward the right or to follow the road going toward the left. Ven. Nāgasamāla pointed to the road on the left and said, "Bhante, this is the way. Let's go this way." The Buddha pointed to the road on the right and replied, "This is the way, Nāgasamāla. Let's go this way."

But Ven. Nāgasamāla was sure that the road on the left was the correct way to their destination, and he again pointed to the left and said, "Bhante, that is the way." The Buddha again pointed to the right and said, "Nāgasamāla, this is the way."

Ven. Nāgasamāla was frustrated that the Buddha did not agree with him and he was very confident that he was correct, so he pointed to the left and firmly said, "Bhante, *that* is the way." The Buddha again pointed to the right and said, "Nāgasamāla, this is the way." The Buddha knew what danger was waiting on the road Ven. Nāgasamāla chose.

Ven. Nāgasamāla was holding the Buddha's bowl and outer robe. He was angry that the Buddha would not agree with him. He did not like to be told that he was wrong. He bent down to put the Buddha's bowl and outer robe on the ground. The Buddha did not get upset about this misbehavior, but just said, "May I have my bowl and robe?" Ven. Nāgasamāla did not answer and did not move. The Buddha bent down and picked up his bowl and robe. He slowly walked alone up the road to the right.

Ven. Nāgasamāla walked alone, along the road to the left. He felt sure that the Buddha would notice his mistake and come quickly to the road on which Ven. Nāgasamāla was walking. He walked confidently without looking back. Suddenly, he heard a noise coming from the bushes next to the road, and the next moment, several rough-looking men appeared. One of them immediately hit him on the head and another one kicked him. One of them broke his bowl, slamming it down onto the road, and another took his robes and tore the one he was wearing. Ven. Nāgasamāla's head was bleeding and his robes were badly torn. He was afraid, and he turned around, wishing to be with the Buddha again. He walked very quickly with his torn robe and broken bowl, back to the split in the road and then walked along the road that the Buddha had chosen. He finally caught up to the Buddha and called out to him. The Buddha stopped, and Ven. Nāgasamāla bowed with deep reverence and told him what had happened. The Buddha said, "A wise man and a foolish man lived together. The wise men leave

what they know is bad.” The Buddha was hinting that with his wisdom he knew that the road Ven. Nāgasamāla chose was bad, and that someone who has not developed wisdom should follow the advice of a wise person.

On another day, when the Buddha was staying at Calika, Ven. Meghiya, who was his attendant, went to the Buddha and said, “Bhante, I want to go to Jantugrama for food.” The Buddha replied, “It’s time to do as you think is right, Meghiya.” Ven. Meghiya took his bowl and went to Jantugrama, where some villagers put some food into his bowl. He then walked to the river, and saw a beautiful Mango grove. He thought, “This beautiful mango grove is a good place for a monk to stay for the spiritual struggle. If the Buddha allows it, I will come here to stay.” He went to the Buddha and told him about it. The Buddha’s reply was, “Wait, Meghiya, we are still alone. Wait until another monk comes.” Meghiya did not understand why the Buddha wanted to wait to give an answer. Ven. Meghiya said, “Bhante, you don’t have anything left to do. If you will allow me, I want to stay at the mango grove for the spiritual struggle.” For the second time, the Buddha’s reply was, “Wait, Meghiya, we are still alone. Wait until another monk comes.” But Ven. Meghiya insisted, and asked again. The Buddha knew that it was not the right time for Ven. Meghiya to be able to meditate well, but he replied, “Since you want to struggle, what can I say? It is time for you to do as you think is right.”

Ven. Meghiya bowed and left to go to the mango grove, where he sat under a tree to meditate. He expected to have a peaceful mind now that he was in such a beautiful place. But that did not happen. He started to have many negative thoughts, horrible thoughts, and angry thoughts. He had thoughts about things he wanted. He even had thoughts of cruelty and ill will. He wondered why he, as a monk, sitting in a beautiful place, was being bothered by evil thoughts. In the evening, he went back to the Buddha and told him what happened. The Buddha said, “Meghiya, when a person has not yet reached the goal, five things will lead him toward the goal: having friends who are virtuous, being virtuous so he does not do even small misbehaviors, talking about Dharmic subjects, leaving unwholesome things, and wisdom that leads to the end of suffering.” The Buddha said further, “Bad thoughts come and tempt the mind. Not understanding these thoughts, the mind chases after them. A man who understands these thoughts gets rid of them with mindfulness. And one who is enlightened is done with them all, because no more temptation stirs up his mind.”

Questions after the story:

1. Why didn’t Ven. Nāgasamāla agree with the Buddha about which road to take?
2. Why didn’t Ven. Meghiya follow the Buddha’s advice to wait?
3. How would you describe the personality of Ven. Nāgasamāla and Ven. Meghiya?
4. What happened to them when they did what they wanted to do, against the Buddha’s advice?
5. What did Ven. Nāgasamāla and Ven. Meghiya learn?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

**“Karaṇīyaṃ atthakusulena, yaṃ taṃ santaṃ padaṃ abhisamecca,
Sakko ujū ca sūjū ca, suvaco c’assa mudu anatimāni.”**

“One who does good, who wishes to skillfully attain peace, should act this way: One should be able, straight, upright, obedient, gentle and humble.”

Karaṇīyametta Sutta

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

The Buddha teaches us that we should be obedient. Obedient to whom? Should we be obedient to our friends? Classmates? Strangers? Of course not - they may not be very wise and may lead us to do something wrong or foolish. But who should we obey? Our parents, teachers, grandparents and other family elders. If we are obedient to them, we avoid many mistakes and problems in our lives. We may not always agree with them. We may think they don’t understand modern society. We may think they are much more strict than other parents or teachers. But they have experience, wisdom, success and good values which they practiced and learned from. And they deeply care for us and our happiness. That is why we should obey them.

The Buddha teaches us not only to be obedient, but also to be *able* - not lazy, forgetful, irresponsible, or unwilling to learn or to follow directions when they ask us to do something. Can you think of some examples of how we make ourselves appear unable to do what we are supposed to do? An example of not being able and obedient is when asked to do something, we say “It’s too hard to do,” or “I can’t do that myself” or “I don’t know how to do it” rather than trying with our best effort.

The Buddha teaches us to be *straight and upright* - not “crooked,” deceitful, misleading or pretending as a way of avoiding doing what we are told to do, or as a way of explaining why we should not or did not obey. Can you think of some examples? Some examples of not being straight and upright is lying, saying “I already did it” when it was not done or not fully done, “I forgot to do it” when we really didn’t forget, “I can’t find it” when we didn’t try hard to look for it, or “It’s not working” when there is nothing wrong with it.

The Buddha teaches us to be *gentle* - to gently and respectfully accept advice, orders and instructions from our parents, teachers and older relatives. This means we don’t whine, beg (plead), raise our voice, make unpleasant faces or remarks, argue, question, or insist on our way. An example of not being gentle and obedient is Ven. Meghiya insisting on his way- going immediately to the mango grove - without waiting as the Buddha told him to do. Some other examples are, when asked to do something, to say “Why do I have to?” or “Can’t I do it later?” or “I always have to . . .” or “But she didn’t have to do it” or some other reason starting with the word “But . . .” Hopefully you don’t say these things!

Also, the Buddha teaches us to be *humble*. What does humble mean? Not to be arrogant, thinking we know better than our elders and teachers, like Ven. Nāgasamāla thought he knew better than the Buddha. Sometimes, we may be correct. Sometimes, a parent or teacher may be incorrect. But as a son, daughter or student, it is our duty to be humble to our parents and teachers and to be obedient and to respect their advice even if we do not agree.

What should we do if our teacher, parent or elder has asked us to do something and we have a different idea? We can politely say, “Would it be OK if I . . . ?” and if the answer is no, we must accept “no” as the answer. What should we do if our teacher, parent or elder has asked us to do something and there is an honestly good reason why we cannot obey? We can politely explain or show him or her the reason, but we should not argue, whine, plead, or insist on our way.

It may not be easy to follow the Buddha’s teaching always, especially when we see other kids who are not so obedient. But being “able, straight, upright, obedient, gentle and humble” are some of the most important virtues for getting and keeping a good job, and therefore our success, peace and happiness in the future depends on our development of those virtues. We can only develop them if remember and practice them when we are young.

Activity to reinforce the lesson:

The popular game “Simon Says” changed to “Wise one says”: Students stand up, facing one student who is the leader, who quickly gives the other students commands such as Wise one says touch your toes, Wise one says turn around, Wise one says touch your nose, Wise one says raise your hands, Wise one says hands on your hips, Wise one says jump, or Wise one says raise your right foot. Occasionally the student leader gives a command without saying “Wise one says.” Students must obey immediately each command preceded by “Wise one says,” but must not obey commands without it. Each student who obeys a command without “Wise one says” or who doesn’t immediately obey a command with “Wise one says” must sit down and is out of the game. Commands can be given faster and faster to make the game more challenging. The last person out wins, and becomes the next leader. This game demonstrates obeying immediately the instructions of our parents, teachers and elders (“wise ones”) and not blindly following what friends tell us to do.

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