

## **Lesson 2 – COMPASSION**

*Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.*

*Question to think about before the story:* Can you think of a time when you were very young when you felt **compassion** for a person or an animal?

### **Story: Prince Siddhartha's Childhood**

The young Prince Siddhartha had the best of everything – the best food, the best clothing, and even three lily ponds with swans on them. There were 32 ladies to help her take care of the young Prince, and someone to hold a sunshade over him always. The king gave the young prince three palaces - one for summer, one for winter and one for the rainy season. He played with his friends in his palaces and in the gardens around them. The king remembered what the astrologers had said, that Siddhartha would be either a king of the world or an Enlightened One. King Suddhōdana wanted his son to be a great king rather than a great holy man. So, he gave his son wonderful luxuries so that he would be happy living his life as a king in the future.

One day, King Suddhōdana went to a ploughing ceremony with the young Prince Siddhartha and the ladies who took care of him. The King went to participate in the ceremony while the ladies looked after the young Prince. The ladies spread a soft rug on the ground and placed the young Prince on it. The ladies wanted to see the singing, dancing and music of the ceremony, so they went closer to the ceremony and forgot about little Siddhartha. After some time, the ladies returned to look for Prince Siddhartha, but he was no longer on the rug.

Prince Siddhartha had watched the men sweating in the hot sun working with the heavy ploughs, he saw the oxen straining their muscles to pull the ploughs faster, and he saw the birds killing insects to eat. Prince Siddhartha not only saw, but he also deeply felt, the pain and misery of the men, the oxen and the insects. Understanding their suffering and wishing he could take away their suffering, he felt compassion (karuna). As he felt great compassion for them, he sat cross-legged under a rose-apple tree with his eyes closed, and meditated. As he meditated, he felt great happiness. The ladies and King Suddhōdana found Prince Siddhartha meditating. Seeing his son meditating, the King remembered again what the astrologers had said, that if he does not have a family life, he will be an Enlightened One. The King decided to give little Siddhartha more and more luxuries and to train him to be a great king.

So, when Siddhartha was eight years old, he became the student of the best and wisest teacher, Viswamitra, along with many other children. He learned math, science, languages, history, geography, archery, wrestling, and the art of war and the military. Siddhartha was a very intelligent student, and was very strong, respectful and kind to all. Although Siddhartha already had read many books before he started school, and knew many things, he was humble; he did not show off to other students.

*Questions after the story:*

1. Why was Prince Siddhartha given the best of everything?
2. What did Prince Siddhartha see at the ploughing ceremony?
3. What did he feel when he saw the men, the oxen and the insects?
4. What was he doing with his eyes closed?
5. What does the word “humble” mean?
6. What is “karuna” in English?
7. Why do you think the king wanted his son to be a king rather than a holy man?

*Quotation of the Buddha about the moral of the story:*

**“Sabbe sattā, sabbe pāṇā, sabbe bhūtā ca kevalā, sabbe bhadraṇi passantu, mā kañci pāpam āgamā.”**

**“All beings, all those with life, all who have taken birth,  
May all see what is good; may suffering not come to anyone.”**

Khandhaparitta

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

Compassion, or karuna in Pali and Sanskrit languages, is one of the main teachings of the Buddha. What does compassion really mean? Compassion does not mean only to feel sorry for someone, or to feel sad about someone’s pain or unhappiness. Sometimes when we see someone else’s pain or difficulty, we feel afraid that it may happen to us too. That is a self-centered feeling, fear or worry about ourselves, which is not compassion. Compassion means that we really understand the suffering of another living being. The Pali word “dukkha” means suffering, dissatisfaction, pain, sorrow, stress and unhappiness. We understand the dukkha of another being because we have felt that way before; we have experienced it and we remember how it feels. More importantly, compassion means that we genuinely wish to take away the pain, stress and unhappiness of the other living being, and fill him or her with happiness and peace. So, what does compassion mean? It means to understand the dukkha of another being and really wish to remove it from him or her.

Do you know about the law of Karma? It means that for each action that we do, we receive the result of that action. For each good act we do, we get a good result - something pleasant, something that is good for us - maybe not immediately, but some time in the future. For each bad act we do, we get a bad result - something painful or unpleasant will happen to us in return for our bad act.

So does that mean that when we see someone else suffering, we should think that is because that person did something bad? If we do, then we may not care about the person, or we might be unkind to him or her. Then we become unkind and uncaring. It is better to think that we all have done bad things in our past lives, and we all must suffer the results of it at some time. We never know when we will get the result. We may be following the Dharma, doing what the Buddha taught us to do, but still we experience the painful results of our past deeds. So, we should have compassion for others without judging whether they are good or bad.

Why is compassion so important? Why is it one of the main teachings of the Buddha? If we don't have much compassion, then we only think about what we want. What type of person are we if we only think about what we want? Selfish and greedy.

If we understand how others feel, and we care about how they feel, then it helps us to be less selfish. When we have compassion for others, then we are more kind to them, and we may look for opportunities to help them. When we are kind and helpful, they can become happier. When others around us are happier, then we have a peaceful, friendly, happy environment.

It is good to feel compassion for everyone, but can we always help everyone? It is not always appropriate to help everyone. Little Prince Siddhartha did not go and help the sweating men or the straining oxen, and he did not go and protect the insects from the birds. Why not? He might have gotten hurt if he went near the oxen, and he would be interfering with the ceremony. He would be starving the birds, preventing them from getting food, if he protected the insects. So, if we see an opportunity to help, we should first determine whether it is safe for us to help, whether our parents would approve, and whether our help would be appreciated. If we are not sure whether someone would want our help, we should first offer to help.

*Activity to reinforce the lesson: Matching-* Draw a line from the word in the left column to the matching words in the right column:

humble	predicted that Siddhartha would be a king or enlightened
meditation	to understand someone's suffering and wish to relieve it
luxuries	the King, Siddhartha's father
rose apple tree	how Siddhartha felt toward the other students
karuna	suffering, unhappiness, stress
dukkha	to calm and focus the mind
Suddhōdana	where Siddhartha was found meditating
astrologers	good actions give good results, bad actions give bad results
Law of Karma	what the King gave Siddhartha

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