

## **Lesson 20 – AVOID ANGRY SPEECH**

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

*Question to think about before the story:* Has someone ever said angry words to you and you said angry words in return?

### **Story: River Rohini**

The Sakya clan lived in Kapilavasthu, the city where the Buddha grew up as Prince Siddhartha. The Sakyas got their water for drinking, bathing and watering their food crops from the River Rohini. On the other side of the river lived the people of Koliya, who also used water from the River Rohini for all of their needs. One year there was not much rain, and the dry weather caused the River Rohini to flow with much less water than usual. The Koliyan farmers and Sakyan farmers needed a lot of water for their crops, and they were worried that there would not be enough and that their plants would die and there would not be enough food. The farmers of Koliya crossed the river to talk to the Sakyan farmers. The Koliyan farmers said, “We need enough water for our crops. Please stop using so much water. Let us grow all the crops and we will share the food with you.” The Sakyan farmers mistrusted them, and said, “After you have harvested your food, we don’t want to come begging from you. Our crops don’t need that much water, so let us continue using the water.” They were upset, thinking, “How dare they tell us to stop using water and depend on *them* for food.” The Koliyan farmers were upset because the Kapilavasthu farmers didn’t trust them and accept their offer. The farmers of both cities started arguing. Neither side would give in to the other, so they became more and more angry and they started shouting. They each started feeling very disgusted with the farmers of the other side.

Finally, in anger, a Koliyan farmer accused the people of Kapilavasthu of doing certain very improper actions. That was a terrible insult. The Sakyan farmers did not tolerate it. So a Sakyan farmer shouted that the Koliyas were lepers and poor people who lived in trees like animals.

The Koliyan farmers went away and reported the fight to the ministers of Koliya, who then reported the fight to the Koliyan royal family. The Sakyas reported the fight to the ministers of Kapilavasthu, who then reported the fight to the Sakyan royal family. The Sakyas and Koliyas were very angry when they heard about the insults, so they became totally disgusted with each other, and felt that they wanted to destroy the other and never have to see them again. So they each planned war against the other.

The Buddha woke up early in the morning and surveyed the world with his divine eye, as usual. He saw the danger of war between the two royal families, which were his closest relatives. He went to the River Rohini and saw the armies of Kapilavasthu and of Koliya preparing for war. The Buddha went to the river and

sat in the air over the river. When the armies saw the Buddha, and they put down their weapons and bowed to him.

The King of Kapilavasthu and the King of Koliya came and bowed to the Buddha. The Buddha said, “What is this fight about, great kings?” They replied, “I don’t know, Bhante.” The Buddha said, “Who does know?” The kings told him “The generals of the armies.” The Buddha went to the generals and asked the same questions, and the generals also did not know why they were fighting and said that the lieutenants would know. The Buddha asked the same questions to the lieutenants, who also did not know why they were fighting. The Buddha then went to the farmers, and asked them why they were fighting. The farmers of Koliya said, “Bhante, we are fighting because the farmers of Kapilavasthu are using too much water from the river. We may not have enough.” The Sakyan farmers said, “Bhante, we are fighting because the farmers of Koliya think they are entitled to more water, but they are using too much and they want more.”

The Buddha went to the kings of Kapilavasthu and Koliya and asked them, “How much is water worth?” The kings agreed that water was not worth very little. The Buddha asked, “How much are your people worth?” They replied that their people were most important, the most valuable. The Buddha said, “Is it right for you to destroy your people just for water, which has so little value?” The Buddha taught them about the harm of making enemies and hatred. He taught them that when they are anxious to get what they want, and they fight over it, insult each other and develop hatred, they live with the disease of unhappiness. After hearing him teach, 250 Sakyas and 250 Koliyas were ordained as monks.

*Questions after the story:*

1. Why did the Sakyas and Koliyas argue ?
2. What did they need the water for?
3. Why did they get so angry?
4. What happens when people get very angry when they are arguing?
5. What made the kings and armies so angry?”
6. Did the kings really know the cause of the fight?
7. What did the Buddha teach the Sakyas and Koliyas?

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

**“Māvoca pharusam kañci, vuttā paṭivadeyyu taṃ, dukkhā hi sārambhakathā, paṭidaṇḍā phuseyyu taṃ.”**

**Do not speak harshly to anyone, because if you do, they may speak harshly back to you. Angry speech hurts, and retaliation may overtake you.”**

Dhammapada 133 (10:5)

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

Everyone knows that arguments can get out of control, with shouting, insults and even hitting. What exactly is an insult? Words that attack our character, intelligence, ability, the way we do something, or the way we look. It means saying something mean about you to your face. Can you think of some examples? “You can’t even do *that!*” “you’re fat,” “you look like a . . .,” “you sound like a . . . ,” “you watch baby shows on TV,” “you act like a big baby,” “you don’t even know *that?*”

In the story, the argument started with a disagreement over water. Why? Because it was something they both wanted. When the other side didn’t give them what they wanted, they wanted to force them to give what they wanted. So, what did they do? They started getting angry and shouting. They felt disgusted with each other. When did the anger grow to extreme anger? When they said painful insults to each other. Then they went to tell their own people about it, involving them in the fight. Why would they tell others? Maybe because they wanted help to take revenge. And the armies did agree to take revenge. Each clan wanted to take revenge on the other. Was it only because of the water? No, it was because of the terrible insults.

Insults cause feelings of not only anger, but also resentment, hatred, revenge, and ill will - wishing something bad would happen to a person. These are some of the most dangerous emotions - they can result in lifelong painful feelings, lifelong enemies, and possibly even killing. As the Buddha says, if we use angry speech or insults, the other person may insult us in return, which could provoke us to take revenge. We may say or do something we will later regret very much.

So it is very important to learn to stop arguments before they get to the point of angry speech and insults. It is also extremely important to learn how to react when someone insults us, so that we do not retaliate (take revenge) by using angry speech or insults. So, we learn to be peacemakers and not get angry when someone insults us.

How can we learn to be peacemakers and stop an argument? We can remember that it takes two people to argue, so we *can* stop it. Our calmness is the best weapon – when we are calm, the other person notices how outrageous he is acting, and probably will stop. We can ignore the person, or say “I don’t want to argue with you,” “that’s your opinion.” Or, we can find a solution, like “let’s share - you can have it first,” or “let’s clean it up together - I’ll start.” If we did something that the other person is complaining about, we can say “I’m sorry if I did something to upset you. How can I help you feel better?” If the person continues to shout at us, we can appear to agree with him, saying “yes,” “uh huh” or “OK” to everything he says. What other things can you say that will discourage someone from arguing?

How can we learn not to get angry when someone insults us? We can remember that an insult is only what *that person* thinks because of his own ignorance,

jealousy, anger or ill will. We should not allow that person's insult to bring us down to his level of anger and ill will. We can remember that we are good and they can't bring us down. We improve ourselves, we become stronger in our good character, if we can ignore insults, resist the urge to fight back, and avoid bad feelings. So the person insulting us is actually helping us to become better!

*Activity to reinforce the lesson:* Role play: Teachers make a list of controversial topics that are age appropriate for students to discuss. Students divide into pairs, and each pair takes one of the topics for an argument. The partners argue opposite views on the argument, as if representing their "clan" or friends with the same view. One partner tries desperately to win the argument and resorts to angry and insulting speech, and the other partner uses his skill to avoid an angry argument and remain peaceful, using words that he would realistically use in talking with peers.

Suggestions for topics of argument:

- whether to require more hours per day at school but attend school 4 days a week
- vegetarianism
- whether students should be required to dissect animals in science class
- whether to have a dress code or uniforms or no dress code at school
- whether to raise the minimum age for driver's licenses
- whether to broaden or tighten certain rules at school
- whether to prohibit students from having jobs so they can study more
- whether television is more helpful or more harmful to students

Teacher should instruct students not to use personal insults or bad language, but only silly or general insults for the purpose of the role play (ex: "you all are clowns, losers, foolish, totally selfish, nerds, geeks, lepers, or obsessed with...", or "you all blabber nonsense").

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