

## **Lesson 21 – ADMIT MISTAKES**

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

*Question to think about before the story:* Did you ever do something wrong, and then you wondered whether you should admit that you did it?

### **Story: Quarrel at Kosambi**

At the Buddha's monastery in Kosambi, there was one monk who was an expert in the sutras taught by the Buddha, and another monk who was an expert in the monks' disciplinary rules (the Vinaya) taught by the Buddha. One day, the Sutra expert went to the bathroom and left a pot of clean water in the bathroom. The Vinaya expert found it, and asked the Sutra expert, "Did you leave a pot of water in the bathroom?" The Sutra expert said, "Yes." The Vinaya expert said, "You didn't know that it is a violation of the rules?" The Sutra expert said, "No." The Vinaya expert said, "It is a violation, friend." The Sutra expert said, "Then I will admit my mistake." The Vinaya expert said, "But if you did it unintentionally or because of forgetfulness, it's not a violation." The Sutra expert thought to himself, "OK then I did not commit any violation."

The Vinaya expert told his students, "The Sutra expert does not know when he has committed a violation." Then those students told the Sutra expert's students, "Your teacher violated the rules, but he thinks that he didn't." They told their teacher what the Vinaya expert's students had told them. The Sutra expert replied, "At first, the Vinaya expert said there was no violation. Now he says it is a violation. He is a liar." The Sutra expert's students told the Vinaya expert's students, "Your teacher is a liar."

The Vinaya expert had a discussion among the monks, and they agreed to suspend the Sutra expert for his violation of the rules. The Sutra expert did not think that he committed a violation, and he thought that it was wrong for him to be suspended. Some monks supported him and agreed that he should not have been suspended. There was now a big disagreement among the monks. The monks who supported the Vinaya expert told the others not to support a suspended monk, but the others supported the Sutra expert anyway.

One of the monks told the Buddha about this big disagreement. The Buddha went to the monks who supported the Vinaya expert and said: "Bhikkhus, don't suspend a bhikkhu just because you think he should be suspended. It is a very serious matter to divide the Sangha. So, don't suspend a monk if he does not see it as a violation, because it will lead to disagreements, arguments, and bad actions. You should respect the other monks."

The Buddha then went to the monks who supported the Sutra expert, and said, "Bhikkhus, don't think that when a violation is committed you don't have to apologize or fix the problem just because you think that you did not do a violation. If a monk violates a rule but does not think it is wrong, other monks

will see that it is wrong. So, a bhikkshu who violates a rule should admit the violation, to be considerate of the others. If he doesn't, there will be disagreements, arguments, and bad actions."

*Questions after the story:*

1. What violation did the Vinaya expert think that the Sutra expert committed?
2. Do you think the Vinaya expert should have complained about such a small thing?
3. Did the Sutra expert admit his mistake?
4. Then what did the Vinaya expert say?
5. Did the Sutra expert then think he committed a violation of the rules?
6. What happened after the Vinaya expert told his students that the Sutra expert violated the rules?
7. Do you think the Sutra expert should tell others that the Vinaya expert is a liar?
8. Do you think the students of the monks did anything wrong?
9. What did the Buddha teach each group?

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

**"Na paresaṃ vilomāni, na paresaṃ katākataṃ, attano va avekkheyya, katāni akatāni ca."**

**"Do not find fault with others, do not watch what others do or did not do. But let us see our own acts, what we do and what we fail to do."**

Dhammapada 50 (4:7)

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

Everyone makes mistakes, right? We all have weaknesses and faults. No one is perfect always. So, should we ignore our mistakes? Should we expect others to ignore our mistakes? No. As the Buddha taught the monks, if we do something wrong, or if we didn't do something we should have done, we should admit our fault (that we did something wrong or made a mistake) and apologize. Our apology should be very sincere, not just an automatic "Sorry."

As we learned from the story, we should apologize even if we are not sure we really did something wrong, so that others don't get upset with us. That doesn't mean that we should apologize for something we did not do. We can say, "If I did something wrong, I am very sorry." If we did something wrong but honestly did not intend to do something wrong, should we apologize? Yes. For example, we can say, "I didn't intend to hurt you, but I am very sorry that I hurt you." We can hurt someone very much even if we did not intend to hurt them. In some situations it may be difficult to admit fault and say "I'm sorry," but that is the way to be friendly and peaceful. Others can easily forgive us. They may think that we are arrogant and uncaring if we don't. It is also better to apologize than to give excuses.

When someone else does something wrong and they get in trouble, do you like to tell your friends about it? Even the students of the Sutra and Vinaya experts liked

to tell the other students about the wrongdoing of others - their teacher. Why do we enjoy it when others do wrong things or make mistakes? Maybe because we feel better about ourselves. We think, "Ooooooh, you did something bad. *I* wouldn't do *that*." But the Buddha teaches us *not* to look for others' mistakes and wrongdoing. He teaches us to look for our *own* mistakes and wrongdoing. When you point your finger at someone, what happens to the other fingers? Try it. Three fingers are pointing back at you. That means when you point out someone else's wrong, then you should look three times more at your own wrongdoing. What do you think about that? Do you like to pay attention to your mistakes and misbehavior? Most people don't like to do that! We don't like to feel guilty or think about what we do wrong. And we don't like to admit to others what we do wrong. We don't like to make mistakes, and we don't want to feel we are bad, clumsy or ignorant. Those are natural feelings; we want to feel about ourselves.

But can we really feel good about ourselves if we just ignore our mistakes and wrongdoing? That is like pretending we are good when we are not, or like wearing clean clothes and pretending we are clean when we didn't take a bath. That is being dishonest with ourselves. The only way we can get clean is to admit to ourselves that we didn't take a bath, and then take a bath, right? Pretending we took a bath won't get us clean!

Similarly, when we make a mistake or do something wrong, we should admit we did it, apologize *and* fix the problem: do what we should have done, or find a way to help undo the wrong. If we broke or lost someone's toy, we should admit it, apologize, and get it repaired, get them a new one, or give him one of your toys of equal value. If we upset someone, we should do something special that shows we care about her very much.

When we are honest with ourselves, noticing our mistakes and wrongdoing, then we can stop doing wrong and stop making those mistakes. If we ignore our mistakes and wrongdoing, what happens? We will continue making them. Noticing our mistakes turns into a good habit of correcting ourselves. The more mistakes we notice, the more we can correct ourselves, and the better we become. Then we don't have to worry about getting in trouble. That is the best way to *really* feel good about ourselves!

*Activity to reinforce the lesson:* Noting our mistakes: Each student writes a list of actions they did that were not good, and good things that they should have done but didn't do, over the past week. The teacher can prompt with suggestions: Did you have any arguments with sisters or brothers? Did you do everything your parents asked you to do without being told twice? Did you keep your room clean every day? Did you help your parents? Did you finish all of your homework every day? Did you watch too much TV? Did you say anything that was untrue? Did you say any angry words? Did a teacher have to ask you to stop talking in class? Were you late to a class? Did you complain to your parents about what they gave you or what they didn't give you?

Students make a grid with the list as the y-axis and the days of the week as the x-axis, so there is a box for each item on the list for each day of the week. During the next week, each day students check any boxes on the grid to note any mistakes made that day. They can add any new mistakes to the list. They bring the grid with them to the next class.

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