

Lesson 22 – AVOID BAD COMPANY

Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.

Question to think about before the story: Did you ever wonder whether you might get in trouble if you associate with a certain kid or certain group of kids?

Story: Quarrel at Kosambi Part 2

The Buddha taught the monks at Kosambi that they should admit their mistakes, even if they are not sure they are wrong, and warned them about the fighting that might result if they don't. After he taught them about it, he went away from the monks. Then, the bickering among the monks got worse. They argued loudly and forcefully, and hurt each other's feelings with angry speech and insults. They could not resolve the disagreement.

One of the monks went to the Buddha, bowed to him, and described what was going on at the monastery - the bickering, arguing, angry words, bad feelings, and stubborn refusal to end the arguments. The monk said, "Bhante, it would be good if you would go to visit those monks with compassion." The Buddha silently agreed to visit. He went to the monks at Kosambi and told them to stop their arguing and quarreling. One monk said, "Bhante, you are the master of Dharma, please stay here and live pleasantly. Don't concern yourself with this. We are the ones who will be known for this disputing and quarreling." Again the Buddha told the monks to stop, and the monk gave the same response. After the Buddha told them to stop for the third time, and the monks did not agree to stop, the Buddha thought, "These monks seem obsessed. It is impossible to make them understand the wrong that they are doing." Then he left.

In the morning, after he went with his bowl to the village to receive food, he sat down, and said aloud, "When many voices are shouting, no one thinks, 'I'm being a fool, I was part of this fight, I helped cause this.' They forget to speak with wisdom, their minds are obsessed with talking, they don't control their mouths. They don't even know what causes them to act like that. They think, 'He did something bad to me,' and feel hatred. But that hatred is never calmed by hatred. Hatred is calmed by controlling ourselves, by understanding, forgiving and forgetting the wrong done to us. If you can find a wise friend who leads a virtuous life, then keep company with him, joyfully and mindfully, and you can overcome danger. If you cannot find a wise friend who leads a virtuous life, then, like a king who leaves behind a conquered kingdom, or like a lone elephant in the forest, you should go your way alone. There is no friendship with fools. Walk alone, and harm no one, and you will have no conflict. Be like an elephant alone in the forest."

Then the Buddha went away to another village, to the Eastern Bamboo Park. When he arrived, the park security man saw the Buddha coming and tried to prevent him from coming in so no one would disturb the three monks living there. Ven. Anuruddha told him to let the Buddha in, that he is their teacher. Ven Anuruddha called the other two monks, and they prepared a seat for the

Buddha. He asked them whether they were well, comfortable and had enough food. He also asked whether they lived in harmony with each other, viewing each other with kind eyes. They said “Yes, Bhante.” He asked Ven. Anuruddha, “How do you do that?” Ven Anuruddha answered, “I think it is so fortunate that I am living with such friends in the holy life. I have acts, words and thoughts of loving-kindness to these other monks always. I think, why should I do what I want to do, why not do what they want to do.” When the Buddha asked the other two monks how they got along, they said the same thing. The Buddha asked them whether they were diligent in their practice and self-controlled, and they said yes, and he asked them how they did so. He said that whoever arrives first from the village with their food sets out the seats, water, and garbage bucket, and whoever arrives last cleans up after the meal. He said that whoever notices that something needs to be done does it, and that they help each other. After the Buddha talked about Dharma with them, he left.

He sat alone and thought about how he had lived in discomfort, pestered by the monks at Kosambi who were arguing and fighting, and now that he was alone, he was living peacefully. He saw an elephant who had been pestered by the other elephants in the herd, who also came there to live alone.

In Kosambi, the villagers noticed that the Buddha had left Kosambi, and they thought, “These monks here bothered the Buddha until he left. Let’s ignore them and not honor or respect them anymore, and let’s not give them any more food. Then they will either leave or correct themselves with the Buddha.” Sure enough, the Kosambi monks decided to visit the Buddha and settle their quarrel. The Sutra expert, who had been suspended, thought about what had happened: “I *did* violate the rules, and I *was* properly suspended,” and he told his friends that. They all went together to the Buddha, and because he admitted his wrongdoing, the Buddha told him his suspension was over and he was reinstated back into the Sangha. The quarrel was over.

Questions after the story:

1. What did the Buddha do when the monks would not stop fighting?
2. The Buddha taught that hatred is never calmed by what?
3. How do we calm hatred?
4. If we can’t find a wise and virtuous friend, what does the Buddha say we should do?
5. How did Ven. Anuruddha and the other two monks live so peacefully together?
6. What animal did the Buddha see in the forest when he was alone?
7. What happened at Kosambi after the Buddha left?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

“No ce labhetha nipakaṃ saḥāyaṃ, saddhiṃ caraṃ sādhuviḥāridhīraṃ, rājā va raṭṭhaṃ vijitaṃ pahāya, eko care mātagaraññe va nāgo.”

“If you cannot find a wise friend who leads a virtuous life, then, like a king who leaves a conquered kingdom, or like a lone elephant in the forest, you should go your way alone.

Dhammapada 329 (23:10)

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

Do you have wise friends who lead virtuous lives? What does that mean? A friend who does not harm others, steal, lie, or misbehave, who is honest, trustworthy, disciplined, tolerant, compassionate and respectful. Are your friends like Ven. Anuruddha and his friends? Do you easily agree on what to do, because each of you is willing to do what the other wants to do? Do you each see what needs to be done and help each other? Do you all act and speak kindly to each other? Usually at school or in our neighborhood, there are some kids who are virtuous and who we can be friends with.

But sometimes we find that the kids around us are not that way. Maybe they like to argue and fight, like the monks at Kosambi. Maybe they misbehave in other ways. What should we do? The Buddha tells us to “go our way alone,” like a lone elephant, or a king who leaves a kingdom. Why did he say like an *elephant* or a *king*? Because we respect kings and elephants very much. And if you leave misbehaved kids alone and stay away from them, then you are being very honorable, too. Rather than thinking of yourself as unpopular or not worthy of friends, you are doing the best thing for yourself, and you are worthy of great respect by good people. Soon you will find virtuous friends to be with, particularly those who are learning Dharma, like you are.

What if we are with kids who misbehave in some ways, but they are fun to be with - should we just hope they get better? As we learned in an earlier lesson, other people’s misbehavior influences us no matter how sure we are that we can be a good example, or that we will not get drawn into misbehavior. One person’s misbehavior very easily spreads to others who associate with him or her, leading them into wrong acts, bad talk or bad thoughts. When it seems difficult to stay away from those kids, we can remember how difficult it was for Prince Siddhartha to leave his wife and new baby, and after he became the Buddha, how he stayed alone in the forest when other monks misbehaved.

Sometimes, a friend who we thought was virtuous starts to misbehave. Should we just ignore it and hope he or she stops misbehaving? Should we say something to him or her about it? It depends on the situation. If it is serious misbehavior, we should stay away. If it is something not so serious, we can gently point it out in a way that is not arrogant but shows that we don’t agree with it. For example, we can say, “I don’t think you should lie.” If he or she disagrees with us, that indicates that he or she intends to continue to misbehave, and is a signal for us to stay away. When you stay away from a friend, they may get the message, like the Kosambi monks got the message to stop misbehaving when the villagers stayed away and did not take care of them. Then they might either stop misbehaving or find other friends.

Activity to reinforce the lesson: Clay sculpture: Teacher brings a piece of clay (“Fimo” or other modeling clay) for each student, and maybe also an example clay elephant or toy elephant, toothpicks and popsicle sticks for shaping the clay,

and plastic placemats for easy-clean-up work surfaces. Each student shapes the clay into an elephant. Eyes can be made with tiny beads or seeds. Ears can be made by flattening two small balls of clay and sticking them onto the head using popsicle sticks. Rolling a piece of clay into the shape of a rope, then sticking it on the body, creates trunk, tail and tusks.

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