

Lesson 24 - FORBEARANCE

Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.

Question to think about before the story: Has anyone ever said or done something unkind, cruel or uncaring to you so you wanted to “get him back” or punish him for what he did?

Story: Sundari

The Buddha and his bhikkshus were living at Jetāvana Monastery at Sāvatti, where the people had great reverence for them and provided all of their needs - food, robes, shelter and medicines. But there were some wandering ascetics who were not so well cared-for. They felt envious that the people of the town cared more for the Buddha and the Sangha than for them. Among those ascetics was a wandering lady ascetic named Sundari, who was beautiful and young. The ascetics said to her, “Sister, will you do a favor for us, your relatives?” She answered, “What would you like me to do? I would do anything for my relatives, even give up my life for them.” They said, “Visit Jetāvana Monastery often.” She agreed. She knew what they wanted her to do - to make it seem that she was secretly and privately visiting with the Buddha. That would ruin his reputation, so the people of Savatti would stop caring for him and his bhikkshus, and care for the ascetics instead.

Sundari dressed nicely and went to Jetāvana Monastery in the evening, when the people were leaving the monastery to go home. They thought it was unusual for a lady to go alone to the monastery after the program was over. After she passed them, she went to the ascetics’ homes. Early in the morning, when the people were coming to see the Buddha, she was seen walking from the Jetāvana Monastery, so it appeared that she had spent the night with the Buddha.

After a few days, when many people had seen her going to Jetāvana Monastery in the evening and returning in the morning, the ascetics had her killed and buried in a hole in a ditch near Jetāvana Monastery. The ascetics went to King Pasenadi and reported to him that they could not find Sundari. When the king asked where she might be, they said she may be at Jetāvana Monastery. So the king told them to look for her there.

The ascetics went to the monastery and searched all around, and then dug her body up out of the hole. They put her on a stretcher and carried her into the town of Savatti, shouting “Look at what the followers of Gotama have done! These sons of the Sakyas are shameless wicked liars who do evil things. They claim to practice Dharma, speak truth and be virtuous - but they are not monks, they are not leading a religious life, they are not holy men. How can they do this to her and then kill her?”

Then the people of Savatti were horrified and angry. When they saw the Buddha’s monks, they repeated what the ascetics had said, shouted insults and

nasty accusations at them, and called them bad names. The bhikkshus were embarrassed and upset and reported to the Buddha what was happening.

The Buddha said, “This noise won’t last long. It will only last seven days. When people insult you, say this: “The liar goes to the hell-world, also he, having done wrong, who says ‘I did not do it.’ People who do such bad actions have that destiny in the next life.”

When the bhikkshus went out again, the people insulted them again, and the bhikkshus calmly told them what the Buddha taught them to say: “The liar goes to the hell-world, also he, having done wrong, who says ‘I did not do it.’ People who do such bad actions have that destiny in the next life.” When the people heard that, they thought, “These bhikkshus, the sons of the Sakyas, must not have done this horrible thing.” Sure enough, after seven days, the insults and shouting stopped. Several bhikkshus went to the Buddha, who said, “When harsh words are spoken, just endure them with an undisturbed mind.”

Later, the king and people of Savatthi found out that the ascetics had hired someone to kill Sundari and put her body at Jetāvana Monastery. The ascetics were punished by the king, and the Buddha and the Sangha were again highly honored and well taken care of.

Questions after the story:

1. Why were the ascetics envious of the Buddha and his monks?
2. Why did the ascetics ask Sundari to go to Jetāvana Monastery?
3. Why do you think they had her killed?
4. Was their plan successful?
5. What did the Buddha tell the monks to do when people said terrible things about them?
6. How long did the Buddha say the problem would last?
7. What advice did the Buddha have when harsh words are spoken?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

“Abhūtavādī nirayaṃ upeti, yo vāpi katvā na karomī’ ti cāha

ubho pi te pecca samā bhavanti, nihīnakammā manujā parattha.”

“The liar goes to the hell-world, also he, having done wrong, who says ‘I did not do it.’ People who do such bad actions have the same destiny in the next life.”

Dhammapada 306 (22:1)

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

When someone does or says something unkind, uncaring or cruel to us, it is painful. How would you feel if someone humiliated you or shamed you in front of your friends, like the ascetics and people of Savatthi did to the bhikkshus? The ascetics shamed the Buddha and bhikkshus in front of the whole town of Savatthi, including their friends and supporters. How does a normal person react when he is shamed like that, or if his family or friend is shamed like that? He might feel so angry that he wants to immediately hurt those who did that, or

somehow punish them and make them feel bad for such cruel behavior. His mind would become very disturbed and obsessed with thoughts of revenge and plans of how to do it.

So, sometimes, it is very difficult to do what the Buddha said when very harsh words are spoken, to “just endure them with an undisturbed mind.” What did we learn from previous lessons not to do when someone argues, insults us or shouts at us? We should not argue, and not speak angry or insulting words. We learned that insults cause feelings of anger, hatred, revenge, and ill will, which can result in long-lasting pain and possibly violence. If we use angry speech or insults, then what happens? The other person might insult us back or do something else to upset us, which could provoke us to take revenge, and do things that we will regret later.

What if someone does something very unfair or abusive to you, or says something bad about you to others, how do you feel? We may feel angry, hateful, or revengeful. We want to stop that person from ever doing it again. We want to prove to him how wrong and bad he is, or punish him. Our minds become irritated and focused on how we will “teach him a lesson,” “get him back for what he did.” These are revengeful thoughts. With these thoughts, we might do something that we will regret later.

How can we avoid that? How can we control our minds when we are so upset and angry? It is best not to talk to the person who upset us, because it is likely to become an argument or a fight. We are not as calm and self-controlled as the bhikkhus, so we probably should not say to others that liars will go to a hell-world; they may feel insulted and attack us. Instead, there are some things that we can *do*, and some things that we can *think*, to control our mind, mouth, and actions.

Here are some things that we can do: (1) quickly walk away from the person to show that we will not listen to him any more and to prevent ourselves from saying or doing something in revenge; (2) get a drink of water or juice to cool down our emotions; (3) do some work to keep busy; (4) listen to music that makes us feel happy; (5) write in a diary or journal; (6) read a good book; or (7) take a walk outside. Can you think of some other things that may help calm your mind?

Even if we do these things, we also need to get rid of revengeful and angry thoughts. How? We can remember not to allow a person’s cruelty to bring us down to his level of anger and ill will. Remember that we are good and that person can’t bring us down. Remember that our calmness is the best weapon against him. He did the bad act, so by the Law of Karma, what will happen? He will get exactly what he deserves - the bad result of that action, sooner or later. If he says bad things about us or is abusive or unfair to us, those are not *our* words and deeds, they are *his* - so let him keep them! Don’t think about them! They are his problem, his weakness. As the Buddha said, a liar and people who do bad

actions will go to a hell-world. So *we* don't need to punish him, because his own karma will punish him. If we try to punish him, then what happens to us? Then *we* will suffer the result of that revengeful deed. Also, we should not *wish* for him to suffer - that is ill will. Instead, we can have compassion for him for the pain he will suffer, and for the unhappiness he has now that makes him want to hurt another person. And we should not gossip about the person.

If we control ourselves by resisting the urge to punish him, insult him or use angry words, then we are practicing *forbearance* (khanti), which makes us stronger. Is it true that if we walk away from rather than fight or argue with someone who is cruel to us that we are *stronger*? Who was stronger, Angulimala or the Buddha? Angulimala had a strong body but the Buddha was much stronger overall because he had the enormous strength of self-control. Angulimala totally gave in to the Buddha. When we control our emotions, our mouth, or minds, then we are much stronger than if we shout and fight. So, if someone is cruel to us, and we are self-controlled and don't take revenge - don't shout, argue or fight back - then he is actually helping us become stronger, to have forbearance (khanti), and to have better character!

Activity to reinforce the lesson: Multiple Choice - circle the best answer:

1. If a person insults your best friend, it is best for you to:
 - a. say she or he will go to a hell-world
 - b. walk away from your friend
 - c. tell your friend to fight back
 - d. walk with your friend away from that person

2. If someone calls you bad names, it is best to:
 - a. think about some bad names you could call him
 - b. enjoy thoughts of how he will feel in a hell world
 - c. ignore him
 - d. blast your radio at him

3. If you feel very angry for what someone said about you, it is better to:
 - a. call a friend and tell her how bad that person is
 - b. drink water and read a good book
 - c. think about how to punish that person
 - d. think about that person

4. You can make yourself strong by:
 - a. having forbearance
 - b. not fighting back
 - c. having self-control
 - d. a, b, and c

5. If you are thinking about punishing someone for hurting you, change your thoughts by:
 - a. listening to music
 - b. thinking about how bad he is
 - c. doing some homework
 - d. a and c

6. Forbearance means:
 - a. helping others
 - b. not taking revenge
 - c. resisting the urge to shout at someone
 - d. b and c

7. If a person says or does something bad to you:
 - a. his words and acts belong to him
 - b. you can gossip about him
 - c. you must suffer from his bad words and acts
 - d. if he doesn't believe in karma he won't suffer

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