

Lesson 29 – CONTROL ANGER

Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.

Question to think about before the story: Have you ever gotten so angry that you did something that you regret?

Story: Devadatta's Anger

Devadatta was a cousin of the Buddha, a Sakyan prince who as a child had shot a swan and argued with Prince Siddhartha over who owns the swan. He later was ordained as a Buddhist monk. After having been a monk for many years, he still had desires for power, admiration and honor. He thought, "If a very wealthy person becomes devoted to me, I will get power, honor and whatever I desire." So, he went to visit Prince Ajatasattu, the son of the good and powerful King Bimbisara. When he arrived, Devadatta used his psychic powers to appear in a disguise as a small boy with snakes around his body, to impress the prince. Prince Ajatasattu was scared, guessing that this was some type of powerful being. Devadatta said, "Are you afraid?" Prince Ajatasattu said, "Yes. Who are you?" He replied, "I am Devadatta." The Prince said, "Then please show yourself in your true form." Devadatta then appeared in his normal form as a monk.

The Prince was very impressed, and thought that Devadatta was a great monk to have such powers. So, he served Devadatta with great devotion and gave him many gifts. Devadatta then felt very honored and famous, to have the great Prince Ajatasattu serving him so well. But now that he had this desire fulfilled, he wanted something else - to rule the Sangha. But these desires caused his psychic powers to disappear.

The bhikkhus heard about Devadatta's fame, gifts and honor, and told the Buddha, who said, "Devadatta's gifts, fame and honor will cause his goodness to decrease; they are for his own self-destruction."

One day, Devadatta approached the Buddha while he was surrounded by a huge crowd of followers, and said, "Bhante, you are getting old and weak. You should rest, relax and enjoy your accomplishments. I'll take care of the Sangha." The Buddha answered, "That's not necessary, Devadatta. Don't think about taking charge of the Sangha." Devadatta asked a second and then a third time, and then the Buddha said, "I would not let even Sariputta and Moggallana take care of the Sangha. How can I let the Sangha be ruled by you?" Devadatta reeled in anger, feeling shamed while Moggallana and Sariputta were praised. He silently bowed to the Buddha and left.

With his desire to rule the Sangha frustrated, and having been so insulted, Devadatta had such anger in his mind that he started to have terrible thoughts of hatred and revenge. He went to Prince Ajatasattu and suggested that the Prince may not live long, and then would not get to rule as king, so he should become king soon by killing his father King Bimbisara. Then Devadatta planned to

become the new Buddha by killing Gautama Buddha. So Prince Ajatasattu, convinced that Devadatta was powerful and therefore good, followed his advice and went into the king's inner palace with a knife on his leg. But the guards caught him, and questioned what he was doing. He admitted he intended to kill his father, the king. They asked why, and Prince Ajatasattu said, "Ven. Devadatta." The prince was taken to the king, who asked, "Why did you want to kill me?" The prince replied, "I want the kingdom." So the king gave him the kingdom.

Devadatta asked Ajatasattu to send some men to kill the Buddha. The man who was supposed to kill the Buddha went to where the Buddha was, but he became scared, and his body froze. The Buddha called the man, who put down his weapons, bowed to the Buddha and admitted his foolish and evil intent to kill him. The Buddha said that since he knew and admitted his mistake, he is forgiven. He heard the Buddha teach the Dharma, and he became a follower of the Buddha.

When he heard what happened, Devadatta decided to kill the Buddha himself. He climbed up Vulture Peak Rock when the Buddha was walking in the shade of the rock. Devadatta pushed a huge stone down so it would hit and kill the Buddha. As it rolled down, the stone was caught between two pieces of the rock, and only a sharp piece of the stone fell and cut the Buddha's foot so that it bled. The Buddha looked up and told Devadatta that was a very bad karma. Devadatta did not seem to care, as he soon had another plan.

He went to the stable where a man-killing elephant named Nalagiri was, and announced to the elephant-keepers that he and the king could increase their pay and food, and said, "When the monk Gautama comes down the road, let this elephant loose." The next day, when the Buddha and a group of bhikkhus went to the city to receive food, the elephant-keepers saw them coming and let Nalagiri loose on the road. Nalagiri raised up his trunk, tail and ears and charged toward the Buddha. The bhikkhus quickly warned the Buddha to turn back, but the Buddha said, "It is impossible for a Buddha's life to be taken by violence." People nearby looked to see what would happen. The Buddha thought only of loving-kindness toward Nalagiri, and then the elephant lowered his trunk and walked up to him. The Buddha patted Nalagiri's forehead. Nalagiri picked up the dust from around the Buddha's feet and sprinkled it on his head, and quietly walked back to his stable, now a tamed peaceful elephant.

The people of the town found out how Devadatta tried to kill the Buddha, and Devadatta's fame and honor faded away.

Questions after the story:

1. Why did Devadatta visit Prince Ajatasattu?
2. What did Devadatta desire?
3. Why did he become so angry at the Buddha?
4. How did Devadatta try to kill the Buddha?

5. Why couldn't he kill the Buddha?
6. How did the Buddha tame Nalagiri?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

“Paradukkhūpadānena, attano sukhamicchati, verasamsaggasamsattho, verā so na parimuccati.”

“Entangled by the bonds of anger, he who seeks his own happiness by causing pain to others is never free from anger.”

Dhammapada 291 (21:2)

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

Devadatta had some desires that most people have - he wanted to be admired, he wanted popular or powerful people to like him, he wanted to have nice things, and he wanted to show off how popular he was. So with these desires, he became friends with Prince Ajatasattu for selfish reasons. But, when the Prince gave him what he wanted, was he happy? Not for long. As we know, one desire leads to another. Getting what we want does not ever make us happy for long. There is always something else we want.

So then Devadatta wanted to rule the Sangha. But the Buddha refused his request, and his desire was frustrated, leading to anger.

When we get angry, are we able to think clearly? Usually not. Anger makes our mind so disturbed that we cannot concentrate or enjoy anything. We think about how we can get what we want, who has what we want, and who is blocking us from getting what we want. We envy those who have what we want, we feel aggressive toward those who prevent us from getting what we want, we feel revengeful toward those who took something away from us, and we think of ways to force or trick others into giving us what we want. These thoughts make us forget Dharma, forget ways to calm down and be happy.

Entangled by our feelings of anger, we only get more desires, frustrations, and anger. We not only want to get some *things*, we also want to get others to do what we want, or we want to hurt someone who took what we like, or who prevented us from getting what we want. We think we will only be happy if we get our way. So we say and do things to get what we want. If we speak according to our thoughts, what kind of things would we say? Angry words, insults, and bad talk about others. If we act according to our thoughts, what might we do? Fight, steal, or do something else to hurt others. Because of the anger, we don't think clearly, and we foolishly think that if we manipulate or hurt others to get our way, to get what we want, we will be happier. These are all bad karmas, pāpakarma. And we know what that leads to!

So, the underlying cause of all of this trouble is desire. If we can be more content and less agitated by desire, then we can control our anger and avoid so much trouble and suffering. How can we be more content? Naturally we want to be comfortable and get what we need. Everyone has those desires. But we have to

recognize what we really need and what is not really necessary. Do we want something just because our friend has it? Do we want something new because we are bored with what we have? These are the kinds of questions we ask ourselves to see whether something is really necessary.

Activities to reinforce the lesson: (Choose one)

A. Flowchart: Each student draws a flowchart on paper on how a desire can result in harming someone, and an unpleasant future:

The first box is labeled “desire,” with two arrows coming from that box leading to boxes marked “desire fulfilled ” and “desire not fulfilled.”

The “desire fulfilled” box has one arrow leading to the first box.

The “desire not fulfilled” box has one arrow leading to a box labeled “frustration,”

The “frustration” box has one arrow leading to a box labeled “anger.”

The “anger” box has three arrows:

(1) leading to a box marked “hatred of person preventing me from getting what I want”;

(2) leading to a box marked “envy of people who have what I want”; and

(3) leading to a box marked “stealing or use of force, threats or lies to get what I want.”

The latter box (3) has one arrow leading to a box marked “others get angry at me.”

Boxes (1) and (2) (hatred and envy) lead to a box marked “ill will toward others.”

Finally, the boxes marked “others get angry at me” and “ill will” lead to a box marked “angry words, harmful deeds.”

The latter box (angry words, harmful deeds) has one arrow leading to a box labeled “results of bad karmas: suffering, unhappy future, unhappy rebirth.”

B. List of Ways to Control Anger: Each student lists on paper possible ways to control anger, then posts the list in his or her bedroom so it can be referred to when he/she gets angry:

Close eyes

Drink cold water or juice

Drink milk & feel thankful to the cows who provided it

Breathe deeply – breathe out anger, breathe in peace

Remember anger wastes my energy

Lay down

Listen to music

Go outside, enjoy nature

Take a walk

about it

Take a bath or shower

Read a book

Clean my room

Do homework

Write in a journal or diary

Remember that someone who hurts others
hurts inside and creates bad karma

Chant or say a prayer

Avoid people who upset me

Remember calmness is the
best weapon

Think of good qualities of person
who upset me

Look in mirror, decide not to look angry

Tell a friend how you feel, try to laugh

Draw a picture or cartoon

Sing or play musical instrument

Count to ten before talking

Closing chant: Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā

May all beings have happy minds!