

Lesson 3 – AVOID ARGUMENTS

Opening chants, meditation, and review of last lesson.

Question to think about before the story:

Have you ever had an argument with someone, each of you saying “it’s mine”?
Have you ever had an **argument** when someone did something wrong and you were trying to correct him or her?

Story: Devadatta and the Swan

Prince Siddhartha was extremely kind and compassionate to all. He never hurt others, he wanted to make others happy and was always ready to help both human and animal beings. He even loved snakes and other animals that other people did not care about. Prince Siddhartha often played in the park with his friends and his cousin, Devadatta. Devadatta had a bow and arrows and he liked to hunt animals.

One day when the Prince and his friends were in the park, Devadatta saw a swan flying and shot it with an arrow, and the swan dropped to the ground. Prince Siddhartha quickly ran to the swan and saw that it was alive, but in great pain. He removed the arrow, caressing the swan tenderly, and got some healing leaves and squeezed out some juice from the leaves onto the wound. He bandaged it with a cloth. Just then Devadatta rushed up to Siddhartha and angrily demanded, “Give me my bird. I shot it.” Prince Siddhartha replied, “No, I’m not going to give it to you. If you had killed it, then it is yours. But it was wounded and alive, and I saved it, so it is mine.” Devadatta argued and demanded that Prince Siddhartha give him the bird. Prince Siddhartha said, “Let’s go to the pundits (wise men) and ask who owns it.” Devadatta agreed.

They explained the situation to the pundits, who discussed it and said, “A life must belong to him who tries to save it. A life cannot belong to one only trying to destroy it. So, the swan belongs to Prince Siddhartha.”

Prince Siddhartha took care of the swan until he was healed. Then Prince Siddhartha released him so he could live in freedom as a wild swan. But Devadatta began to hate Prince Siddhartha.

Questions after the story:

1. How did Devadatta feel about other beings?
2. What happened when Devadatta’s arrow hit the swan?
3. Why didn’t Prince Siddhartha give the swan to Devadatta?
4. If the swan was dead, would Prince Siddhartha argue with Devadatta to keep it? Why not?
5. Why did the Pundits say that Prince Siddhartha should have the swan?
6. What do you think would have happened if Prince Siddhartha did not argue with Devadatta?
7. How did Prince Siddhartha and Devadatta settle the argument?

8. Why do you think Prince Siddhartha decided to go to the pundits rather than try to win the argument himself?
9. When someone does something wrong, or wants to do something wrong, should we always argue? Should we always keep quiet? Should we always go to an adult to settle it?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

“Na tena ariyo hoti, yena pāṇāni himsati; ahimsa sabbapāṇānam, ariyō ti pavuccati.”

“He is not noble who injures living beings. He is called noble because he is harmless to all living beings.”

Dhammapada 270 (19:15)

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

We know that it is wrong to kill or injure the body of another being, human or animal. The word “ahimsa” means not harming, or not hurting. But harm can be done to others in many ways. The body can be hurt or injured. What are some other ways that we can feel harm or hurt? How do you feel when someone argues with you? We often feel annoyed, or we may feel angry. Or, if we “win” the argument, the other person gets annoyed or angry, and may try to hurt us in return. So, arguing is often harmful. Also, others who hear the argument get annoyed or may join in the argument, causing more people to lose their temper, which is harming them. Arguing can become a bad habit. Buddha teaches us to be harmless to all living beings - to practice *ahimsa* (which means non-harming, non-violence). This means not to harm others with our acts or our words or even our thoughts. So usually, arguing is not a good thing. We should not argue just because we want to have something, which is selfish. We should not argue to force someone to do what we want. We should not argue to avoid doing something that we should do. And we should not argue with parents or teachers.

But we see from the story that there are times when arguing is the right thing to do. When is it OK to argue? You can argue to save the life of another being, or to prevent another being from harm. This does not happen very often, right? Sometimes it is difficult to decide whether arguing will really protect someone from harm.

It is also sometimes difficult to decide whether arguing will protect ourselves from harm. We might argue to defend ourselves, to stand our ground, and not give in to what other kids say. We may believe that we will look weak if we don't argue. We don't like some kid bossing us around, bullying us, bothering us, or treating us unfairly. How can we defend ourselves without arguing? It is alright to say our opinion, to disagree, to ignore someone trying to argue with us, to walk away, or to refuse to do something we think is wrong. We should protect ourselves from being abused by others. This is not harming others. But if we try to force others to do something or to agree with us by speaking harshly, loudly, angrily, or with threats or insults, then we are arguing. We are disturbing all

those people who hear our loud unfriendly voices, which is harming them. Before we do that, we need to determine whether we *should* argue.

We must decide whether arguing is more helpful to others or more harmful to our selves and others. So, we have to carefully think, are we arguing to really help or protect someone? Or are we arguing to impress others, to “win” the argument, or to get what we want but don’t really need? These are not good reasons to argue.

When we are trying to protect someone, protect an animal, or protect ourselves, we may have to go to an adult to settle the argument. Prince Siddhartha saw that Devadatta was very angry and forceful, so it was best to go to the pundits to settle the argument rather than continue arguing.

Activity to reinforce the lesson: In each of the following scenarios, should you argue or keep quiet? Under what conditions is it wrong to argue? Under what conditions is it good or OK to argue?

1. Your little sister wants to play with your toy. Should you argue and prevent her from playing with it?
2. Your little brother is eating cookies and you ask him to stop eating so many, but he doesn’t stop. Should you argue and prevent him from eating them?
3. A student says something insulting to another student. Should you argue with him or her?
4. Your sister drops food on the floor, you point it out, but she does not clean it. Should you argue?
5. You and your brother are watching TV and he turns it to another channel. You ask him to put it back, and he refuses. Should you insist that he turn it back to the other channel?
6. You are standing in line at school and a student cuts in front of you. Should you argue?
7. Your brother borrows your clean bike and returns it full of mud, and you ask him to clean it but he says no, he didn’t make it muddy. Should you argue and insist that he clean it?

Suggested Answers:

1. No if you just want to play with the toy or you don't like her to have it. Yes if the toy is dangerous for her.
2. No if you just want to eat or save the cookies for yourself. Yes if you think he may get sick from eating too many.
3. If you think the student was really hurt by the insult, you may say something to point out that insulting is wrong. If he or she argues back, it is best to keep quiet and avoid arguing. If it seems likely that he or she may harm the other student again, then it is appropriate to tell an adult.
4. You can kindly point out the food on the floor again, but if she still does not clean it, arguing probably won't make her do it, but only causes annoyance. You can clean it and discuss it with your parents.
5. Yes if the other channel is violent (harmful). No if you just want to watch your channel. You can kindly agree to watch a show you both like, or a show that you like for some time and a show he likes for an equal time. (But you should not watch too much TV, and only what your parents permit!)
6. If you are last in line and you think the person didn't notice you, you can politely say "I'm in line also." If others are in line behind you, they may be unhappy if you allow him to cut in line, so you can kindly say "excuse me, they are all waiting also." If he ignores you, arguing probably won't help, it only causes annoyance.
7. No, it probably won't help anyone to argue. You can discuss it with your parents.

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