

## **Lesson 31 – AVOID WASTING OPPORTUNITY**

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

*Question to think about before the story:* Have you ever felt too lazy to go some place, but then later you wished you had gone?

### **Story: The Passing Away of the Buddha**

When the Buddha was 80 years old, during the rainy season, he got very sick, with severe pain that could take his life. The Buddha thought, “It is not good to pass away without telling the bhikkshus.” So he made the illness disappear and he recovered.

Ven. Ananda saw that he looked healthier, and felt relieved. He said, “Bhante, I am used to seeing you look healthy and comfortable. When you were sick, I felt weak, I couldn’t think clearly. But I knew that you would not pass away into Nirvana without giving instructions to the bhikkshus.” The Buddha replied, “Ananda, what does the Sangha expect from me? I taught Dharma without keeping anything secret. I am old, my body is like an old cart that needs repairs. It is only comfortable with extra effort; I must concentrate my mind so I don’t think of the body and its feelings. So, each of you should make the Dharma your refuge, by being mindful, fully aware, giving up greed.”

One day, Ven. Ananda was alone with the Buddha, who said, “Ananda, anyone who like me has developed the four ways leading to success could, if he wished, live for a very long time. I have completely mastered them, so if I wish, I could live longer.” This was a hint to Ven. Ananda to ask the Buddha to live much longer. Ven. Ananda didn’t get the hint; he wasn’t paying full attention. The Buddha repeated himself twice, but Ven. Ananda still didn’t get it. The Buddha said that Ven. Ananda could leave, so he did.

Mara came and encouraged the Buddha to pass into Parinirvana. The Buddha told him that in three months, he would pass away into Parinirvana, the final goal. Just then, an earthquake occurred, because the Buddha had given up the will to live. Ven. Ananda asked the Buddha why there was an earthquake, and when the Buddha told him, he suddenly remembered what the Buddha had said about living longer. Ven. Ananda said “Bhante, live longer for the welfare and happiness of the people, from your compassion.” The Buddha told him, “Don’t ask me now, the time to ask that has passed. I gave you the hint, but you didn’t ask, so I gave up the will to live and I cannot go back on those words.” He told him to call all of the bhikkshus in the monastery.

The Buddha told them, “I taught you the things which I know directly. You must learn, study and practice them, so the holy life will last long for the good of many people, with compassion for the world. All things must get old and pass away. In three months, the Buddha will pass away and I will attain Parinirvana.” But he explained that the Dharma does not age, does not wear out.

One bhikkhu, Ven Dhammarama, did not go to visit the Buddha in his last days, so the others thought he didn't care about the Buddha. When the Buddha called Ven. Dhammarama to come, he explained to the Buddha that the best way to honor him is to become an arahant before the Buddha passes away. The Buddha praised him, saying "He who loves me should follow the example of Dhammarama. He honors me most who practices my teachings best."

The Buddha became very weak and sick with terrible pains, but he did not complain. He traveled to the village of Kusinara. The Buddha told Ananda to announce in Kusinara that in the last part of the night, he will pass into Parinirvana, so they won't be sad if they missed seeing it.

But even while people were grieving that the Buddha was leaving forever, a wandering ascetic named Subhadda came to visit the Buddha. Subhadda heard that the Buddha would be passing away, but he had a question and wanted the Buddha to teach the Dharma to answer it. Ven. Ananda tried to stop him, saying, "Friend, do not trouble the Buddha, he is weary." The Buddha heard him, and told Ven. Ananda not to stop Subhadda from asking his question. Subhadda approached the Buddha, asked his question, and the Buddha answered it. Subhadda then took refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The Buddha told Ven. Ananda to ordain him into the Sangha, and he later became an Arahant.

The Buddha's last words were: "Bhikkhus, it is the nature of all things to dissolve. Attain perfection by diligence."

*Questions after the story:*

1. Why did the Buddha make his illness disappear?
2. Why didn't Ven. Ananda ask the Buddha to live longer when the Buddha first hinted to him?
3. Why do you think Mara wanted the Buddha to pass into Parinirvana?
4. Why did Ven. Dhammarama not come to see the Buddha?
5. What is the best way to honor the Buddha?
6. Why did the Buddha allow Subhadda to see him even in the last moments of life?

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

**"Uttitṭhe nappamajjeyya, dhammaṃ sucariṭaṃ care, dhammacāri sukhaṃ seti, asmim loke paramhi ca."**

**"Wake up! Be diligent! Lead a righteous life. He who lives practicing the Dharma lives happily both in this world and the next."**

Dhammapada 168 (13:2)

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

One of the most important teachings of the Buddha is that all things that arise must end. The body, even the Buddha's body, gets old and has to end. We hope that we will grow very old before we die, but we never know for sure when our life will end. So, the Buddha taught us to make the best use of our time while we are

alive in this body. In other words, we should not waste time. How do we waste time now? Watching TV, playing electronic games, seeing movies, talking on the phone? We should wake up and notice what we are really *doing* with our time. We can take some time for play, sports and recreation, but we should not overdo it.

The Buddha taught us by his example not to waste any time. He gave many teachings even in his very last days when he was in extreme pain. Even when he had only a few moments left before he was to pass away, he met with a new devotee, taught him Dharma and had him ordained! Yet even Ven. Ananda, a great monk, thought that the Buddha should just relax in peace in his last few moments of life. This shows how just a few moments of effort can make such an enormous difference. Another example of not wasting time is Ven. Dhammarama, who wanted to spend his time practicing Dharma the best way he could, so that he could become an arahant. So for him, that meant not even spending time to visit with the Buddha.

Another lesson from this story is not to waste opportunities. Ven. Ananda had the opportunity to make a really big difference - to cause the Buddha to live much longer. The Buddha could have guided many more people if he had lived longer. But Ven. Ananda wasted this great opportunity because he wasn't paying close attention. There are so many opportunities to help someone, to be friendly, to show someone we care, to do some selfless service. How many opportunities have we lost because we weren't paying close attention? We may never know, because we weren't paying attention and no one told us what we missed.

The Buddha's last words were advice not just for the monks, but for everyone: to be diligent. What does "diligence" mean? To do something with great interest, attention and effort. These words emphasize how important it is to pay attention to what should be done and do it well. We assume that we have plenty of time, the rest of our lives, to become more virtuous, to make merit (punyakarma), and to control our minds. But as we have learned in earlier lessons, we form habits by what we do now. It is very difficult to change our habits when we are older. If we have good habits now, living according to Dharma and meditating, then it is much easier to maintain them and improve ourselves when we are older.

*Activity to reinforce the lesson:* Decorating alarm clocks:

Teacher brings a small alarm clock for each student, and art supplies such as glue, markers, yarn, fabric scraps, felt pieces, buttons, sequins, ribbon, glitter glue. Each student is given a clock. Materials such as felt, fabric, popsicle sticks, ribbons, etc. may be glued to the clock. The message "Don't Waste Time" is written in marker or glitter glue on suitable material to be glued to the clock.

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