

## **Lesson 4 – UNDERSTAND SUFFERING**

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

*Question to think about before the story:* Have you ever thought about how every living person feels **suffering** (dukkha) in their lives?

### **Story: The Four Signs**

Prince Siddhartha grew up with all of the comforts and wealth given to him by his royal family's palaces in the city of Kapilavasthu. When he was 16 years old, his father King Suddhōdana met with his council and they discussed Prince Siddhartha's future as a king, to govern the Sakya people. The council members suggested that Prince Siddhartha get married. King Suddhōdana wondered which young lady would be the right one to be Prince Siddhartha's bride, and each council member wanted his daughter to be married to Prince Siddhartha. The King asked his son what type of bride he would accept, and Prince Siddhartha replied that she must not be an ordinary girl, but she must have no envy, she must be truthful, careful, not proud of her beauty, generous, content, religious, pure in mind and speech and respectful to all. The King sent messengers to search for a bride for his son, and they invited all of the daughters of the neighboring kings and nobles to his palace. They came to the palace dressed beautifully. Prince Siddhartha presented each young lady with a gift. The daughter of King Supprabuddha, Princess Yashodhara, who was Prince Siddhartha's cousin, was one of the young ladies invited. But after all of the other young ladies received a gift from Prince Siddhartha, he had no extra gift for Princess Yashodhara, so he gave one of his own pieces of jewelry to her that he was wearing, maybe a gold ring. Prince Siddhartha saw that Princess Yashodhara had the qualities that he had told his father he was looking for, and decided that she would be his bride. Soon, they were married.

Prince Siddhartha lived happily with his wife Yashodhara, with the best food and entertainment – musicians, dancers and singers. One day, Prince Siddhartha asked Channa, the driver of his chariot (horse drawn carriage), to drive him outside the palace grounds to the park. An old man was walking along the road, bent over, shaking, holding on to a large stick for support. Prince Siddhartha asked Channa, "What is wrong with that man? Why is his hair so white and his face wrinkled?" Channa replied, "He is very old." Prince Siddhartha had never seen an old person before, and asked, "what is the meaning of 'old'?" Channa said, "He will not live long." Prince Siddhartha asked, "Will I become old like that?" Channa said, "You and I and all people get old." Prince Siddhartha felt unhappy and said "Enough of this journey. Let's go back home." He was filled with sorrow and distress, thinking that everyone who is born must get old. When King Suddhōdana saw his distress, he sent more dancing girls to entertain the Prince.

On another day, Prince Siddhartha went in his chariot to the park with Channa. Along the road they saw a man lying down, wailing in pain, trembling and thin, breathing loudly. Channa said, "Let's get away from here." Prince Siddhartha asked, "Who is he? Why should we get away?" Channa replied, "He is a sick man. Everyone gets sick some time. It is painful. Anyone can get sick at any time." Prince Siddhartha asked, "Could I get sick? Can royal people get sick?" Channa said, "Yes, no one knows when they will get sick." Prince Siddhartha was again very upset and distressed, and when King Suddhōdana observed this, he ordered more entertainment for the Prince, and guards to watch him.

On another day, Prince Siddhartha went with Channa to the park, and they saw a body being carried on a stretcher, with people crying around the body. Prince Siddhartha asked Channa, "What is this? Why are those people crying? Is the man sleeping on the stretcher?" Channa answered, "The body is a dead man." Prince Siddhartha asked, "What is the meaning of 'dead'?" Channa said, "A dead person cannot walk or even move, and they cannot feel anything. The body will be cremated, burned to ashes." Prince Siddhartha asked, "Will I die? Will my father die? Will all the people I know die?" Channa said, "All living beings die. We cannot avoid it. No one can live forever." Prince Siddhartha returned to the palace, filled with sorrow.

On yet another day, Prince Siddhartha went with Channa to the park, and they saw a man wearing an orange cloth, with a bowl. His face looked very serene. Prince Siddhartha asked Channa about this man. Channa explained that he is a renunciant, a person who has given up family life to live a simple life without a home and other comforts, to develop his virtues. Prince Siddhartha liked the idea of a renunciant, and he stayed in the park happily. He had many deep thoughts after seeing these four sights: the old man, the sick man, the dead man and the renunciant. He thought, "If I get old, sick and die, be reborn again and have unhappiness and bad thoughts, then why should I seek those things that lead to getting old, sick and dying, rebirth, unhappiness and bad thoughts? What if I seek that which is not born, that which does not age, does not get sick, does not die, and does not have sorrow and impurity." He did not enjoy the pleasures at the palace anymore, the singers, dancers and musicians. He wanted to be a renunciant, like the one he saw.

*Questions after the story:*

1. Did Prince Siddhartha want the most beautiful lady in the country to be his bride? What type of lady did he want as his bride?
2. What did Prince Siddhartha see during the first ride to the park with Channa?
3. What did he see during the second ride and the third rides to the park?
4. Do you get upset when you see old, sick or dead people?
5. Why do you think Siddhartha felt upset when he saw these three sights?
6. Why do you think King Suddhōdana ordered more entertainment for Siddhartha, and guards to watch him?
7. What did he see on the fourth ride to the park?
8. What is a renunciant?

9. How did he change after seeing the renunciant?

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

**“Dukkānupatitaddhagū”**

**“A person who is in samsara (continuing cycle of birth, death and rebirth) experiences suffering.”**

Dhammapada 302 (21:13)

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

Does everyone suffer? Do you think that some people are always happy and do not experience real suffering (dukkha)? Many students at school, movie stars, sports stars, and other people we see seem to have a life full of pleasures and fun. We don't see them unhappy, crying, or in pain. But we should know that however wealthy, famous, intelligent or popular a person is, each person experiences illness, pain, fear, worry, stress, anger, frustration, loss, grief, embarrassment, agitation and other unpleasant feelings, which are all dukkha. Many people don't like others to know that they are unhappy or distressed, so they do not show their unpleasant feelings. Many people experience years of an easy life without many big difficulties. But everyone experiences some dukkha every day - some worry, wait, disappointment, feeling uncomfortable (such as being too hot, cold, hungry or thirsty), someone disappointed with us, someone expecting us to do something we don't want to do, forgetting something important, losing something, something not working properly, or someone ignoring us or acting unpleasant toward us. We feel happiness, we have fun, we enjoy, but some type of dukkha always comes afterward. It is said that pleasure comes only between two pains. And everyone experiences extreme dukkha at some points in their lives - loss of someone they love, getting in an accident, having a serious illness, losing something precious, failure, loneliness, or fear.

Siddhartha felt such compassion for others that he felt very sad seeing illness, old age, death, and pain. He could not be happy knowing that others are suffering. He wanted to relieve people from suffering by finding a way to escape it.

*Activity to reinforce the lesson:*

Bean bag toss: Students sit in a circle, and try to think of several situations which cause dukkha in their lives (for example, getting a bad grade, being late for class, rejection, broken toy, not being invited to a party, being bullied, making your team lose, disagreement with a friend, boredom, too much homework). As the teacher or parent tosses the bean bag toward a student, he/she calls out a situation which causes dukkha. The student catching the bean bag must immediately toss the bean bag to another student while calling out a different situation which causes dukkha. Students continue the bean bag toss while calling out a situation which causes dukkha. If a student pauses more than three seconds with the bean bag, calls out a dukkha situation after throwing it, or calls out a situation which someone else already called, he is “out” and is no longer in the game. The last one in the game wins.

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