

Lesson 5 – AVOID BAD INFLUENCE

Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.

Question to think about before the story: Have you ever decided to stay away from a friend because you think he or she has become a **bad influence**?

Story: Leaving Home

Prince Siddhartha very often thought about the renunciant that he saw, the man who had given up family life and comforts to live a spiritual life of meditation. His face was so calm and peaceful, he seemed to have no worries at all, although he had no home, belongings or family. Prince Siddhartha thought, “Living in a palace is a crowded life, like living in a dusty atmosphere. The life of a renunciant is like living in wide open fresh air. It is not easy, living in a household, to lead a holy life of purity. Suppose I shave off my hair and beard, put on a yellow robe, leave the household life and live my life as a renunciant?” King Suddhōdana noticed that Siddhartha seemed uninterested in the entertainment at the palace, so he worried that his son may decide to abandon the royal life and become a renunciant. King Suddhōdana wanted his son to become the next king when he passes away, so he ordered the best musicians and dancers to entertain at the palace.

Prince Siddhartha’s wife Yashodhara was going to have a baby. When Prince Siddhartha was away from the palace one day, he heard the news that his son was born, and he thought to himself, “An eclipse has arisen. Another bond to the world is created which is an obstacle to my renunciation.” The baby was named Prince Rahula.

As Prince Siddhartha was returning to the palace, he passed the mansion of Princess Kisagotami, who was standing out on her balcony. When she saw Prince Siddhartha, she felt joy and admiration for him, and thinking that his family must feel great joy to be with him, she said, “His mother, father and wife must be nibuddha, very peaceful.” Prince Siddhartha heard her say this, and he thought, “Nibuddha is such a wonderful word. I am looking for nibuddha, which is not selfish happiness but true peace. Today I must give up my householder life. Princess Kisagotami inspired me with the word ‘nibuddha,’ so I will give her a gift.” So he gave her some jewelry as a gift, which made her feel very happy.

When he arrived at the palace, he had dinner and the finest dancers and musicians were there to entertain him. To please his father, he watched them late into the night, until he fell asleep. Then one by one, everyone started falling asleep. When Prince Siddhartha awoke in the middle of the night, he saw the dancers asleep. Some of them had their mouths open, some had saliva dripping from their lips, some were snoring, and some were grinding their teeth like demons. The dancers who had looked so beautiful now looked so disgusting. He got up and told Channa to secretly prepare his favorite white horse, Kanthaka, for a long journey.

Then he silently went to the bedroom to see his newborn son. Yashodhara and the baby Rahula were sleeping so peacefully. Yashodhara had the baby cradled in her arms, holding him close to her, and her arm was covering baby Rahula's face. Prince Siddhartha wanted to see his son's face, but he thought, "If I move her arm, she will awaken, and my concentration will be ruined. I won't have the strength to leave her and become a renunciant. But I will find Enlightenment, and then I will come back to them."

So that night, when he was 29 years old, he left the palace, riding his horse, along with Channa. As he rode away he looked back at his home city, Kapilavasthu, and thought, "I will not return until I have found the end to old age, sickness and death." When he got to the deep Anoma River, the powerful horse Kanthaka jumped over the river. Prince Siddhartha got off the horse and told Channa, "Please take my jewelry and the horse and go back to the palace. I will become a renunciant. Tell my parents and Yashodhara not to worry, that I have gone to find a way to end old age, sickness and death." Channa said, "Please let me go with you!" But Siddhartha said, "No, when I have found the way to enlightenment, I will return. Then everyone will be happy." With his sword, he cut his hair. As soon as each small bunch of hair was cut, it curled around to the right in a circle and stayed that way. (That is why statues and paintings of the Buddha show his hair as they do.) Channa bowed to Siddhartha, and started to ride back to Kapilavasthu. But as Siddhartha disappeared into the distance, Kanthaka's heart broke with love for Siddhartha, and he died. Channa cried with sorrow, also missing his dear Prince Siddhartha.

Siddhartha saw that his beautiful clothes were not appropriate for a renunciant. A great heavenly being named Ghatikara, who is a Maha Brahma, knew that Siddhartha would become a renunciant, so he brought the eight necessities for a monk: 3 robes, a bowl, a razor, a needle, a belt, and a water strainer. Siddhartha accepted the gifts from Ghatikara, and went to meditate in the forest.

Questions after the story:

1. How did Siddhartha feel when he heard that his son was born?
2. What did Princess Kisagotami say that inspired him?
3. What did Prince Siddhartha think of the dancers when they were asleep?
4. Why did Prince Siddhartha leave the palace?
5. Why did he not see his son's face before he left the palace?
6. Why do you think Siddhartha did not let Kanthaka and Channa come along too?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

"Asevanā ca bālānaṃ, paṇḍitānaṃ ca sevanā, puḍā ca pūjanīyaṃ, etaṃ mangalamuttamaṃ."

"Not to follow or associate with the ignorant, associating with the wise, honoring those who deserve honor, this is the best way."

Mahamangala Sutta

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

Prince Siddhartha gave up, “renounced,” his family life - he left his wonderful loving wife, his newborn son, his dear parents and all of his friends and relatives. This is not because Yashodhara was ignorant or misbehaved; she was an extremely good person. If he had stayed with them, he could not have become enlightened, to find the way to end the cycle of old age, sickness, death and rebirth. So, even though it was very difficult to leave them, he knew it would be better for him to leave. It was so difficult for him that he knew that if Yashodhara woke up as he was leaving, his love for her would distract him from doing what was best for everyone, and he might not leave.

Sometimes when we like someone, it is difficult to leave that person. We like to be with the person even if it is not good for us. For example, we don't want to leave a friend even if his or her behavior is not good. Sometimes friends who we thought were nice change, and their behavior gets out of line. For example, they disobey or talk disrespectfully to their parents or teachers, hurt or say bad things about others, lie, bully, act arrogantly, or take others' things without permission. We might make excuses for their behavior because we don't want to lose their friendship. They may be popular, fun, or make us laugh. But when their behavior goes out of line, they are ignorant, they are not being wise. If we associate with them, then we are associating with the ignorant, which Buddha warned us not to do.

But, maybe we think we can be a good example to them, and their behavior will improve. Have you ever thought like that? Is it a good idea? It is not a good idea. Why did Buddha warn us not to associate with the ignorant? It is because no matter how confident we are that we can be a good example, or that we will not get drawn into misbehavior, the fact is that one person's misbehavior very easily spreads to others who associate with him or her. Adults are very often led into wrong acts, bad talk or bad thoughts by one person's bad influence. So, certainly as young people, it is impossible to follow Dharma if we associate with those who violate Dharma.

If it is difficult to leave a friend who misbehaves, we can remember the example of Prince Siddhartha. We can remember how difficult it was for him to leave his wife and family so that he could do what was best for him, and eventually what was best for everyone. And, making one good decision leads to making other good decisions! Leaving one bad influence makes it easier to leave other bad influences in the future. Then we have a habit of making good decisions.

Activity to reinforce the lesson: Make a poster: Each student copies the quotation of Buddha (above) neatly on paper with colored markers or colored pencils. The quotation is then decorated with various art materials, perhaps with a drawing showing how the student will stay away from others who misbehave. The poster can be hung on the wall in the student's bedroom or on the

refrigerator at home to remind him or her of this very important teaching of Lord Buddha.

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