

FORGIVENESS

Question before the story: Has someone ever done something that made you so angry that you could not stand that person, and you planned to hurt him in return for what he did?

THE CHAPLAIN WHO HATED CROWS

One day, two crows were sitting in a tree, looking down toward the river where the king's chaplain was having his bath. After his leisurely bath, the chaplain dabbed scented oil on his skin, and put on his nicest clothes and a flower garland around his neck. Feeling all clean and fresh, he happily walked back to the town, looking forward to another pleasant day at the king's palace.

One of the crows said, "I am going to let my droppings fall on his head." The second crow said, "Don't do that. The chaplain is a very powerful and well respected man. It is a bad idea to make a very respected person angry. If you get him angry, he may destroy all of us crows!" But the first crow said, "Well, I really want to do it." The second crow shook his head slowly, and said, "OK, but you are sure to be found out," and then flew away.

Just as the chaplain walked under the tree, the crow let a big dropping fall and splatter on the chaplain's head. The chaplain glared up at the crow, and became enraged. He could not do anything -- he wished he could hit the crow with a stone, but knew he would miss the crow high up in the tree. From then on, he felt disgusted with crows. He often remembered the incident, and his hatred for crows grew worse. He tried to think of a way to destroy crows, so he would be sure to destroy the crow that humiliated him.

Several weeks later, just outside the town, a servant girl was spreading rice out to dry in the sun. Whenever she would fall asleep, a goat would eat up the rice. The girl chased the goat away every time she saw him. She was always worried that the goat would eat up the rice, so she thought of a way to scare him forever and keep him away. She found a thick short branch and put the end of it in a fire, and set it nearby. Then she lay on the ground near the rice and pretended to sleep. She peeked occasionally to see if the goat was coming. Then when she saw him coming, she suddenly jumped up and grabbed the branch with the fire and hit the goat with the burning end of it. Terrified, the goat ran with his fur burning, to the hay shed to roll in the hay and put the fire out. The hay shed was at the end of the stable where the king's elephant was. The hay caught on fire and then the stable caught on fire, burning the elephant's skin.

The boy who took care of the elephant quickly put the fire out with wet rags, and then ran to report to the king that the elephant's skin was burned, and to request some medicine. The king called out to the chaplain, "What is a remedy for burns on the skin?" The chaplain had just been remembering again the incident with the crow, feeling the vengeance, wanting to destroy crows, to make sure that no crow would ever humiliate him again. He was aroused from his thoughts when the king again shouted, "Chaplain! What is the remedy for burns?" The chaplain had a

devious thought, and announced confidently, “Well of course, crow fat will cure any burns immediately.”

The king ordered his hunters to shoot some crows so they could use the fat to cure the elephant. But when they cut open the crows’ bodies, they did not find any fat on his body – it was all feathers, muscle and bones. So the hunters shot some more crows, and when no fat was found on their bodies, the hunters shot more and more crows, thinking surely some of the big ones would have fat to cure the elephant.

The crows in the town panicked seeing their brothers being killed, and reported the killings to the king of the crows. The king of the crows flew to the human king’s palace. He flew straight into the king’s front room where the throne was, and he flew under the king’s throne. A servant tried to catch that crazy crow, but just then the king walked in and stopped the servant. The king walked up to the throne, and the king of crows slowly walked out from under the throne, with the sun shining from the window onto his glossy feathers, making them glisten with iridescent color.

The king of crows looked up at the king with large, shiny black eyes, and said, “Sire, a king should remember that a king should not act with bad thoughts like hatred in ruling his kingdom. Before you act, you should first examine the facts, and know the whole story. You should understand what is really going on, and then only do what is good. In telling you about the crows’ fat, the chaplain lied to you. He was prompted by revenge to lie to you. Crows have no fat. He just said that so that the crows would all be killed, because one crow had humiliated him.”

The king’s heart softened as he heard the dignified crow explain the king’s error in believing the chaplain. The king then made a little throne for the king of crows, and gave him a gilded plate piled high with the king’s own food for the king of crows to eat. Thereafter, the king was generous to all crows, giving them food to eat every day.

Questions:

1. How did the chaplain feel when the crow let his droppings fall on the chaplain’s head?
2. How did the chaplain feel about crows afterward?
3. How do you think the servant girl felt when the goat ate the rice when she was sleeping?
4. Why was the chaplain still angry at crows several weeks later?
5. How did he get his revenge on the crows?
6. What wrong behaviors did the king of crows point out to the human king?

What the Buddha said:

“He abused me, he struck me, he overpowered me, he robbed me.’ Those who hold onto such thoughts do not end their hatred.”

Discussion about forgiveness:

When someone does something that makes you angry and makes you want to hurt him in return, what is the name of that feeling? Revenge, or vengeance. When we have feelings of revenge, we make plans of how we can “teach him a lesson” in a way that is not pleasant for him, or may hurt him very much. Maybe we wish to humiliate him, make him look really bad, ruin his reputation or make him lose his popularity. We wish that he would feel hurt like he hurt us. We make elaborate plans of how we will get back at him, how we will have our revenge. We imagine how silly he will look, how others will laugh at him, how upset he will be, how he would wish he never hurt us.

We might think that revenge helps us cope with our anger – we expect that our rage will be over once we have our revenge. We enjoy our clever and devious plans of revenge. We might even share our plans with others and laugh about it. Maybe we think that is OK, because we often see people punish others for wrongdoing. Even our parents punish us when we do something that upsets them. Teachers and school officials may punish us if we do something wrong at school. So we might think, why can’t we also punish others for doing something wrong to us? First, young people are still learning proper behavior, so they need to be corrected by parents, teachers and school officials.

Second, there are two main reasons why we should not have revenge. One reason is that revengeful thoughts harm us while we are having them. When we feel revenge, we are not happy and relaxed. Our breathing and heart rate is faster, and our thoughts are busy with devious plans, hostile angry thoughts, focused on hurting someone. This is stressful on the body, and the bad thoughts filling the mind are like a poison. We might be too distracted to do our schoolwork or homework properly. We are holding onto anger, and maybe developing hatred. Even if we don’t hate the person, we still hold a grudge against him -- we hold ugly thoughts in our mind about him. That is not a wholesome and happy way to live. We are hurting ourselves by having feelings of revenge, or holding a grudge.

The other reason why we should not “punish” others for doing something that we don’t like is that revengeful words or acts will result in more pain to us in the future, because of the law of karma. Do you know about karma? Karma means “action.” Every action has a matching result, or reaction. If we hurt someone, we will be hurt in turn at some time in the future. We don’t know when the result will happen, and we cannot predict when it will happen. But it will. That is why people experience pain and suffering; their own past bad actions lead to painful results. Even if the other person hurt us first, and we hurt him in revenge, both we and the other person will suffer in the future. Why make more suffering for ourselves?

Is there a better way to handle a person who hurt us? What should we do? What do you think the chaplain should have done when the crowd made the chaplain’s head dirty? He should have

thought, “It’s just a crow, he didn’t know better, so I forgive him.” And then he would have forgotten about it and felt peaceful. What do you think the servant girl should have done when the goat ate the rice? She should have thought, “He is only a goat, he doesn’t know better, he is hungry, so I forgive him.” Then she should have found a better way to prevent the goat from eating the rice, and she could have avoided causing pain to the goat and elephant.

But what if it is a *person* who has upset us? How can we forgive a person, who *should* know better? There are different ways of hurting someone and different ways to forgive someone. If a person does something accidentally which hurts us, it is easy to forgive. He didn’t intend to hurt us. If a person hurts us only slightly, it is easy to forgive. There was no big harm done. But if a person does something intentionally that really hurts us, how can we forgive him?

First, we can remember that holding onto anger and thoughts of revenge harm us right away, and that words or actions in revenge will harm us in the future. Second, we can remember that forgiving the other person will make us more peaceful and happy. And third, we should understand that people would not hurt us if they were not hurting inside. People only hurt others if they are themselves suffering. They are suffering with bad thoughts, delusion, and ignorance, and maybe anger and hatred. They are suffering with the results of their bad acts, and will suffer more in the future with the bad acts that they are doing now. We should not *wish* for them to suffer; instead we can feel compassion for them. We can wish that they become a better person and not hurt others. With that understanding, compassion, and good wishes for their future, we can forgive them. We may need to avoid them so that they will not hurt us anymore, but we can at least make ourselves more peaceful by forgiving them and wishing them a good future.

Activity:

Word Search - Circle 15 words from the story and discussion. Words are horizontal, vertical, diagonal, or backward. If you need hints, see the word box below.

S R H U R T U K A A A A C
U E H U M I L I A T E M R
F V A T A O G N N R F A O
P E A C E E A G G A M A W
E N F O R G I V E A S A T
R G R U D G E A R N R U B
A E C O M P A S S I O N A
M P U N I S H A V U L E D

Word Box:

Hurt Karma Revenge Punish Compassion Peace King Crow
Grudge Humiliate Forgive Anger Fat Burn Goat