

INTRODUCTORY LESSON

Opening chants and meditation.

Question to think about before the story: The word “metta” means loving-kindness. Do you know someone who has a lot of metta?

Story: Jeanne – An Embodiment of Metta (A True Story)

Many years ago, a beautiful baby girl was abandoned by her parents on railroad tracks and left to her fate. An elderly man found her and tried to find her parents, but no one claimed her, so he brought her to a place where she could be properly taken care of, at a local orphanage. At the orphanage she was named Jeanne. The man visited the orphanage to make sure they took good care of Jeanne, but he soon saw that she was being neglected, and was not receiving a proper education. He searched for a good home for her, but no one wanted to take the responsibility of raising someone else’s child. He brought her to his own house and convinced his son to adopt her as one of the family. The son rather reluctantly decided to keep her as a child companion for his daughter. She went to school and lived in the home just as daughter did.

When the daughter got married, Jeanne, who was a teenager at the time, moved in with the daughter and her new husband. When the young couple had a child, Jeanne became the baby’s nanny. Jeanne was then an extremely beautiful young lady, always ready to help, with the greatest care and concern for everyone, and she never thought of her own needs. She had the greatest respect for the young couple and deep love for the baby. When the baby was sick or not feeling well, she would stay awake all night to care for the baby.

Many people who visited the young couple saw the good qualities of Jeanne and wished they had such a helpful and pleasant person to take care of their children. Many young men noticed her great beauty and wished to marry her, but because of her loyalty to the family, she stayed away from them. A young man who also came to serve the young family soon decided to get married and he left them. Jeanne could easily have done the same thing. Many ladies were envious of her beauty and began to gossip about her, thinking that she must have many boyfriends. Jeanne ignored the gossip, and did not fight back or say bad things about them no matter how evil the gossip was. Some ladies, terribly envious of her, even cut her with a knife, burned her, beat her and broke her fingers. Because she was not angry with them, people were sure she was misbehaving. They were very wrong. Her fingers began to swell from all the hard work she did, yet she continued to help the young family in every way that she could. She hid her injuries from the family and did not receive any medical treatment. As a result, her fingers were permanently bent and swollen. When questioned about her injuries, she would not tell who injured her. She just said the damage is done, and it cannot be corrected, and revenge would not help anyone. She showed extreme compassion toward everyone, even those who harmed her, as she knew that they would have to suffer the results of their karma.

The young family grew larger as the couple had more babies, and Jeanne took care of each child from birth until their adulthood just as lovingly as she cared for the first baby. She was the first person in the household to wake up in the morning. She would wake up the servants, pick flowers and clean the shrine for the morning worship, do her morning worship, supervise the breakfast, feed the crows the leftovers, wash and dress the children and make sure they went to school on time. She helped the young wife with her chores, like cleaning, laundry, shopping and religious duties. She supervised the children's homework and took care of the pet dogs. She protected everyone in the family and the servants from any harm that could happen to them. She always wanted to make sure all household duties were completed perfectly before she went to bed, and therefore she was the last person to go to bed. She ate with the servants, slept in their quarters, and worked with them all day every day except Saturdays, the servants' day off. Her only fun activity was going to the movies with the servants on Saturdays. Movies in those days were very wholesome, teaching morals, and without violence. Whenever she had extra pocket money, she would buy gifts for others because her happiness was making others happy.

Every evening, she went to the temple with the young wife and heard the Dharma. The next day, she taught the children what she learned and she put it into practice. Every day, morning and evening, she gave merit to all beings, and especially the elderly man who rescued her, to her unknown parents and relatives, to her teachers, to the family she served, and to others she knew, and she forgave all people who abused her and wanted to harm her. "Giving merit" means that by the good that we have done, we wish others happiness, peace, and everything they need. Jeanne always remembered the compassion of the elderly man who saved her as a baby. She could not remember him but she could see photographs of him and she got information about him from the young couple and the orphanage.

When the children became young adults and went overseas to college, she missed them just as a mother would, and she looked forward to the day when they would return. The children always brought her gifts from other countries, and she treasured these expressions of love from them, so that even the smallest and simplest gift was kept in a special place. When the husband of the couple became old and died, Jeanne took care of the wife until Jeanne became blind and could no longer safely take care of her. When Jeanne passed away, the children dearly missed her and realized how extremely special she was in their lives, the most loved person in the family.

Questions after the story:

1. What happened to Jeanne when she was a baby?
2. What did Jeanne do to help the family?
3. Why didn't Jeanne just get married and have her own children?
4. What made Jeanne happy?
5. Why did people hurt her?
6. What did Jeanne do when people hurt her?
7. What does "giving merit" mean?
8. What are some good qualities of Jeanne?

Answers: kind (loving), forgiving, unselfish, disciplined, hard-working, responsible, humble, content, thankful, forbearing (not revengeful), loyal, happy when others are happy, generous, helpful, compassionate.

Quotation of the Buddha:

“Idha nandati, pecca nandati, katapuñño ubhayattha nandati; puñnam me katan’ti nandati, bhiyyo nandati sugatim gato.”

“The doer of good delights here and hereafter; he delights in both the worlds. The thought, “Good I have done,” delights him, and he delights even more when he takes his future birth.” Dhammapada 18

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

Jeanne was born into difficult circumstances – she was abandoned by her parents, was neglected at the orphanage, and lived like a servant with the family, working every hard. People gossiped about her, and she suffered being beaten, cut, burned, and her fingers broken. But did she get angry, revengeful, or jealous of others? No. Why? She was very kind and loving. She forgave them. She didn’t get angry thinking that life is unfair. By learning and practicing Dharma, she felt happiness that she was doing good things. That happiness she could share with others as loving-kindness, so others felt happy being with her.

Do you feel happiness when you do good things? For example, when you help someone, does it make you feel happy? We may think we can’t be as good as Jeanne because most kids these days don’t behave as well as she did. Also, maybe we are not in the same situation of having no parents. But we can try to practice one good quality, remembering it more and more, so we get better and better at it. Then we can practice other good qualities. This is what is called practicing Dharma. Just remembering the qualities and noticing when it is difficult to practice them and when we are practicing them is helping us, too!

Choose one good quality that Jeanne had, and practice it for several days. Then, think about whether it was difficult to practice and discuss in the next class. For example:

If you practiced loving-kindness (metta): Is it difficult to act or feel kind toward people who are acting selfish or inconsiderate?

If you practiced forgiveness: Do you feel angry when someone is unkind to you, or can you forgive their behavior?

If you practiced forbearance: Will others think you are weak if you don’t take revenge when someone is unkind to you?

If you practiced contentment: Do you feel content with what you have, even if other kids have nice things that you don’t have?

If you practiced loyalty: Do you want to be with a new friend rather than an old friend if the new friend is more fun?

If you practiced happiness when others are happy: Do you feel irritable or upset if someone gets something that you wanted and didn't get?

If you practiced being helpful: Do you feel upset if you are helping your parents and your brother or sister isn't helping?

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