

CHAPTER 1 - ENVY

THE STORY OF MUNIKA THE PIG

A long time ago, an ox named Big Red and his younger brother, named Little Red, lived on a farm where they worked very hard every day. They pulled a heavy plough in the hot sun so the farmer could grow vegetables. They pulled a cart whenever the family wanted to travel to the town. They pulled the cart heavily loaded with vegetables to sell at the market, and then they pulled the cart, heavily loaded with all of the items the family bought, back to the farm. At the end of the day, their muscles hurt from all the hard work they did.

The farmer owned a pig named Munika, who never did any work. He happily trotted around the farm playing and rolling in the mud every day, and he was fed with rice and delicious food like the food that the farmer's family ate. Little Red noticed this, and said to his brother, "You and I must pull all of the loads for the farmer every day, and all they give us for our hard work is cheap grass and straw to eat. And look at this pig. He is being fed the finest food! Why is he being treated so much better than we are?"

Big Red said, "My dear brother, do not envy him. It is not good to envy anyone. He eats the food of death. You know the farmer's daughter will be married soon to a young man in the nearby town. Munika the pig is being given such nice food to fatten him so he will be eaten by the guests at the wedding. Wait, you will soon see the guests coming, and you will see that pig pulled out of the barn by his legs, killed and cooked over a fire. Don't envy poor Munika. Be content with your simple food. It will give you a long and healthy life."

A few days later, the guests began to arrive for the wedding. Poor Munika was killed and cooked, and his meat was made into several dishes. Big Red said to his little brother, "Did you see what happened to Munika? I saw the outcome of Munika's feasting on such rich food. A hundred times better, or a thousand times better, is our simple food of grass and straw, because it does not harm us and we can live a good long life."

Questions:

1. What did Little Red feel about Munika?
2. What did Munika have that Little Red wanted?
3. The word "jealousy" usually means the same thing as "envy."
What is the meaning of "jealousy" or "envy" in your own words?
4. Why do people feel envy?
5. What did Little Red learn?
6. Was Munika lucky that he had such good food?

What the Buddha said:

"One should not dislike what one has received, nor envy the gains of others."
(Dhammapada 365)

Discussion about Avoiding Envy:

What are some things that people often feel envious of? Do you ever feel envious when someone you know gets a lot of nice new clothes? Or when someone gets all the attention and no one is paying attention to you? Or when someone gets a better score than you got? Or when someone has a better athletic skill than you have? We feel envy when we want what someone else has. We might feel envy when we compare what we have with what others have, and then think that what we have is not so great. Then we feel irritable that what we have isn't good enough. Envy makes us not appreciate what we have; we feel greedy for something else that we don't have, so we feel unhappy. Also, envy may make us feel unfriendly toward a person who has something better than what we have. Envy might even make some people feel hostile toward that person, so they may say unkind things about him or her.

What if we have everything we want, could we still feel envy? Even if we were wealthy, very pretty or handsome, very skilled, and get the best scores, there is always someone who has more, or who has something better than we have. So, envy can always arise even if we are very lucky. If we compare what others have with what we have, we make ourselves feel unhappy.

What can we do to avoid feeling envy? We should learn to enjoy what we already have without complaining. This is called contentment. We can learn to be happy when others have something that we like. Let others enjoy what they have. We never know what will happen in our future or in another person's future. Remember what happened to Munika? Who was more lucky, Munika or the hard-working Little Red and Big Red? Munika was lucky at first, then not so lucky. Big Red and Little Red were really luckier than he was. Similarly, someone may be lucky to have something special now, but we may be even luckier than that person in the future. We can just work hard and live according to Dharma and then we will be successful and get what we need. Maybe we will not always get what we want, but we will get what we need.

If we live our lives instead with envy and greed, with determination to get what others have, will we have a better future? No. We will feel unhappy because we don't have something that someone else has, and we can't get it immediately. That is like a greedy cow who starves himself looking for better grass, and who doesn't eat the grass that is growing all around him. We can ruin our own future if we are greedy for what others have. But we can improve our future by remembering that we should feel contentment with what we have, and working hard. We should notice if we feel irritable when someone has something that we like. And then we should immediately remind ourselves not to get upset about what other people have, and instead we should appreciate when others are successful, feel happy for someone who is successful. Just like we are happy for our friends when they get a good score in sports or on a test, we can be happy for other people too when they do well or when they have something that we like.

The next time we see someone who has something that we like, remember the story of Munika! That way we can get rid of our envy and live a happier life.

Activity:

Fill in the blank from the word list below

1. _____ means being happy with what we have.
2. Wanting something that someone else has is _____.
3. We should not _____ what we have with what others have.
4. _____ means to want something.
5. We should feel _____ for others when they are successful.
6. We feel _____ if we are jealous.
7. Desiring more than what is necessary is _____.
8. _____ means not fancy, elaborate, expensive or luxurious.

Word list:

COMPARE

CONTENTMENT

ENVY

GREED

DESIRE

SIMPLE

UNHAPPY

HAPPY