

## **Sixteen Dreams of King Pasenadi (Mahāsupina Jataka No. 77)**

One morning, King Pasenadi, the king of Kosala, woke up in such terror that he couldn't get up; he lay huddled on his bed. When the sun started to rise, his priests and chaplains came to him to ask whether he had slept well.

He responded, "How could I sleep well? Just this morning I dreamed sixteen vivid dreams, and I have been in terror ever since! Tell me, my advisors, what it all means."

They said, "We shall be able to judge when we hear them."

The king told him about the sixteen dreams. The priests looked worried, wringing their hands, and the king asked why they were doing so.

They responded, "Sire, these are evil dreams."

He asked, "What will come of them?"

They answered, "One of three calamities—harm to your kingdom, your life or your riches."

He asked, "Is there a remedy for this?"

They replied, "Undoubtedly these dreams are so threatening as to be without remedy, but we will find a remedy nevertheless."

The king asked what they propose to do, and they told him that wherever four roads meet, they will offer the appropriate sacrifices. The king told them that his life is in their hands, and to hurry and act to keep him safe. The priests each thought to themselves that large sums of money and large amounts of every kind of food will soon be theirs. Telling the king to have no fear, they left the palace. They had pits dug for the sacrifices, and collected all kinds of four-footed animals that had no blemish and a multitude of birds. They went back and forth to the king to ask him for this or that.

Queen Mallika noticed all the commotion and asked the king why the priests kept coming to him. When he told her about his unlucky dreams and the priests' efforts to protect him from evil by offering sacrifices, she asked,

"Has your majesty consulted the Chief Brahmin of this world and the world of the devas?"

He responded, "Who is he, my dear?"

She said, "Don't you know the chief person of all the world, the all-knowing and pure, the spotless master-brahmin? Surely, he, the Buddha, will understand your dreams. Go ask him."

“And so I will, my queen,” said the king.

The king then went to the monastery, bowed to the Buddha and sat down. The Buddha asked him what brought him there so early in the morning. The king told him that he had sixteen terrifying dreams and that the priests warned him that the dreams foretell calamity and to avert evil they must protect him by sacrificing animals. The king said that they are busy with their preparations, and that many living creatures have the fear of death before their eyes. He said,

“I pray you tell me what will come of my dreams, O Blessed One.”

The Buddha said that there is none other except him that can tell what his dreams signify or what will come of them, and requested the king to tell him the dreams as they appeared to him.

The king said that in the first dream, he saw four jet-black bulls that came together from the four directions to the royal courtyard with the intent to fight, and a great crowd of people gathered together to see the bullfight. but the bulls only roared and bellowed and then left without fighting. The king asked the Buddha what will come of this dream.

The Buddha said, “Sire, that dream will have no issue in your days or in mine. But hereafter, when kings shall be stingy and unrighteous, and when people will be unrighteous, in days when the world is perverted, when good is waning and evil is equally waxing, in those days of the world’s backsliding there shall fall no rains from the skies, the storms will not come on time, the crops shall wither and famine will arise. Then the clouds will gather as if for rain from the four quarters of the skies, and there shall be a hurry to bring inside the rice and crops the women had spread in the sun to dry, for fear the harvest shall get wet. With shovel and basket in hand the men shall go out to bank up the dikes. As though in sign of coming rain, the thunder shall bellow and lightening will flash from the clouds. But like the bulls in your dream that didn’t fight, the clouds shall flee away without raining. This is what shall come of this dream. But no harm from it shall come to you, for it was with regard to the future that you dreamed this dream. What the priests told you was said only to get themselves some profit. Tell me your second dream, sire.”

The king said that in his second dream, he saw little tiny trees and shrubs burst through the soil, and when they had grown only a few inches high, they flowered and bore fruit.

“Sire,” said the Buddha, “this dream shall have fulfillment when the world has fallen into decay and when human lives are short. In times to come passions will be strong, and quite young girls shall go to live with men, and they will conceive and bear children. The flowers and fruits symbolize their children. But you, sire, have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your third dream, O king.”

The king said, “I saw cows sucking the milk of calves to which they had given birth that day. This was my third dream. What shall come of it?”

The Buddha responded, "This dream too shall have fulfillment only in days to come, when age is no longer respected. In the future, showing no reverence toward parents or parents-in-law, people will themselves administer the family estate and if they wish, will give food and clothing to the old folks, but will not do so if they don't wish to. Then the old folks, destitute and dependent, exist on the favor and whim of their own children, like big cows being suckled by young calves. But you have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your fourth dream."

The king said, "I saw men unyoking a team of sturdy and strong oxen and setting young steers to draw the load, and the steers, too weak to pull the load, refused to pull it and stood still so the wagons didn't move at all. This was my fourth dream. What shall come of it?"

The Buddha replied, "Here again, the dream shall not have fulfillment until the future, the days of unrighteous kings. For in days to come, selfish and greedy kings shall show no respect to wise leaders who are skilled in diplomacy, successful and able to complete business. Nor shall they appoint to the courts of law and justice aged councilors of wisdom and of learning in the law. No, they shall honor the very young and foolish, and appoint such to preside in the courts. And these latter, ignorant of state-craft and of practical knowledge, shall not be able to bear the burden of their honors or to govern, but because of their incompetence shall throw off the yoke of office. The aged and wise leaders, although able to cope with all difficulties, will keep in mind how they were passed over and will decline to help, saying, 'It's no business of ours as we are outsiders; let the boys of the inner circle see to it.' So they will stand aloof, and the kings' governments will fall to ruin. It shall be as when the yoke was laid on the young steers who were not strong enough for the burden and not upon the team of sturdy and strong oxen who alone were able to do the work. You have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your fifth dream."

The king said, "I saw a horse with a mouth on each side of its head to which food was given to both sides and it ate with both its mouths. This was my fifth dream. What shall come of it?"

The Buddha explained, "This dream also will not have its fulfillment until the future, in the days of unrighteous and foolish kings, who will appoint unrighteous and covetous men to be judges. These base ones, fools, despising the good, will take bribes from both sides as they sit in the seat of judgment, and will be filled with this two-fold corruption like the horse that ate fodder with two mouths at once. But you have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your sixth dream."

The king said, "I saw people holding a well scoured golden bowl worth a hundred thousand coins, and begging an old jackal to urinate in it. And I saw the beast do so. This was my sixth dream. What shall come of it?"

The Buddha responded, "This dream also will not have its fulfillment until the future. In the days to come, unrighteous kings, though born from a royal line, mistrusting the descendants of their old nobility, shall not honor them but instead will exalt the low-born; whereby the nobles shall be brought low and the low-born raised to lordship. Then the great families will have to be dependent on the upstarts and shall offer them their daughters in marriage. And the union of

the noble maidens with the low-born shall be like the urinating of the old jackal into the golden bowl. But you have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your seventh dream.”

The king said, “A man was weaving rope, sir, and as he wove, he threw it down at his feet. Under his bench lay a hungry female jackal which kept eating the rope as he wove, but without the man knowing it. This is what I saw. This was my seventh dream. What shall come of it?”

The Buddha answered, “This dream also will not have its fulfillment until the future. For in days to come, women will lust after men, strong drink, extravagant clothing, jewelry, roaming, and seeking the joys of this world. In their shamelessness and recklessness these women will drink strong drink with their lovers; they will flaunt in garlands and perfumes and creams, and heedless of even the most important household duties, they will keep watching for their lovers. In all these ways they will waste the savings from the hard work of their husbands, like the jackal under the bench ate up the rope of the rope-maker. But you have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your eighth dream.”

The king said, “At a palace gate I saw a big pitcher full to the brim standing amid a number of empty pitchers. And from all directions came a constant stream of people, rich and poor, carrying pots of water which they poured into the already full pitcher. The water overflowed and drained away. But they kept on pouring more and more water into the overflowing pitcher without a single person giving a single glance at the empty pitchers. This was my eighth dream. What shall come of it?”

The Buddha explained, “This dream too will not have its fulfillment until the future. In days to come the world will decay. The kingdom will grow weak, its kings will become poor and stingy. These kings in their poverty will require all the people to work for them. For the kings’ sake the working people will leave their own work and grow crops, make and operate sugar mills, lay out flower gardens and orchards and gather the fruit. As they gather all this produce they will fill the royal storage and warehouses to overflowing but won’t be able to even glance at their own empty barns at home. Thus it is like filling up the full pitcher, ignoring the empty ones. But you have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your ninth dream.”

The king said, “I saw a deep pool with sloping banks overgrown with the five kinds of lotuses. From every side, two-footed and four-footed creatures flocked there to drink. The deep water in the middle was muddy but the water was clear and sparkling at the edges where the creatures went down to the pool. This was my ninth dream. What shall come of it?”

The Buddha replied, “This dream too will not have its fulfillment until the future. In days to come kings will become increasingly corrupt; they will rule according to their own desires and pleasures and will not judge according to what is right. These kings will crave wealth and store up money from bribes. They will not show mercy, love and compassion toward their people but will be fierce and cruel, amassing wealth by crushing their subjects and by taxing them to the last penny. Unable to pay the oppressive tax, the people will flee the villages and towns and take refuge in the borders of the country. The heart of the land will be a wilderness while the

remote areas along the borders will teem with people, like the water was muddy in the middle of the pool and clear at the edges. But you have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your tenth dream.”

The king said, “I saw rice boiling in a pot without getting done. It looked as though it was sharply marked so that the cooking went on in three distinct stages. Part of it was watery, part of it was hard and raw, and the remaining part was cooked nicely. This was my tenth dream. What shall come of it?”

The Buddha answered, “This dream too will not have its fulfillment until the future. In days to come kings will become increasingly corrupt; the people surrounding the kings will become corrupt too, as will the priests, householders, townspeople and countryfolk; yes, all people alike will become corrupt, including sages and priests. Next, their deities—the spirits to whom they offer sacrifice, the spirits of the trees, the spirits of the air—will become corrupt also. The very winds that blow over the lands of these unrighteous kings will grow cruel and lawless; they will shake the mansions of the skies and thereby kindle the anger of the spirits that dwell there, so that they will not allow the rain to fall—or if it does rain, it will not fall on all the kingdom at once. The rain will not fall on all crops alike to relieve them from drought. The rain will not fall at the same time over the whole area; if it rains on the upper part, it won’t fall on the lower part. In some areas, the crops will be spoiled by a heavy downpour, and in others, the crops will wither from drought, and in yet others, the rain will fall at the right time. So the crops in a single kingdom—like the rice in the one pot—will have no uniform character. But you have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your eleventh dream.”

The king said, “I saw sour buttermilk traded for precious sandalwood worth 100,000 pieces of money. This was my eleventh dream. What shall come of it?”

The Buddha answered, “This dream too will not have its fulfillment until the future—in days to come when my teaching is waning. In days to come, many greedy and shameless monks will arise, who for their belly’s sake will preach the very words with which I warned against greed! Because they have deserted the truth to gratify their belly and have sided with sectarians, they will fail to make their teaching lead to Nirvana. Their only thought as they preach will be by fine words and sweet voices to induce people to give them expensive things and to give gifts. Others will position themselves along highways, at the street-corners, at the doors of kings’ palaces, and so forth, and will stoop to preach for money, even for a pittance! And as they trade away for food or clothing or coins my teaching which leads to Nirvana, they will be like those who traded sour buttermilk for sandalwood worth 100,000 pieces of money. But you have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your twelfth dream.”

The king said, “I saw empty dried pumpkins sinking in the water. What shall come of it?”

The Buddha responded, “This dream too will not have its fulfillment until the future, in the days of unrighteous kings, when the world is perverted. In those days kings will show favor not to sons of the noble, but to the low-born only, who will become great lords, while the noble ones

sink into poverty. In the royal presence, in the palace gates, in the council chamber and in the courts of justice, the words of the low-born alone (represented by the empty pumpkins) will be firmly established. Also, in the assemblies of monks, in enquiries about proper behavior, rules of conduct, discipline, or lodging, the counsel only of the wicked, corrupt monks will be considered and not that of the modest monks. But you have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your thirteenth dream.”

The king said, “I saw huge blocks of solid rock as big as houses, floating like ships upon the water. What shall come of it?”

The Buddha replied, “This dream also shall not have fulfillment before such times as those of which I have spoken. For in those days unrighteous kings will show honor to the low-born, who will become great lords while the noble ones sink into poverty. The upstarts alone will be respected and not the noble ones. In the royal presence, in the council chamber, or in the courts of justice the words of the nobles learned in the law (which the solid rocks represent) will drift idly by and not sink deep into the hearts of men. When they speak, the upstarts will merely laugh at them to scorn them, saying ‘What is it these fellows are saying?’ So too in the assemblies of monks, men will not deem worthy of respect the excellent among the monks; their words will not sink deep but will drift idly by, like the rocks floating on the water. But you have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your fourteenth dream.”

The king said, “I saw tiny frogs, no bigger than miniature flowerets, swiftly pursuing large black snakes, chopping them up like so many lotus stalks and gobbling them up. What shall come of it?”

The Buddha explained, “This dream too shall not have fulfillment until those days to come such as those of which I have spoken, when the world is decaying. For then will men’s passions be so strong and their lusts so hot that they will be infatuated with the very youngest of their wives, who will control the wealth and everything in the house. If the husband asks where the money or a robe is, he will be told that it is where it is, that he should mind his own business and not be so inquisitive as to what is, or is not, in *her* house. And in various ways the wives, with abuse and goading taunts, will establish their power over their husbands as they would over slaves and servants. It will be like when tiny frogs gobbled up the big black snakes. But you have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your fifteenth dream.”

The king said, “I saw a village crow, which had all the ten vices, escorted by a retinue of those birds which, because of their golden sheen, are called Royal Golden Mallards. What shall come of it?”

The Buddha answered, “This dream too shall not have fulfillment until the future, until the reign of weakling kings. In days to come kings will arise who will know nothing about ruling, and will be cowards and fools. Fearing to be deposed and removed from their royal estate, they will raise to power not their peers, but their footmen, bath-attendants, barbers and such-like. Thus, shut out from royal favor and unable to support themselves, the noble ones shall be reduced to

dancing attendance on the upstarts, like the crow had Royal Golden Mallards for a retinue. But you have nothing to fear from it. Tell me your sixteenth dream.”

The king said, “Normally, panthers prey on goats. But I saw goats chasing panthers and devouring them—munch, munch, munch! While at the sight of goats in the distance, wolves fled quaking in fear and hid themselves in the thicket. Such was my dream. What shall come of it?”

The Buddha responded, “This dream too shall not have fulfillment until the future, until the reign of unrighteous kings. In those days the low-born will be raised to lordship and be made royal favorites while the noble ones will sink into obscurity and distress. Gaining influence in the courts of law because of their favor with the king, these upstarts will claim the ancestral estates and all the property of the old nobility. And when these latter plead their rights before the courts, then will the king’s minions have them beaten and tortured and thrown out with words of scorn such as, ‘Know your place, fools! What? Do you dispute with us? The king shall know of your insolence, and we will have your hands and feet chopped off and other correctives applied!’ Then the terrified nobles will affirm that their own belongings really belong to the overbearing upstarts and will tell the favorites to accept them. Then they will hurry home and cower in fear. Likewise, evil monks will harass good, worthy monks until the good monks, finding none to help them, will flee to the jungle. And this oppression of the nobles and of the good monks by the low-born and by the evil monks will be like the intimidation of wolves by goats. But you have nothing to fear from it. For this dream too has reference to future times only.”

The Buddha continued, “It was not truth, it was not love for you, that prompted the priests to prophesy as they did. No, it was greed and the insight that comes from selfishness that shaped their self-seeking utterances.”

Thus did the Buddha explain the meaning of the sixteen great dreams. He added, “You, sire, are not the first to have these dreams; they were dreamed by kings of bygone days also; and then, as now, the priests found in them a pretext for sacrifices, whereupon at the instance of the wise and good, the Bodhisattva was consulted and the dreams were explained by them of old time in just the same manner as they have now been explained.” Then he told a story from one of his past lives when he was a hermit living in the Himalaya mountains and interpreted the sixteen dreams of King Brahmadata.

### ***Dharma Discussion – World Decline:***

Through interpreting King Pasenadi’s dreams, the Buddha gave the world a prophecy about the times in which we are now living.

While horrific events and evil leadership have existed here and there throughout history, now it appears that the whole world is in a decline.

The first and tenth dreams are consistent with global warming and the associated increases in droughts, flooding and unpredictable weather patterns. Scientists have found that the number and duration of droughts has increased by nearly a third worldwide since the year 2000, according to the United Nations. There has been a continuing upward trend in flood disasters worldwide since 1990 according to the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The second, third, seventh and fourteenth dreams reflect common behaviors in today's world due to unrestrained lusts and desires.

As to the other dreams, we can see that the Buddha predicted the behavior of many of today's leaders. We can assume the dated words "king" includes "political leader," "lords" include "those in powerful positions," and "low-born" means "morally underdeveloped"—those full of greed, ruthless ambition, hatred, vengeance and arrogance and without much patience, compassion, tolerance or other virtues.

It's perhaps some comfort that all of this was predicted—destined—to happen, so there's no reason to agonize that the world "shouldn't be this way."

We couldn't have done anything to prevent it. No one could have prevented it.

So we can't blame anyone or any group for causing it; there's no use in pointing fingers and spreading more hate. But that certainly doesn't mean that we should just sit back and do nothing. There are plenty of ways we can make the best of this situation, as discussed below.

But before we get to that, let's address some questions that might arise.

Some of you might ask, why was I born into this chaotic environment? I don't deserve this, I didn't cause this, I don't belong here.

A short answer is that you have an important spiritual part to play here in the world, just as it is. We are all interdependent, so we affect each other—and help each other—more than we know. The discussion below provides a more complete answer.

Another question you might have is, what about karma? Why are evildoers ("low-borns") rewarded with so much success and power, while good people ("noble ones") are suffering so much, being exploited by them?

We all have done countless unknown good and bad actions in our past lives, and we never know when the effects of a particular karma will ripen. And usually there is a time lag, perhaps many lifetimes, between actions and their karmic results.

This time lag generates doubt in many people; if we can't see the karmic connection between the action and the result, then why should we believe in it?

During the night when he became enlightened, the Buddha saw people's karmic causes and effects, and later, he often pointed out to his student monks the karmic results of the good or bad actions done in previous lives of various individuals they encountered.

And if we think deeply about it, a significant time lag between action and result is necessary for people to develop higher moral character. If there was no time lag—if each good or bad action had a direct corresponding consequence—we would do good actions because we expect an



immediate pleasant result, and we would avoid doing harmful actions because we know we will suffer an immediate unpleasant result. So, our moral development would remain at the level of a dog or young child, motivated by immediate reward and punishment. On the other hand when there is a time lag between cause and effect, we observe the effects of our actions on others and feel rewarded when others are pleased by our kindness, compassion, patience, helpfulness and so forth, so we develop these virtues to seek approval from others. From that level, eventually we can attain an even higher level of moral development in which we do altruistic and virtuous actions without looking for the approval or appreciation of others.

But aren't these degenerate times just upsetting people so much that they can't develop virtues, and instead increase bad karma?

The hardships might push us to our limits, but they are an opportunity to purify or "burn away" our past negative karmas.

Most people are not interested in developing virtues but instead just want to enjoy life, be comfortable, and pursue their desires and cravings. In these modern times when they have all the freedom to do so, one after the other desire is allowed to run its course until eventually they realize that it doesn't lead to full satisfaction and that it's time to start seeking a spiritual path to true happiness. But many, like addicts, must pursue desires over and over and then hit "rock bottom"—total loss and desperation—numerous times before they realize it.

Others, observing the extreme greed and egoism and seeking relief from the misery of this stressful world, are compelled to seek pathways to peace such as meditation, which they wouldn't be motivated to do if they were just enjoying a relaxing life.

They need to be shaken to awaken. The first of the Four Noble Truths is that life is full of suffering. One must contemplate that this world is unsatisfactory, full of suffering, in order to turn one's mind with conviction to the Dharma, to have the motivation to practice the Dharma. Those who are further along the path to enlightenment still have flaws to overcome and virtues to perfect, which only can happen if someone tests their patience, perseverance, compassion, equanimity and so forth. One can't be a hero without an adversary or adversity. So, they need "low-borns" to truly test and challenge them with hardships and problems.

But how can we find real peace and happiness if we feel, angry, resentful, or outraged toward those who are creating the chaos and problems we see?

Or when we have feelings of dread, depression, or hopelessness about the future?

Harboring such feelings for extended periods of time takes a toll on our health.

So, we keep ourselves distracted by focusing on screens—scrolling on our phones, watching videos, engaging with social media, playing videogames, and so forth.

Some of us distract ourselves by extreme exercise, overindulging in social activities, and/or exhausting ourselves with work, not keeping a healthy balance.

Many of us withdraw emotionally from the world. All the bad news, catastrophes in the world and the increased dangers and instability make us feel helpless, powerless, overwhelmed, numb, or unable to feel much empathy, or we disassociate in an unhealthy way. This is analogous to compassion fatigue in the medical community.

Some of us feel that life is not valuable in this decaying world, so we become reckless.

And others of us live in a bubble of denial, avoiding or resisting any information we don't like.

When we suppress our feelings by denial or by distracting, withdrawing, disassociating and/or devaluing ourselves, although we're trying to avoid stress and anxiety, we're actually still building it up, harming our mental, spiritual and physical health.

There are some who seek relief by following one of the many modern spiritual guides who claim to have had a spontaneous awakening or attained enlightenment and who post videos or conduct programs to help others awaken, experience satori, attain non-duality, or manifest their desires—without any need to meditate, study, accumulate merit, or purify the mind.

They may have had experiences of “awakening” and great bliss but after some time, despite their assertions of non-duality, the mental obscurations of attachment, egoism, pride and so forth return. Similarly, people who experience ego dissolution under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs (which can be very dangerous) such as DMT or ayahuasca recover their egos and mental obscurations afterward.

The Buddha encountered several spiritual teachers, such as the Kassapa (Kashyapa) brothers (Vinaya Pitaka Mahavagga 1:7-20), who believed they were enlightened and/or attained advanced states of bliss, but he knew they were not enlightened and when they were challenged, their arrogance, egoism, attachment or jealousy was revealed.

While certain Zen and Dzogchen practices are designed to lead to spontaneous experience of emptiness, satori, or non-duality, they require a highly qualified master who prepares the student's mind with rigorous study and practice under his guidance, which has a firm foundation in centuries of instructions and experiences of genuine enlightened masters.

Following a modern guide who doesn't have these qualifications leads to disillusionment if the desired result is not achieved, or leads to delusion and spiritual egoism if one achieves altered states, insights, psychic phenomena or blissful experiences without purity of mind.

So, back to how to make the best of this situation: what guidance did the Buddha give us for thriving in this declining world?

The Buddha helped King Pasenadi in this story in two ways—which also provide guidance to us. One way was by pointing out to the king that the priests were trying to exploit him. The Buddha thus suggests that we shouldn't be naïve or compromised by fear but rather we should learn to be aware of others attempting to exploit us and not let them do so. This theme will be addressed later in this discussion.

The second way is that he changed the king's narrative from negative to positive.

We all have narratives about ourselves and the world and many—such as the narratives we get from news and social media—make us worry too much.

The Buddha changed the king's narrative from “danger!” to “everything is okay.”

This is an important practice—to change our narratives from negative to positive, destructive to constructive. How do we do that?

We label the uncomfortable feelings that we have and then determine its converse in which we are healing and creating something constructive.

For example, if you feel resentment, create a narrative of generating love; if you feel fear, create a narrative of being fearless; if you feel helpless, create a narrative of helping others; if you feel like a victim, create a narrative of helping yourself and others not be victims; if you feel

hopeless, create a narrative of resilience and taking on challenges; if you feel you are living in a hell-world, create a narrative of being curious about it and making it an adventure.

It's not simply an affirmation, but something you contemplate and then act on to make it true.

How can we make our positive narrative true? How do we put it in action?

We start by generating lovingkindness as part of daily life, integrating it into our routine, in simple, easy ways, for example:

Practice daily lovingkindness meditation and/or prayers wishing others peace, happiness and well-being.

Be aware of your kind words and deeds each day and remember that they are merit (good karmas). Dedicate the merit for the benefit of other beings before you go to sleep each night.

Whenever you see someone who seems to be suffering, sad, stressed, angry or upset, wish them happiness and peace.

When you encounter "low-borns" or anyone who disturbs you, pray or wish that they soon find a path to the Dharma so they will heal from their mental afflictions and stop causing harm.

Make a conscious effort to cheer up others with friendliness wherever you are.

At your job, think about creating peace for others by the work you do.

When you prepare food for others, think about providing good nourishment for their health.

When you park your car or take a seat, rather than taking the best space, leave the most convenient spaces available for those who might need them more than you.

If you create music or art, make it a medium of healing—spiritually uplifting or evoking emotions to help others process or sublimate their emotions.

You also can put lovingkindness into action in your spare time.

For example, volunteer at a temple or meditation center with whatever tasks might be needed.

Start a meditation group at work, in your neighborhood, at a library, or among your friends, perhaps with recorded guided meditations.

Volunteer to help the needy, for example: providing food or other necessities for disaster victims, women's shelter, or homeless, or tutoring underprivileged children.

Join a group or organization that advocates for or benefits a wholesome cause.

Volunteer at a charity that inspires you.

Volunteer with an animal rescue or shelter, or volunteer to foster pets.

Visit lonely elderly relatives or neighbors.

Remove trash from a neighborhood park trail, stream, riverbank or beach.

Keep your mind aware and open to find other ways to help or benefit others as a selfless service.

These activities are exercises to train our minds to be caring and helpful wherever we are, without seeking any reciprocation, attention, appreciation, particular outcome, or reward.

This is how you reduce ego and develop equanimity and detachment (which include universal love and compassion and thus are different from apathy and withdrawal).

But actually, we do get a reward: when we direct our mind or offer our time in ways that benefit others, we gain direction, meaning and purpose in life.

Scientists have shown that having meaning and purpose in life gives us more energy and happiness. Instead of feeling drained of energy from dwelling in disgust, worry or hopelessness, we gain energy from kind thoughts, words and actions.

So, by helping others, we help ourselves.

When you act with lovingkindness to benefit other beings, you're offering love, time, energy and/or skills—your abundance—to others. Even when you start small and simple, if you try to maintain a feeling of having abundance and generosity, you train your mind to be uplifting and altruistic, like a Buddha.

When you do this, you will find more and more interesting opportunities to benefit others, and you build up your confidence, capability, resilience, and other good qualities.

As you make more merit and share it with others, you increase your power and good fortune. In this way, you create an unstoppable upward spiral of increasing opportunities, lovingkindness, virtues and merit.

One might ask, how can our small actions, which seem so insignificant in this chaotic world, actually make any difference?

Contemplate interdependence. Each Dharmic thought is energy, like a drop of light that combines with the drops of light of countless beings, building up an unimaginably powerful ocean of light to gradually heal the darkness in the world. Each of us needs the others to help build up this ocean. We all support each other. And our actions are an example and encouragement to others to engage in similar actions; we demonstrate behaviors that we want to see in others.

And each of us has our individual unique contributions, and our own sphere of influence.

Lovingkindness, however, does not mean always saying yes or being a pushover, doormat or people pleaser.

People pleasing means trying to please others while craving validation, love, approval, acceptance, appreciation, reciprocation or reward. It arises often as a result of one's upbringing or from low self-esteem.

People pleasers may be afraid of disappointing or angering another, or of having a different opinion, or of being rejected if others aren't pleased or expectations aren't met.

They may not even notice their own emotions or needs or may hide them as they try to ease the emotions of others.

If you are a people pleaser, you may be encouraging people to exploit you, which increases their negative karma and therefore harms them and ultimately is not kind to them.

This is misplaced kindness and compassion, trying to satisfy their mundane desires of a few individuals at the expense of your own well-being, draining your resources while rewarding them for being selfish.

We must take time to recharge and take care of our needs and priorities. If we spread ourselves too thin trying to please, we become exhausted, impatient, hasty, irritable or regretful.

Or, after agreeing to do things for others, we find we can't do it or we forget, breaking our word.

We need to take care of our spiritual needs and well-being to be of the best assistance to others.

So, we need to set and maintain boundaries. We set boundaries by expressing what we will and won't do, allow, or accept, and what we will do if the boundary is crossed.

Some of us are more aware of our limits and set good boundaries, knowing when to say no. But some of us, wanting to be agreeable and maintain harmony, don't set or maintain good boundaries.

Especially if we aren't skilled at setting and maintaining boundaries, we can be vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation by all kinds of people. From foes to family, clerks to clergy, there are so many people who exploit others, especially in these degenerate times, as predicted by the Buddha in this story.

When someone wants you to do something, pay close attention to how you feel inside, your intuition. Do you feel hesitant? Uncomfortable? Confused? Pressured?

First, ask yourself, am I afraid to disappoint? Worried about rejection or conflict? Afraid they won't like me if I say no?

If so, you might need to work on your self-esteem, courage, assertiveness, equanimity and detachment.

Next, assess the request and the person making it. Ask yourself, is there something about their character, habits or possible motivation that I question? Do they not really need what they're requesting? Do they not really need me to do it? Are they trying to evoke guilt or pity or using another manipulation tactic? Do I have to sacrifice something important to do what they want? If so, decline their request or give yourself some time—say that you need to check something (your calendar, your funds, your partner, your dog, whatever) before you can decide.

Be fully aware your own emotions and needs before giving a response.

This guidance on boundaries is especially important when we are dealing with the "low-born." We see how narcissism, abuse of power, and hypocrisy have risen dramatically in frequency in today's world, as reflected in the Buddha's interpretations of the king's dreams.

How can we use the Buddha's teachings to avoid feeling upset by such people?

Remember that love or compassion cannot coexist with fear. Nor can they coexist with hatred.

We have to find a way to feel lovingkindness or compassion rather than fear, anger or hatred toward them. This is not easy when we naturally respond to them with aversion.

First, if we remember that they will suffer the karmic results of their actions, then we can begin to feel some compassion for them. Think: they are creating so much suffering for themselves. We don't have to wish they be punished for their actions. Karma eventually will take care of it.

Second, we can practice again and again mentally wishing, "may they soon find a path to true peace and happiness." When they find it, they'll stop hurting others so much. They may not find the path in this lifetime, but that's not our concern.

The more we practice this, the more conviction we will have in saying it.

Third, just as scorpions, lions, snakes and vultures have their roles to play in the ecosystem, so we don't hate or destroy them, remember that "low-borns" have their role to play on the Earth—to create chaos and challenges. And we have our role to play—including recognizing our weaknesses and overcoming challenges in order to develop good qualities. So, we can appreciate the "low-borns" for serving as a catalyst for us to be able to fulfill that role.

Fourth, we don't have to like the "low-borns," and we don't want entangle ourselves with them by hating them or associating with them any more than we have to. But we can practice universal loving-kindness toward all sentient beings, including those who hate us and those who create obstacles for us, wishing that all attain nirvana.

Note that there are "low-borns" among spiritual teachers too, such as spiritual narcissists. The Buddha made the king aware of the greed and selfishness of the priests, and predicted that there would be "evil monks" in the future and that the excellent monks will be ignored. So, we need to scrutinize the character of spiritual teachers, guides and monks who we encounter so we can avoid being exploited or led astray. Some red flags include those who have questionable values, egoistic traits, or apparent attachment to money, fame, vanity, or materialistic lifestyle, or those who lack authentic spiritual lineage or training, appear insincere, lack genuine humility, seem controlling, and/or have pricey programs and marketing.

In general, make choices that support what resonates with you and what is aligned with your highest good.

While you can't always do something to help, you can speak kindly or mentally say a prayer, mantra or kind wishes.

To increase your courage, equanimity and healthy detachment, try to remember that everything is impermanent, it's always changing, and this world and everything in it is illusory, like a dream from which we eventually will awaken.

Remember that everything in the world is ultimately unsatisfactory, but living your life aligned with the Dharma brings more satisfaction and brings better quality people into your orbit.