

## THE WOODPECKER AND THE LION (Javasakuna Jataka)

A very long time ago, in the area of the Himalayan mountains of India, there was a woodpecker who was destined to be the Buddha in a future life. One day, the woodpecker was perched on a tree, looking for food. In particular, he was looking for insects or insect larvae that burrow into the tree bark.



He heard an unusual sound and looked down toward the ground. The sound seemed to be coming from a large animal down below. He saw that it was a lion. But the lion was acting strangely. He was coughing and moving his mouth around as if he was trying to get something out. He threw his head back and forth, and side to side, and seemed desperate to get something out of his mouth. He moaned and seemed to be in great pain.

The woodpecker called out to him, “Friend, what’s upsetting you?”



Taking long, slow loud breaths, the lion said, with difficulty, “I was eating my prey, chewing on some bones, and a piece of bone stuck in my throat. I can’t get it out and I can’t swallow it. My throat swelled up and it hurts terribly. And now I can’t eat anything.”

The woodpecker immediately felt compassion for the lion, and wanted to relieve him of his pain. With his long, thin beak, the woodpecker thought, he should be able to pick a bone splinter out from someone’s throat. However, he would have to put his head deep inside the mouth of a big lion with long sharp fangs and huge jaws that could easily snap shut on a little bird like him and eat him.

The woodpecker said, "I would take the bone out of your throat, friend, but I dare not put my head into your mouth because I fear you would eat me up!"

The lion needed help or he might die. He said, "Don't be afraid, little friend. I will not eat you up. Just please save my life."

"All right," said the bird, "Lie down on your side."

The woodpecker didn't trust the lion, however. He thought, "Who knows what this guy might do?"

He had an idea. He could prop open the lion's mouth with a stick and then enter the lion's mouth to remove the bone. So, he found a stick of the right size and said, "Now please open your mouth wide."



The lion opened his mouth like he was yawning, and the woodpecker quickly pushed the stick into the lion's mouth between his upper and lower jaw. Now the lion wouldn't be able to bite down and eat him.

Then the woodpecker put his head in the lion's mouth and poked his beak down into his throat. With his beak, he felt the splinter of bone and struck the end of it, so it fell out. The woodpecker pulled his head out from the

lion's mouth, and then with his beak he knocked out the stick so the lion could close his mouth again. He hopped away and perched safely on the top of a tree.

The lion was so relieved that he could eat again and wouldn't starve to death. His throat started to heal, the pain disappeared and he felt much better.

One day, he had hunted a wild buffalo and was happily dining on the buffalo's body, when the woodpecker flew to a tree nearby.



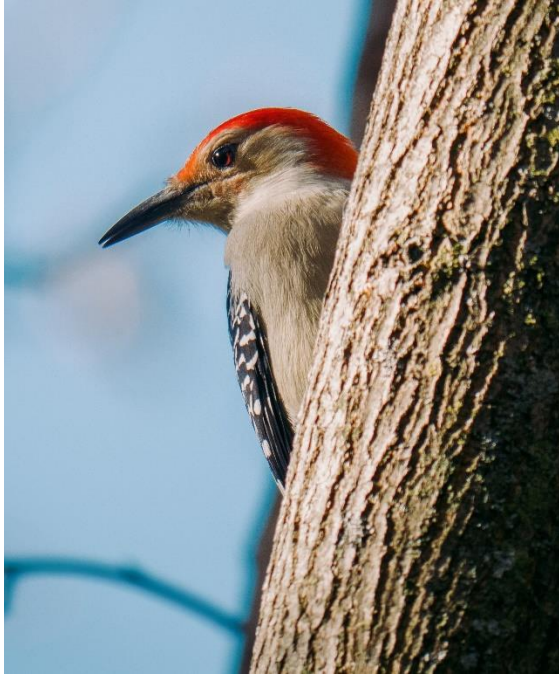
The woodpecker thought, "I wonder whether the lion has learned anything about kindness after I showed my kindness and compassion to him. Will he be grateful to me after what I have done for him? I will now put him to the test."

He perched on a branch high above the lion, greeted him, and started a friendly conversation. Then he said,

"I once showed a kindness to you. In turn, I ask you, would you do a small favor for me?"

The lion had no interest in doing favors for others. He replied,

“For you to be able to trust your head to a lion’s jaws, for you to do such a daring deed and to still be alive – and the fact that I didn’t eat you - is showing you enough of my kindness.”



The woodpecker said aloud for all to hear what he had learned,

“From someone who is ungrateful, don’t hope to receive something in return for your generosity, for your good deed. Don’t have bitter thoughts toward him, and don’t speak any angry words. Perhaps you can just stay away from him.”

Then the woodpecker flew away.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Why was the lion in pain? (he had a bone stuck in his throat)
2. What was the first feeling the woodpecker had toward the lion when he heard that he was in pain? (compassion)
3. What did the woodpecker want to do immediately when he heard the lion was in pain? (remove the bone from his throat)
4. Did the lion thank the woodpecker for helping him? (no)
5. In return for his generosity, what did the woodpecker ask the lion for? (a small favor)
6. How would you describe the lion’s attitude toward the woodpecker? (ungrateful, uncaring, not generous)

## DHARMA DISCUSSION – Generosity and Gratitude:

The woodpecker was generous.

He didn't give the lion a gift, but he gave his service, his help.

Generosity isn't only giving someone an object, like food, a gift, or money, but it also includes giving someone your time, your help, doing something for them, sharing what you have.

It's the opposite of being stingy - not wanting to share or give, thinking "it's mine," "it's my free time," or "I want to keep it for myself."

Many people are generous, for different reasons.

Can you think of some reasons?

Because they want others to like them, be friendly with them, or approve of them.

Another reason is that others might help them in return.

This is like a trade, trading favors. If I do this for you, then you should do something for me in return.

For example, if I go to your party, then you should come to my party.

If I help you with this, then you should help me with that.

The woodpecker wasn't generous for those reasons.

When he heard the lion was in pain, the woodpecker's first thought was what? Compassion for the lion.

The next thought he was, how he could help the lion.

So, the woodpecker was generous because of his feeling of compassion.

This was true generosity - giving without any expectation of reward.

It shows he had a good heart, that he immediately thought of what?

Compassion and what he could do to help.

And he was also wisely cautious, to think about the danger, and how to avoid the danger.

Later, the woodpecker later wanted to test the lion.

What did he want to find out? Whether the lion was grateful for what the woodpecker had done for him.

Similarly, when we give something or do something kind for someone, we often want to know whether the person appreciated it, whether they like it, whether they are grateful.

We might expect the person to say "thank you" or smile.

Then we end up smiling at each other.

But what if we expect them to smile or say “thank you” and they don’t?  
How would you feel?

What if you went out of your way to do something special for them or spent your money for them, and they don’t even say “thank you” or smile?

Of what if you did something kind to them and they didn’t do something kind to you in return?

You might feel disappointed or even angry that they didn’t appreciate it. They might seem rude, uncaring, ungrateful – like the lion in the story.

At the end of the story, the woodpecker taught us that if that happens, not to have negative or angry thoughts.

But how can we avoid feeling upset when someone is ungrateful?

The woodpecker advised, “don’t hope to receive something in return for your generosity, for your good deed.”

If you don’t expect anything - not even a “thank you” or smile in response to our kindness - then will you get disappointed or upset? No.

You know that you did something kind, and that it was the right thing to do. So, you avoid having negative or angry thoughts.

It’s better to give without any hope or expectation at all.

Then we are giving with a pure heart – purely out of kindness, with no thought of reward, “with no strings attached,” with no attachments, with no conditions - unconditionally.

For example, when you give a birthday gift, you don’t think about whether they will give you a gift for your birthday.

When you help someone clean up, you don’t expect them to return the favor and help you do something.

When you share some of your food, you don’t hope they will share something with you.

When you do a favor for someone, you don’t expect... what?

You don’t expect for them to do something for you.

That’s how you give with a pure heart.