

THE JACKAL KING (Sabbadātha Jataka)

There was once a holy man who was an advisor to Brahmadata, the king of the big city of Benares and its surrounding kingdom. The holy man would be the Buddha in a future life, so in this life he was a Bodhisattva. He had studied and mastered all the holy scriptures and the eighteen types of knowledge. In addition, he was taught a certain spell, an extremely powerful mantra called “Conquering the World.” This spell could not be taught to anyone unless they first were qualified to receive it and participated in a special secret ceremony. The holy man had a pure mind, full of lovingkindness and compassion, with no selfishness or pride, so he was well qualified. He had received the mantra in a very special ceremony.



One day, the Bodhisattva decided to practice reciting this mantra, so he could learn it by heart. He went to a place where he would be all alone, where no one could hear him reciting it, so there would be no danger of someone learning it without the proper

qualifications and then misusing it for selfish or harmful purposes. Once he found a remote forest that was some distance away from the road, he sat down on a flat rock, and began reciting the mantra.

He wasn't completely alone, however. It so happened that a jackal was resting in a hole nearby. This jackal was very intelligent, because in a past life he too had been a holy man, although not a very pure-minded holy man. Not only was he very clever, he also had learned that very same mantra, “Conquering the World,” in his past life as a holy man. So, when he heard the Bodhisattva recite the mantra, just by hearing it once, he memorized the whole thing.

The Bodhisattva finished practicing, and then stood up, saying, “Surely I have learned it by heart now.”

Then the jackal got up out of his hole and announced, “Ho, holy man! I have learned the spell better than you know it yourself!” And off he ran. The Bodhisattva, terribly worried that the jackal would use the mantra for selfish or evil purposes, started chasing him. But he was no match for the speedy wild jackal. After following him as fast as he could run, the Bodhisattva couldn’t keep up with the jackal, who ran through vines and bushes in the forest to escape. The Bodhisattva cried out,

“You, jackal, will do a big mischief!” Then to any creature that might hear, he shouted, “Catch him! Catch him!”

But there were no other large animals around to run after him. Once he knew he had escaped, the jackal noticed a female jackal, and gave her a little nip on her body. She asked, “What is it, sir?”

He asked mysteriously, “Do you know me? Or do you not know me?”

She replied, “I do not know you.” She had never seen him before, and didn’t care to know him; certainly not after he nipped her. She had no interest in whatever he was up to.



Then, he recited the mantra of “Conquering the World,” in a loud and clear voice, so it seemed to echo all through the forest.

Suddenly and unexplainably, the female jackal was fascinated by him. She hadn’t noticed before, but now he seemed so confident, powerful and majestic. She walked over to him and wanted to join him in whatever he was doing. Other animals in the area

reacted in the same way. They were mesmerized by this jackal, and wanted to get to know him. First, other jackals arrived, and then more and more of them arrived, and soon there were several hundred jackals.

Then a big group of elephants approached. A herd of horses that had been grazing in the area trotted up toward the jackal. Even lions and tigers joined the group! And finally, wild pigs and deer, and numerous other four-footed forest creatures came to be part of the growing assembly of animals attracted to the jackal.

The lions and tigers didn't notice the fact that there were many animals that they could eat right in front of them. They were too absorbed in admiring this amazingly powerful jackal. All the animals just wanted to stay near him and be part of his huge group.

They unanimously decided to make him their king. Surely, they thought, they never had such a wonderful king of the jungle as this great leader, the jackal. His name was Sabbadātha, which means All-Fangs. One of the female jackals considered herself extremely fortunate to become his wife.



The animals were so devoted to him that a big strong lion proudly volunteered to let the jackal and his wife ride on his back. Then, two elephants, totally disregarding the fact that lions hunt elephants as prey, offered to carry the lion on their backs so that the jackal and his wife would have a royal seat high above everyone else on the back of the lion. All the animals honored the jackal as they looked up

at him, sitting on the back of the lion with an expression of great authority.

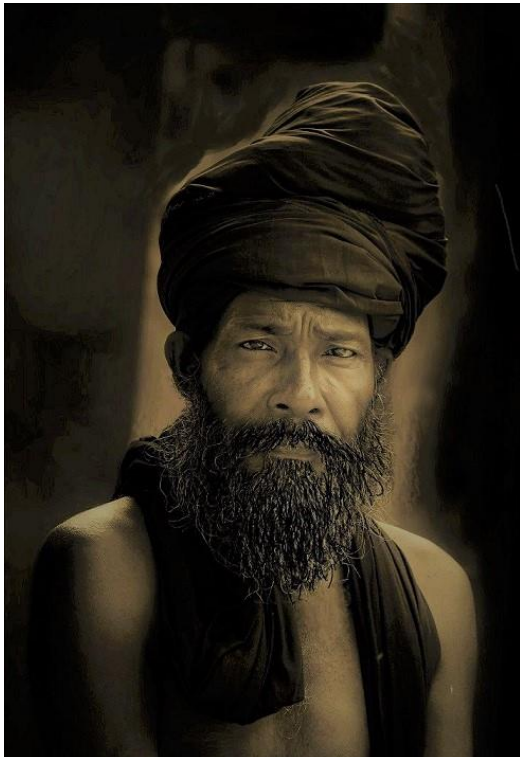
The jackal was enjoying immensely all this admiration showed to him by the many animals, including the mighty lions, tigers and elephants, and he became egoistic, full of pride. He thought,

“I am the king of the jungle now, but I also should become the king of the great kingdom of Benares. And why not? Everyone knows that I am the most intelligent leader in all the land! Everyone should honor me as their leader. The great kingdom of Benares will soon be mine.”

With all the four-footed animals following along, the jackal rode proudly on the back of the lion who stood on the backs of the two elephants, and they proceeded toward Benares. They stopped just outside the city of Benares. There were so many animals that where they stood, they covered a huge area of land. They spread out around the stone wall surrounding the city so the people of Benares would see through the holes in the wall that the jackal king had immense power due to his popularity. He ordered one of his animals to send the message to Brahmadata, the King of Benares:

“Give up your kingdom, or fight for it.”

Word traveled fast – someone with a huge crowd was trying to take over the kingdom! The citizens of Benares panicked. They were full of terror.



The gates to the city were closed and all the citizens stayed within the city walls.

At the palace, the Bodhisattva approached the King of Benares and said, “Fear not, mighty king! Leave me with the task of fighting with the jackal king, Sabbadātha. Except only me, no one is able to fight with him at all.”

The king and the citizens were relieved that the king’s advisor was going to handle this crisis.

The Bodhisattva said, “I will ask the jackal king at once what he will do to take the city.”

Then he went up on top of the tower over one of the city's gates, and shouted out:

“Sabbadātha, what will you do to take over this kingdom?”

The jackal king responded, “I will cause the lions to roar, and with the roaring I will frighten the people. This is how I will take it.”

“Oh, that’s it,” the Bodhisattva thought as he came down from the tower. He made an announcement to all the citizens in the way it was done in those days, by messengers beating drums and walking through the streets, shouting the announcement. The announcement was, that all citizens must plug their ears with flour dough. When the citizens heard the command, they all plugged their ears with dough so they couldn’t hear each other speak. They even plugged the ears of their cats and other animals.

Then, the Bodhisattva went a second time up into the tower, and called out, “Sabbadātha!”



The jackal king called out, “What is it, holy man?”

“How will you take the kingdom?” the Bodhisattva asked.

“I will cause the lion to roar, and I will frighten the people, and destroy them, that’s how I will take it!” the jackal king replied.

The Bodhisattva responded, “You will not be able to make the lions roar. These noble lions, with their tawny paws and shaggy manes, will never obey the command of an old jackal like you!”

The jackal, stubborn with pride and ego, answered, “Not only will the other lions obey me, but I’ll even make this one, upon whose back I sit, roar alone!”

“Very well,” said the Bodhisattva, “Do it if you can.”



So the jackal tapped with his foot on the lion which he sat upon, to signal him to roar. And the lion, resting his mouth upon the elephant's head, roared three times, without any doubt in the jackal king's command.

The elephants became terrified, and, thinking they were being attacked by a lion, they reared up with their front legs in the air, so the jackal king dropped down at their feet. Then the frightened elephants started stamping with their feet, as they would

when attacked, and they trampled on his head. Then and there, the jackal king died. The elephants, in their fear and confusion, even wounded one another. The other animals stampeded in a panic, and many died. The rest of them ran for their lives into the forest.

The Bodhisattva came down from the tower, and had the gates of the city opened wide. He made an announcement, by messengers beating drums and shouting loudly in the streets,

“Let all the people take the dough out from their ears, and those that would like some meat, let them take all the meat!”

There was plenty of meat for all laying on the ground outside the city gates. The citizens ate all the fresh meat they could eat, and the rest they dried and preserved for later. According to the story, this is the time that people first began to eat dried meat.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why didn't the Bodhisattva want anyone to hear the special mantra? (so they wouldn't use it for selfish or harmful purposes)
2. What happened when the jackal chanted the mantra? (many animals were attracted to him and made him their king)
3. What happened to the jackal king's personality when so many animals admired him? (he became egoistic, full of pride)
4. How did he intend to take over the kingdom of Benares? (make the lions roar and scare the people of Benares)
5. How did the Bodhisattva prevent the people from getting scared? (made an announcement for them to plug their ears)
6. What happened to the jackal king when the lion roared? (the elephants were scared, reared up and stamped their feet, so the jackal king fell off and was trampled)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Abuse of Power:

The jackal king suddenly became extremely popular, and with so many fans who admired him, he had the power to influence others.

Whatever he said, the others would agree and support him.

But he used this power for a selfish reason that would harm others – trying to take over another kingdom.

And what happened when he used his popularity for harmful, selfish purposes? It resulted in disaster, and losing his popularity.

So this story teaches us that if you abuse your popularity – if you use it to harm others – you will lose it. If you abuse it, you lose it.

How do people become popular?

They often have “charisma.”

What is charisma? It means being charming, able to easily attract many people, or being able to easily influence others.

For example, many politicians, activists, comedians, Hollywood stars, and even “influencers” on social media have charisma.

People who have charisma are bold, confident, entertaining, and know how to get attention and persuade others, so people listen to them and believe them.

But what happens when a famous person does something that harms others, or says something very offensive or insulting to someone? He gets heavily criticized in the news, and he loses his friends and fans. He might even lose his job or get arrested, Many people lose respect for him, so he isn't so popular anymore. He loses his popularity power when he abuses it.

But does that always happen?

There are some famous people who go on harming others for many years. There are leaders of countries who oppress certain groups of people, cause terrible human rights abuses, and start wars. There are powerful terrorist organizations that don't seem to disappear.

Do these people abuse their power but don't lose it?

No, they eventually lose it, and eventually they suffer the results of their negative karma.

But it might take many years, or sometimes it happens in a future life.

Why don't they immediately lose all their friends and supporters when they do wrong?

Because they have many people who admire and support them, who like their charisma and power and don't realize or care that the person is causing harm to others. So they continue in power.

Could you be admiring or supporting someone who is abusing their power – their popularity or charisma – to cause harm?

One possibility is online. Do you know any popular stars or "influencers" on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram or Tik Tok?

Some of them may have a good influence or a neutral influence (neither good nor bad). But there are some who are so motivated by desire for popularity, admiration, "likes" or money that they say and do things that are very daring, inappropriate, bad or nasty to get attention (more clicks), because that's what attracts the most people.

They spread their negative thoughts and ideas to those who watch them.

If we click on their social media, we are helping to support and encourage them to continue spreading their bad influence.

Another possibility is a friend. Do you have a friend who is popular? What if he or she starts acting unkind or inappropriate, or starts using others, or acting like a bully?

If you spend time with them, then it may seem like you are encouraging their negative behavior, supporting their misbehavior.

To avoid that, we may have to “socially distance” from them.

When someone is popular, it doesn't mean it's okay to follow their ideas or behavior.

Remember, what is popular is not always right, and what is right is not always popular.

And, remember not to blindly follow someone like the animals in the story blindly followed the jackal king.