

CHAPTER 6 – THE WEAVER’S DAUGHTER

One day, the Buddha went to a town called Alavi where some families invited him to a meal and made offerings. At the end of the meal, as usual, the Buddha gave a Dharma talk. The subject of the Dharma talk was impermanence. He instructed the people to meditate on impermanence—that everything in the world, including our life, comes to an end; we all must pass away at some point. He said that people who meditate on impermanence will have no fear when their life comes to an end.

During the Dharma talk, all the people there kept thinking about their jobs, responsibilities and plans at home with their families and friends, which was their usual habit. They weren’t really paying attention to what the Buddha was saying.



But there was one exception. A sixteen-year-old girl who was the daughter of a weaver, a man who made cloth by weaving it on a loom, was listening very carefully and clearly understood what the Buddha was saying. She thought to herself,

“Marvelous is the speech of the Buddhas. I must practice meditation on impermanence.”

So, she diligently practiced meditation every day, in the daytime and in the night. Meanwhile, the Buddha traveled back to Jetavana, his monastery near the town of Savatthi.

Three years later, one early morning before sunrise, the Buddha as usual observed the world from his mind—his inner eye—and he became aware of this girl, the weaver’s daughter. He thought to himself, “What will happen?” He became aware that from the day when the girl heard his Dharma talk, she meditated on impermanence every day for three years. He thought, “I will now go back to Alavi and ask this girl four questions. On each of the four she will answer me correctly, and I will congratulate her. I will then give a few words of teaching beginning with the words, ‘This world is indeed blind.’ As soon as she hears these words, she will reach the first level of enlightenment. Because of her, my Dharma talk will be helpful to the crowd of people there, too.”

The Buddha along with a few hundred monks, departed from Jetavana and walked a hundred miles to the monastery in the town of Alavi. When the people of Alavi heard that the Buddha

had come, they invited him to be their guest for meals in the next days. The weaver's daughter also heard that he had come, which filled her heart with joy. She thought,

"Here has come, so people say, one that is my father, my master, my teacher, one whose face is bright like the full moon, the mighty Gautama Buddha. Now, for the first time in three years, I will see the Buddha, whose body is the color of gold. Now I am permitted to see him, and to hear him preach the wonderful Dharma, which contains all sweetness."

But her father, on his way to the workshop where he would work weaving cloth on his loom, said, "Daughter, an item of clothing for a customer is on the loom, and part of it isn't yet finished. I must finish it today. Quickly get more thread on the spool and bring it to me."

The daughter thought, "It was my dream to hear the Buddha teach the Dharma, but my father has asked me to do this. Should I hear the Buddha teach the Dharma or get more thread and carry it to my father? If I don't bring my father the spool of thread, he will hit me and beat me. Therefore, I will first bring the thread and give it to him, and wait until afterward to hear the Dharma."

So she sat down on a stool and began winding the thread around the spool to load it for her father.

Meanwhile, the people of the town of Alavi offered the meal to the Buddha and his monks, and when the meal was finished, the people took his bowl and stood waiting for him to speak some words of appreciation, rejoicing in their merits for providing the meal and other offerings.

The Buddha said, "I came here on a journey of one hundred miles for the sake of a certain young lady. She hasn't yet found an opportunity to be here. When she can be here, I will speak the words of rejoicing."

He then sat down and remained silent. When the Buddha is silent, no one dares to make a sound. So, everyone around him just stood or sat silently.

When the weaver's daughter had loaded the spool with thread, she put it in her basket and started walking in the direction of her father's workshop. On her way, she stopped and stood in the outer circle of the crowd of people silently standing around the Buddha, waiting for him to speak. She stood there, gazing at him.

The Buddha lifted his face up to look over the crowd and then his eyes met hers. As he gazed at her, he thought, "If this young lady leaves, she will die as an ordinary person and her future birth will be uncertain. But if she comes to me, she will leave this Earth established in the first level of enlightenment, and her future will be certain—she will be reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods." He knew that her karmic energy to maintain her human body was going to disappear very soon, so her destiny was to die that day and there was no possibility for her to avoid it.

The weaver's daughter didn't know what he was thinking, but she knew what he wanted her to do. By his way of looking at her, she thought, "The Buddha, sitting in such a crowd, signals by gazing at me that he wants me to come, he only wants me to go up to him."

So, she set her basket on the ground and walked through the large group of people toward the Buddha. She approached closer, walking through the rays of six colors of light radiating from his body, that ordinary people could not see. She bowed to him and stood respectfully at one side.

Immediately he said to her, "Young lady, from where do you come?"

She answered, "I do not know, Lord."

He asked, "Where are you going?"

She replied, "I do not know, Lord."

He asked, "Do you not know?"

She answered, "I know, Lord."

Then he asked, "Do you know?"

She said, "I do not know, Lord."

These were the four questions that the Buddha knew earlier that he would ask. He was pleased with her answers, but was silent about it. The crowd of people, however, were offended by her answers. They thought she was being foolish or silly.

They whispered among themselves, "Look, this daughter of a weaver talks as she pleases with the Supremely Enlightened One. When he asked her 'From where do you come?' she should have answered, 'From the weaver's house.' And when he asked her, 'Where are you going?' she should have answered, 'To the weaver's workshop.'"

The Buddha wanted to show the crowd that she was not arrogant, ignorant or being disrespectful, as they thought she was. So he asked her,

"Young lady, when I asked you, 'From where do you come?' why did you say 'I do not know'?"

She replied, "Lord, you yourself know that I came from the house of my father, a weaver. So when you asked me 'From where do you come?' I knew very well that you meant 'From where did you come before you were born here?' But as for me, from where I came when I was reborn here, that I do not know."

Then the Buddha said to her, “Well said, well said, young lady! You have answered correctly the question I asked you.”

Then he asked her, “When I asked you, ‘Where are you going?’ why did you say ‘I do not know?’”

She responded, “Lord, you yourself know that I was going to the weaver’s workshop with the spool of thread in my basket. So when you asked me, ‘Where are you going?’ I knew very well that you meant ‘When you pass away, where will you be reborn?’ But as for me, where I will be reborn when I have passed from this present life, that I do not know.”

Then the Buddha said to her, “You have answered correctly the question I asked you.”

In that way the Buddha congratulated her for the second time, and then he asked another question, “When I asked you, ‘Do you not know?’ why did you say, ‘I know?’”

She said, “Lord, this I know, that I shall surely die; and therefore I said so.”

Then the Buddha said to her, “You have answered correctly the question I asked you,” congratulating her for the third time. Then he asked,

“When I asked you, ‘Do you know?’ why did you say ‘I do not know?’”

She replied, “This only do I know, Lord, that I shall surely die; but at what time I shall die, whether in the night or in the daytime, whether in the morning or at some other time, that I do not know and therefore I said so.”

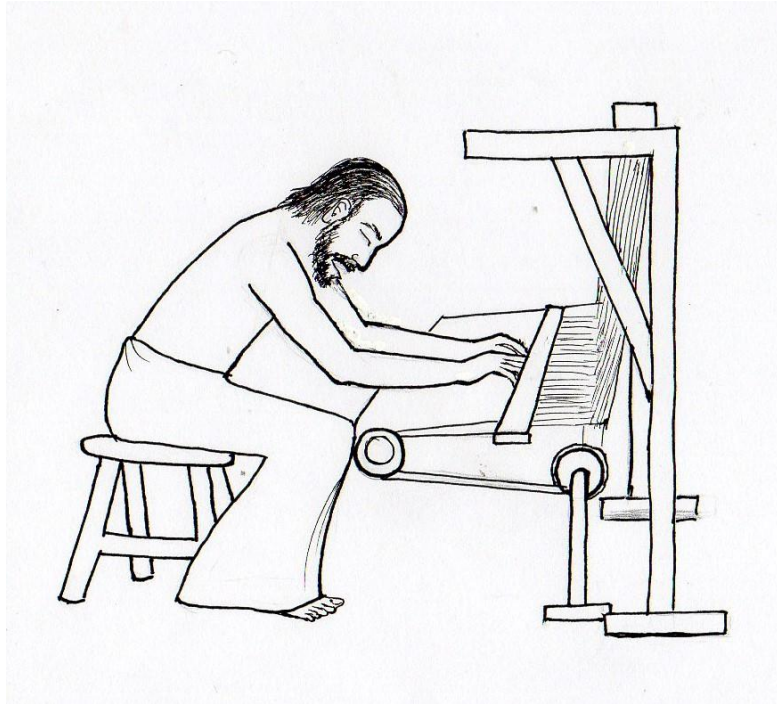
The Buddha said, “You have answered correctly the question I asked you.”

Then, speaking to the crowd of people, he said, “Those among you who failed to understand the words she spoke, only you were offended. For those who don’t have the eye of understanding, only they are blind; those who have the eye of understanding, only they see.”

He therefore let the crowd know that they were the ones who were blind, and couldn’t see the truth—in other words, they were the ones who were ignorant—and not the girl. He spoke the following verse,

“This world is indeed blind. Few are those who deeply see. Like birds escaping from a net, few will go to a blissful heaven.”

He meant that most people in the world are ignorant and can’t understand the Dharma; only a few people can understand it and reach the higher heaven-worlds after they pass away. At the end of the Dharma talk, the weaver’s daughter had reached the first level of enlightenment. She took her basket and went to her father in the workshop.



He was asleep sitting in the chair in front of the loom. She didn't notice he was asleep, and she handed him the basket. As she did so, the basket hit the tip of the loom and then the basket fell with a clatter onto the floor. As her father was startled and woke up suddenly, he grabbed hold of the loom, pulling it, and by accident, the tip of the loom swung around and hit his daughter in the chest.

Right then and there she died from the impact of the heavy loom. She was reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods. Her father looked at her as she lay there and saw that she had died.

Immediately, intense grief arose in him. Thinking of the Buddha, he wailed, "There is none other that can take away my grief," and then he went to the Buddha and, telling him what happened, cried, "Lord, take away my grief."

The Buddha comforted him, saying, "Don't grieve, my student; in the cycle of lives without any imaginable beginning, you have also cried over the death of your daughters, with more tears than the water contained in the four oceans."

The Buddha then gave a Dharma teaching on the cycle of countless lives without any imaginable beginning. Hearing him speak, the weaver's grief was calmed. He requested the Buddha to allow him to be ordained as a monk. He became a monk and not long afterward became an arahant, reaching enlightenment.

Questions:

1. In the beginning of the story, who in the crowd was paying attention to the Dharma talk? (only the weaver's daughter)
2. What did the weaver's daughter do daily after the first time she heard the Buddha speak? (she practiced meditation on impermanence every day and night)
3. When the Buddha returned to Alavi, what did the girl decide to do first, get the thread for her father or hear the Dharma? (get the thread for her father)

4. What did the Buddha do while the girl was getting the thread? (ate his meal and then sat silently and waited for her to arrive)
5. What did the people think about the girl's responses to the Buddha's questions? (they thought she was ignorant, arrogant or being disrespectful; being foolish or silly)
6. What did the Buddha mean when he said "The world is indeed blind. Few are those that deeply see"? (most people are ignorant and can't understand the Dharma; only a few people can understand it and reach the higher heaven-worlds after they die)

What the Buddha said:

"Andha bhūto ayaṃ loko, tanuk' ettha vipassati, sakunto jāla mutto 'va, appo saggāya gacchati."
"Blind is this world. Few are those who clearly see. As few birds escape from a net, few go to a blissful state."

Dhammapada 174 (8:7)

Dharma discussion - Lovingkindness and Wisdom:

How did the Buddha show his lovingkindness to the weaver's daughter?
He walked 100 miles just to see her and teach her so she could reach the first level of enlightenment before she died. He did this even though he could have visited thousands of other people instead without traveling far, or could have stayed with his monks at Jetavana.

What is lovingkindness? Why don't we just say "love" or just say "kindness"?

Because sometimes we might love someone but not show kindness to them,
Or we might be kind to someone but not feel any love for them.

Lovingkindness means love plus kindness.

It means kindness in body, speech and mind: kind thoughts, kind words, kind actions.

What does this look like in our daily life?

We are friendly, we help others, we use kind words, we say prayers for others to be happy, we think of the needs of others and not just ourselves.

Lovingkindness means we truly care about a person, wishing for their happiness and well-being.

We're friendly and helpful to others because we honestly care about them, and not because we're trying to get something in return—some kind of reward, or admiration, or attention.

The Buddha didn't act friendly and helpful to become popular, be admired, or receive food.

Instead, he went where at least one person would understand and benefit from his teachings.

He traveled and helped people only for their happiness.

Lovingkindness means we help others for their benefit, for their happiness, and not just because we want them to like us or be our friend.

But is it so simple—just be friendly and help others all the time?

We can't always help everyone, especially if we have other responsibilities. Even the Buddha didn't visit or talk to everyone just to please them. With his wisdom, he knew who he could help the most to reach enlightenment, and used his time wisely to talk to those people. Similarly, we use our wisdom to choose the situations where it's most reasonable for us to help. That means we set priorities—we choose what is most important and do those things first. In the story, the girl had to choose what to do first—hear the Dharma or help her father. He needed the thread for his job right away, and she decided to help him first. Still, she really wanted to see the Buddha first on her way to her father. Then, when the Buddha signaled for her to come to him, that took priority over helping her father.

Another reason lovingkindness isn't so simple is that some people can abuse our kindness. They "use" us—in other words, they exploit us, take advantage of our kindness—by asking us for something they want, or asking us to do something for them, for selfish reasons. They might ask us because they're lazy or greedy, or to show they have power over us, or to bully us. Or they may ask us to do something they don't want to do, or that's wrong (for example, a classmate asking us to let them copy our answers on a test or schoolwork). If we do what they want, then are we really helping them in a good way? No. Doing what they want rewards them for being selfish, and encourages them to use us and use others even more. Then they are creating bad karma. To avoid this, we shouldn't automatically give or do something just because they ask. Instead, use your wisdom by asking yourself, why is the person asking me—is it because they are selfish or manipulative? If so, or if you don't feel good about it, then don't do it. Does that mean you're being unkind? No. Lovingkindness means we truly care about others, so we want what really is best for them: to be truly happy, peaceful and kind people, and not selfish or abusive people. So, sometimes it's more kind to refuse what someone asks, and disappoint them, than to do what they ask, that pleases them only for a little while but encourages them to be selfish or abusive, which ultimately makes them more miserable from their negative karma. In these situations, saying "no" is lovingkindness with wisdom.

Is this similar to the way our parents show us lovingkindness with wisdom? Yes. Our parents don't give us everything we want and don't let us do whatever we want, because they're trying to do what is really best for us: teaching us to have self-control and be well disciplined so we have a happy future.

Similarly, in the story, the Buddha didn't just do what the people wanted him to do after the meal—to thank them and talk about their merits. Instead, he did what was best for them – by making them wait silently, they could practice patience and silence and then learn something from his conversation with the girl.

When you're not sure what to do, how you can best practice lovingkindness in a situation, let your mind relax for a few moments in mindfulness or meditation, and then let your own inner wisdom help you feel what is the best thing to do or the best thing to say.