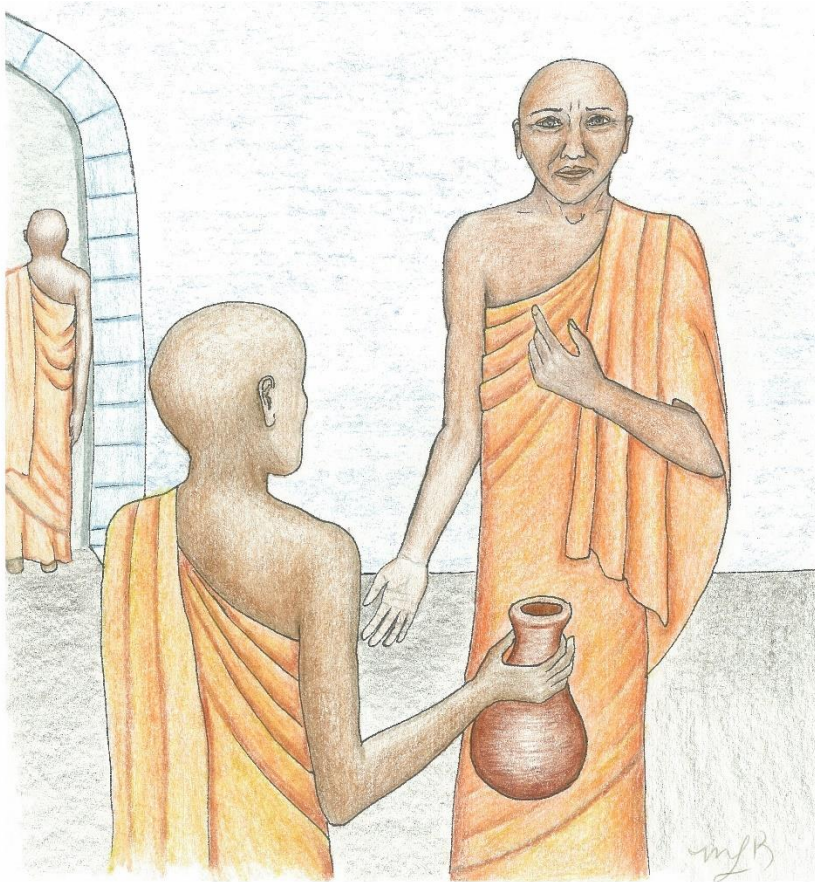


Lesson 21 – ADMIT MISTAKES – The Quarrel at Kosambi

There was a monastery in the town of Kosambi which became the scene of a big argument and conflict – and misbehavior - among monks. It started with just a tiny mistake.

There were two senior monks at the monastery. Each of them had a group of younger monks whom they mentored and taught. One was a teacher who taught the other monks the Buddha’s teachings, and the other was an expert in the Buddha’s rules for monks. The Buddha over the years had created a long list of rules for Buddhist monks to follow so they would develop discipline, self-control, humility and other good qualities.

One day, the teacher monk went to the bathroom and left a pot of clean water in the bathroom. The rules expert went into the bathroom afterward and found the pot of water that had been left there. He had noticed that the last person who used the bathroom was the teacher. So he went over to the teacher and asked,



“Did you leave the pot of water in there?”

The teacher replied, “Yes.”

The rules expert said, “You didn’t know it was a violation of the rules?”

The teacher answered, “No, I didn’t.”

The rules expert said, “It is a violation, friend.”

The teacher responded, “Then I will admit my mistake.”

The rules expert then explained, “But if you didn’t intend to do it and it was because of forgetfulness, then there was no violation.”

The teacher just walked away without saying anything, thinking to himself, “Okay, then I didn’t do anything wrong; I didn’t violate any rules.”

There was a group of young monks sitting nearby who had heard this discussion, and who were students of the rules expert. He commented to his students, “This teacher doesn’t know when he has committed a violation.”

The students admired their mentor, the rules expert. They liked to try to prove to the other young monks at the monastery, who were students of the teacher monk, that their mentor was better.

This situation that they just witnessed seemed like a perfect opportunity to prove it. So they went over to the teacher monk’s students and started a conversation. One of them said,

“Your teacher has violated the rules, but he thinks that he didn’t.”

The students of the teacher monk were surprised and didn’t know what to say. They went to their teacher, hoping he could explain the situation. One of them said, “Venerable sir, the other students said that you violated the rules but that you don’t admit it.”

The teacher monk was so shocked to hear that! He had admitted the mistake at first, but then the rules expert said there was no violation if it was unintentional, so how can he say this now? He told his students,

“The rules expert said to me that there was no violation, and now he says that there was a violation! So, he is a liar.”

The students felt reassured by their teacher’s explanation, and were upset and disgusted by the rules expert blaming their teacher for a violation after telling him there wasn’t any violation. They couldn’t wait to tell the other students that their mentor was no good. So, they went immediately to the rules expert’s students and said,

“Your teacher is a liar.”

The rules expert’s students went directly to their mentor and exclaimed, “Can you believe, they called you a liar!”

The rules expert was not going to tolerate this impertinence. He thought that he must put a stop to this arrogant and egoistic behavior. So, he called a meeting with other senior monks from a monastery nearby to discuss whether the teacher monk should be punished.

The senior monks had a discussion, and then they went to speak with the teacher monk. They said to him,

“Friend, you have committed a violation. Do you see that you have committed a violation?”

The teacher monk, having accidentally forgotten to remove the pot of water after he was finished using the bathroom, thought there was no violation. He said,

“Friends, I have committed no violation, as far as I know.”

The rules expert along with the other senior monks agreed to suspend the teacher monk from the monastery even though he still didn’t believe that he had committed a violation.

Suspending the he teacher monk was a very harsh punishment, especially because he was not just an average monk. He had studied the Dharma for many years, and he was not only an expert in the Dharma but he also was very knowledgeable about the rules that the Buddha had set for the monks. He was wise, understanding, and humble; he followed the rules and wanted to continue his advanced training as a monk. He couldn’t allow himself to be kicked out of the monastery! He went to his close friends and told them what happened. He said,

“This is no violation, this is not a violation! I have not violated anything! So I am not suspended. I have been suspended by a wrongful act of those monks. I have been suspended for no reason, so the suspension is invalid. I hope you will take my side on this.”

His friends understood him and agreed that it was wrong for him to be suspended. He sent messages to his friends all over the country, so they also would support him.

A group of monks who supported the teacher monk went to meet with the rules expert and others agreeing to the suspension, and explained that the suspension was unfair and invalid. The rules expert and his team firmly stood by their view that the suspension was indeed appropriate, and said,

“Let’s not support and follow a monk who has been suspended.”

Nevertheless, the friends of the teacher monk and all the monks who agreed with him loyally continued to support and follow him.

One day a certain monk went to the Buddha who was staying near the monastery, and told him about this big disagreement. The Buddha was very concerned, and said,

“There will be a split in the Sangha. There will be a split in the community of monks.”

The Buddha got up from his seat and went to the rules expert and his team of monks who had suspended the teacher monk. They offered him a seat and the Buddha advised them,

“Monks, don’t suspend a monk just because you think he should be suspended. For example, suppose a monk has made a mistake and doesn’t believe that it was his fault or that he did anything wrong, but other monks do believe he did wrong. Monks, you know how serious it is to create a split in the Sangha. You should not punish that monk when he doesn’t believe that it was his fault. If you do punish him, then it will lead to disagreements, arguments, quarrelling, and fights. It will lead to a split in the community of monks - two groups that cannot agree with each other.”

The Buddha then visited the monks who supported the teacher monk. After taking a seat they prepared for him, he advised them,

“Monks, don’t think that when you make a mistake that you need not apologize or fix the mistake just because you believe it wasn’t your fault or you didn’t do anything wrong. For example, suppose you make a mistake and you believe it’s not your fault, but other monks think it is your fault. Monks, you know how serious it is to create a split in the Sangha. You should admit the mistake in order to be considerate to the other monks. It would be absurd to cause anger, hatred, fear, arguing and fighting just because you didn’t admit the mistake. It will lead to a split in the community of monks.”

After he gave this advice to help all the monks be more understanding of each other and to be more peaceful and harmonious with each other, the Buddha got up and went away.

Questions:

1. Did the teacher monk leave the pot of water in the bathroom on purpose or because he forgot? (because he forgot)
2. Why did he think he didn’t violate the monks’ rules? (the rules expert said if he didn’t intend to violate the rules, or if it was because of forgetfulness, then it isn’t a violation)
3. What did the teacher monk say to his students about the rules expert? (that he was a liar)
4. What did the rules expert do after he heard that the teacher monk’s students called him a liar? (called a meeting with other monks to discuss whether he should be punished)
5. What was the Buddha trying to avoid in the community of monks? (a split)

6. Did the Buddha agree that the teacher monk should be punished? (no)

What the Buddha said:

“Na paresaṃ vilomāni, na paresaṃ katākataṃ, attano va avekkheyya, katāni akatāni ca.”

“Do not find fault with others, do not watch what others do or did not do. But let us see our own acts, what we do and what we fail to do.”

Dhammapada 50 (4:7)

Discussion – Admitting Mistakes:

How do you feel when you see someone make a mistake, for example, doing something embarrassing, bad or clumsy, or saying something wrong or foolish? Maybe we laugh, or maybe we feel glad that we didn't make that mistake. Or maybe we feel compassion for them. When we see television shows with people making mistakes, being bad, or misbehaving, it's funny or entertaining.

But how do you feel if you make a mistake? Maybe we can laugh at ourselves. But usually, we don't feel so good about it. No one wants to feel they are “bad,” wrong, or foolish. So, sometimes it's hard to admit that we made a mistake. We might make an excuse or blame it on someone else to try to avoid guilt.

What did the Buddha teach the monks to do when they make a mistake? They must admit their mistakes - even if it wasn't their fault, or even if they didn't intend to do anything wrong. Why was it so important? To avoid anger, arguments and fighting.

Is his teaching only for monks? No, it applies to us, too. When we make a mistake that might have upset or annoyed another person - for example, if we break something, if we say something that was inconsiderate, or if we didn't do something we promised to do - it's important to apologize, even if we didn't intend to do anything wrong or hurt anyone. Should we just say “I'm sorry”? If we just say “sorry” automatically without really meaning it, it seems that you don't really care. Should we say “I didn't mean it” or “It wasn't my fault,” or we blame someone else? This is not enough. It's only defending ourselves without acknowledging how the other person feels. They still may feel upset with you, which may lead to arguments or fights later.

When you make a mistake that might have offended, disappointed or hurt someone, it's important to connect with the other person from the heart - with compassion - understanding their feelings.

Your eye contact, words and actions should show that you care about them and that you want to try to undo the mistake.

If you made an innocent mistake, you can say with kindness, "I didn't intend to hurt you, it was a mistake and I'm really sorry." Then they might be able to forgive you.

Sometimes we make a mistake that may be offensive or upsetting to others but there isn't any opportunity or appropriate way to apologize.

We should still pay attention to those mistakes, admit them to ourselves, and have remorse - regret that we did the mistake - and determine not to do it again. For example, each group of young monks in the story should have noticed their mistake of criticizing the other monks' mentor. They should have felt remorse and determined not to do it again.

Although we would rather see others' mistakes than our own, the Buddha teaches us that it's important for us to notice our own mistakes.

Notice that when we point our finger at others' mistakes, there are three fingers of our hand pointing back at us – pointing at our own mistakes.

That means when we point out someone else's wrongdoing, then we should look three times more at our own wrongdoing.

Of course, it's uncomfortable to feel guilty or shameful about our mistakes.

But we can fix mistakes and not repeat them only if we notice them to begin with.

If we ignore our mistakes - if we think they don't matter - will they disappear?

No. We won't learn from them, so we will do them over and over again.

When we are honest with ourselves, noticing our mistakes and wrongdoing, then we can stop doing wrong and stop making those mistakes.

Noticing our mistakes turns into a good habit of correcting ourselves.

The more mistakes we notice, the more we can correct ourselves, improve ourselves, and the better we become.

So, making mistakes – and being aware of them - is a good thing!

Instead of feeling bad about them, feel good that you noticed them!

Activity - Noting mistakes:

Can you think of any mistakes you made over the past week? Did you have any quarrels with sisters or brothers? Did you do forget to do something your parents asked you to do? Did you disobey your parents? Did you watch too much TV? Did you say anything that was untrue? Did you say any angry words? Did a teacher have to ask you to stop talking in class?