

## SAVING THE ANTELOPE (Kurunga-Miga Jataka)



Once upon a time, the Bodhisattva (who in a future life would be the Buddha), was born as an antelope.

He lived at the edge of a forest near a beautiful lake.



Not far from the lake there was a tree, on which a bird called a woodpecker liked to perch, sitting on a branch high up on the tree.

From his perch, he could look far out over the forest and the lake.

The woodpecker used his beak to pick insects to eat from the bark of trees. He could communicate with other woodpeckers far away by drumming loudly with his beak on a tree trunk.



Next to the lake there lived a turtle. He loved to sun himself on the rocks next to the lake.

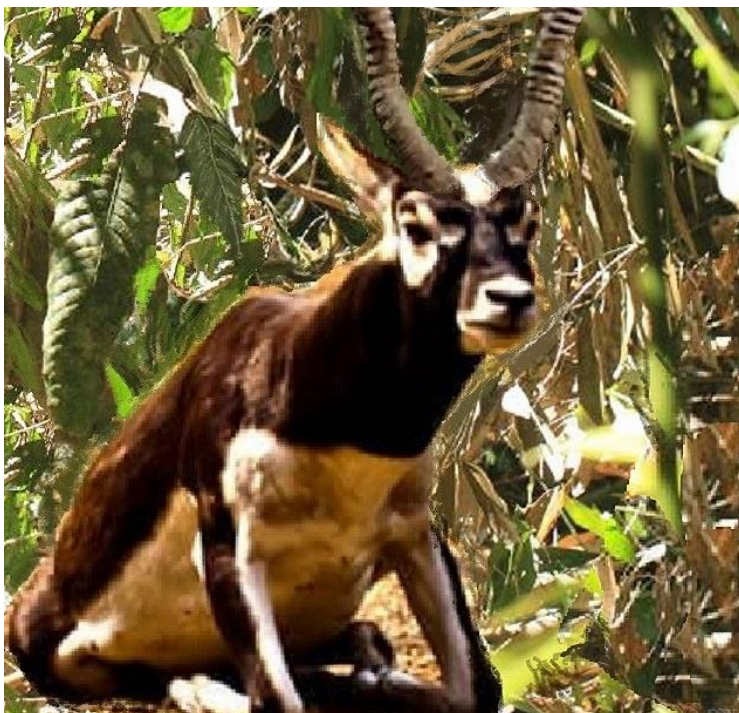
The antelope, woodpecker and turtle often saw each other, and they soon became good friends. They helped each other in several ways.

The woodpecker, being able to see from high up in all directions, could warn his friends if he saw something threatening coming, such as a group of hunters or a lion. The turtle, with his body so low to the ground, could show his friend the antelope where fresh new grass was starting to grow in the early springtime, and could show his friend the woodpecker where some tasty insects were hiding in fallen trees. The antelope, with his big sensitive ears, could warn his friends when he heard the whoosh of a hawk's wings, or the rustle of a fox or other animal moving in the forest underbrush. These animals and birds of prey might hunt and eat other birds and turtles.



One day, a hunter was wandering around near the lake, but the woodpecker didn't notice him down under the thick forest canopy. In the mud along the shore of the lake, the hunter saw the footprint of the antelope. He thought to himself, "Ah, a big healthy antelope roasted over a fire would make a delicious dinner!"

He set a trap, called a snare trap, made of strong leather straps hidden in the weeds near the lake, so the antelope would unknowingly step into it and be unable to escape the loop of leather straps. After the trap was set, the hunter went back home.



Later in the afternoon, the antelope went for his usual daily walk down to the lake to get a drink of water. As he stepped along the path to the edge of the lake, his foot got stuck in the trap! He kicked and pulled his foot again and again to escape, but he couldn't get free. He let out a long and loud desperate cry.

The woodpecker, hearing his dear friend crying out, flew down from his tree-top.

The turtle, hearing the loud cry, came out of the water. They went toward the sound, where they found their dear friend caught hopelessly in the trap.



The woodpecker said to the turtle, “Friend, you have strong jaws – bite through this leather snare. I will go and make sure the hunter stays away from here. If we both do our best, our friend will not lose his life.”

The turtle began to gnaw at one of the leather straps with his strong and sharp jaws.

The woodpecker flew to the hunter’s house and waited on a tree outside.



After the sun rose the next morning, the hunter went out, with the knife in his hand, hoping to find an antelope in his trap. The woodpecker cried out, flapped his wings, and struck the hunter in the face as he started to walk out the door of his house.

“Some bird of bad luck has hit me!” the hunter thought.

He turned around and went back inside, and lay down for a little while. Then he got up again and took his knife.

The woodpecker thought, “The first time he went out the front door, so now he will leave by the back door.” The bird flew around to the back of the house.

The hunter reasoned the same way, thinking, “When I went out by the front door, I got bad luck. Now I will go out the back.” And so he did.

The bird cried out again and whacked him in the face with his wing. Thinking that he was struck again by a bad-luck bird, the hunter exclaimed, “This creature will not let me go!”

The bird had distracted him from going to check his trap. He went back inside and lay down for a while. Then he picked up his knife, walked out of his house and started off toward the forest.

The woodpecker flew swiftly back to the forest to warn his friends, “Here comes the hunter!”



By this time, the turtle had gnawed all the way through the tough leather straps except for one extremely tough one. His jaws felt so sore from chewing through the leather he thought they might break, and his mouth was all smeared with blood.

The antelope saw the hunter coming very quickly, and he jumped up, bursting through the leather strap, and bounded into the woods.



The woodpecker perched on his tree top. But the turtle was so weak that he just lay there where he was. The hunter saw him and threw him into a bag. Then he tied the bag to a tree.

The antelope saw that his friend the turtle was hanging in the bag on the tree, and was determined to save his friend’s life. So, the antelope walked back to where the hunter could see him and pretended that he was terribly weak.

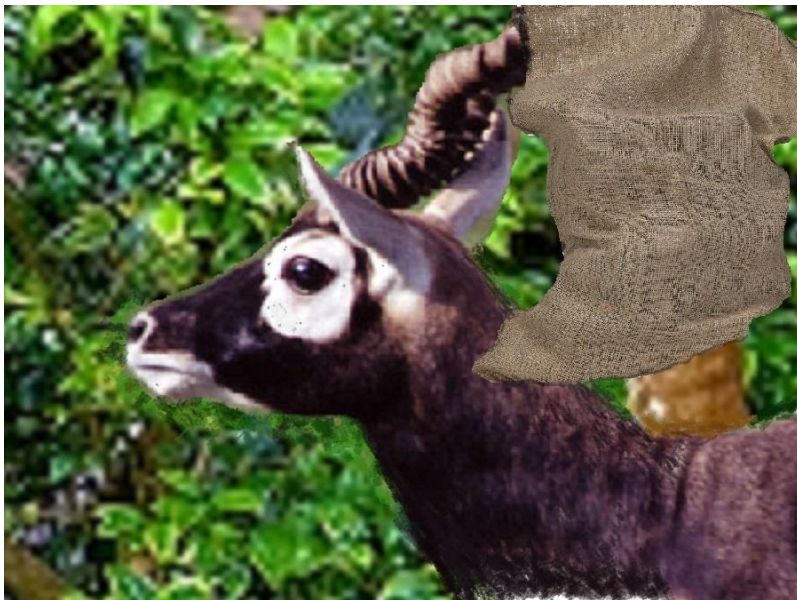


The hunter saw him and, thinking that he was weak and unable to run, pulled out his knife and started running toward the antelope, ready to butcher him.

The antelope moved away and limped along just fast enough to keep out of the hunter's reach. He walked deeper and deeper into the forest as the hunter followed him, hoping for a chance to sink his knife into the antelope.



And after they had gone for quite a distance, the antelope suddenly bounded away and returned as swift as the wind by another way to where the turtle was still hanging in the bag on the tree.



The antelope lifted the bag with his horns, threw it gently on the ground, ripped it open, and let the turtle out. The woodpecker flew down from the tree to be with his dear friends.

The antelope spoke to both of them, "My life has been saved by you, and you have done a true friend's duty to me. But

now the hunter will try to snatch and take both of you. So, friend woodpecker, go to another place with your family. And you, friend turtle, dive into the water to escape."

They did so, and the antelope went deeper in the forest. The hunter returned to where he had left his bag in the tree, and found that the empty bag was torn. He picked it up and went home, disappointed.

The three friends were safe from the hunter and remained good friends for the rest of their lives.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. How did the hunter know that an antelope might be nearby? (he saw the hoof print of the antelope)
2. How did the turtle help the antelope break free of the trap? (he chewed through the leather straps)
3. How did the woodpecker help the antelope get away? (he flew at the hunter and hit him, distracting him from going to check his trap)
4. What did the hunter do to the turtle? (put him in a bag and hung him in a tree)
5. How did the antelope save the turtle? (he pretended he was weak so the hunter would follow him into the forest, and then ran back and freed the turtle from the bag)

#### DHARMA DISCUSSION – Interdependence:

In the story, the three friends helped each other in several ways. They were dependent on each other for food and safety.

Who are you dependent on?

Your parents, teachers, maybe other family members, and friends.

But who else provides you with what you need to live comfortably?

Who makes the food you eat, before your parents give it to you?

Grocery store employees, truck drivers that bring food to the grocery store, farmers who grow the food, factory workers who package the food.

Who made your home? Many people built and repaired your home.

Who made all the things you own and the things in your home?

Many people working in factories created the clothes you wear, the furniture, computers and appliances in your house, and your parents' car. Who helps you stay healthy? Doctors, hospital employees, and others.

Who makes your community safe and pleasant to live in?

Police, government officials, street repair crews, sanitation workers, and many others.

These people work hard and do their jobs well, whether it is making sure your food is clean and safe to eat, or helping you in some other way to live comfortably and safely.

Of course there are exceptions - people who don't do their jobs well - but most do good work that helps many others.

We are all dependent on each other – that means we are interdependent.

Others are dependent on you, too. You not only can directly help your parents, teachers, classmates and friends, but you have other effects on them, too.

Can you think of some ways that your words or behavior affects others? Your smile, kindness and good attitude helps them, for example, to feel peaceful and positive. So you see we are all interdependent.

Buddhist teachings often mention interdependence.

Not only are humans dependent on each other, but also animals, plants (with which we exchange oxygen and carbon dioxide), insects (such as bees that pollinate plants we need for food, and mosquitos that need our blood) are interdependent with us.

What we do affects other beings in big or small ways, directly or indirectly. Thinking about interdependence is important.

When you think of other beings who help us, how do you feel?

You appreciate it, you feel thankful, it uplifts your mood.

And the more often we feel grateful, the more we develop lovingkindness.

For example, when someone does something good, then we think about doing something nice for them in return.

Or maybe we “pay it forward,” which means when someone helps us, we remember to help someone else in a similar way.

Even when someone does something unpleasant, we can try to appreciate that we learned something from it – we can feel thankful to them for the lesson learned.

Interdependence means that everything exists and everything happens as a result of causes and conditions.

Can you think of some causes and conditions for the existence of a flower? A flower is caused by a seed from another flower landing on the ground. The conditions of the right amount of rain, sunlight, and warmth, and good soil, allow the seed to grow. And it is protected from being eaten by deer or rabbits, and from being trampled. The seed came from a plant that itself had to have all the right conditions for it to grow, and in turn that plant grew from a seed from another plant that had to have the right conditions, and so on back through time.

Can you think of how a car can exist? What are its causes and conditions? Some causes of a car are the many people who design it, build the parts, assemble it in a factory, transport it for sale, and sell it at a dealership. There must be a car factory and a car parts factory, companies to create the factories, and materials for the car parts.

Where do the car parts come from? Rubber for tires comes from rubber trees, metals are dug up from mines in the earth, and plastic comes from oil that also comes from the earth.

These are only the more obvious causes and conditions.

But you can't count the many causes and conditions if you deeply think about all the things that must happen in just the right way in order for something to exist.