

THE PALACE DOGS AND THE CITY DOGS (Kukkura Jataka)

A long time ago, the King of Benares went out for the day in his carriage pulled by two graceful milk-white horses harnessed to the carriage with new and very beautiful expensive gold-painted leather straps.



He was enjoying the ride so much that he didn't return to the palace until after sunset.

The carriage driver put the horses into the stable for the night,

but because it was so dark outside, he left the carriage outside.

The beautiful harnesses, still attached to the carriage, were left on the ground outside the palace. That night it rained, and the lovely leather harnesses got wet.

In the morning, as the servants were busy preparing breakfast, the king's dogs walked downstairs from the upper chambers of the palace. They went outside and sniffed at the fresh morning air. They smelled the leather. When leather gets wet, it smells a bit stronger than usual. It smelled very tasty to the dogs. They followed their noses to where the fancy leather harnesses were on the ground. They sniffed at the gold painted leather, and their stomachs growled with hunger. They had not had their breakfast yet.

They licked at the harnesses and started to chew on them. No one saw the dogs, as the palace guards were only watching the palace gates for anyone coming in, and everyone else was inside the palace.



Oh, how delightful the leather was to chew! The dogs enjoyed gnawing and chewing on it so much that by the time the servants called them back inside for breakfast, there were only soggy shreds of leather left on the ground where the shiny new harnesses had been.

Later, when the king's servants went outside, next to the carriage they saw the chewed-up pieces of the harnesses. What animal or what creatures had caused such destruction? The servants imagined that some starving mongrels must have chewed up all the leather. But they couldn't have climbed over the high walls around the palace; perhaps they crawled in through the sewer pipe. The servants knew the king would be terribly upset and they would have to explain how his precious new harnesses had gotten ruined. They went to him right away to place the blame on whatever wretched creatures might have caused this disaster. Wincing in fear of his response, they said to him,

“Sire, dogs have gotten in through the sewer pipe and have gnawed the leather and straps of your majesty's carriage.”

The king became enraged! He thought of the stray dogs that lived in the streets of the city. He imagined their flea-bitten bodies creeping through the filthy sewer to invade his pristine and private grounds for their midnight

entertainment, ruining his expensive harnesses for the sheer joy of destruction and making a mess. His face red with anger, he shouted,

“Kill every dog you see!”

The king’s servants immediately sent messengers to announce to the people in the city the king’s order to kill all dogs. People all over the city started killing every dog they saw. Hundreds of dogs all over the city wondered why their friends were being killed. They became very frightened and hid just outside the city in the graveyard, where the leader of the stray dogs lived.

The leader of the dogs was rather small. He didn’t become the leader because he was big and strong, but because he walked with great calmness, courage and dignity. Not only dogs and but also people admired and respected him. He was wise, generous, and kind, and cared about the welfare of the other dogs rather than himself.



He asked the dogs, “Why are so many of you gathered here together?”

One of the dogs told him, “The king was so enraged when he heard that the leather harnesses

and straps of his carriage had been chewed by dogs, that he has ordered all dogs to be killed.”

Another dog said, “Dogs are being destroyed everywhere in the city. It’s terribly dangerous for us!”

The leader of the dogs thought to himself, “No dogs from outside the palace walls can get into the palace grounds, which are so closely watched by guards and servants. It must be the purebred dogs inside the palace who have done it. Now, nothing is happening to the dogs who actually are guilty, while the innocent dogs are being put to death. What if I were to discover the real culprits and reveal it to the king, and therefore save the lives of my family and friends?”

He comforted his friends, the dogs gathered around him, by saying, “Have no fear. I will save you. Just wait here until I see the king.”



He knew the terrible risk and danger of walking up to the palace. But he concentrated on thoughts of lovingkindness to all beings. And he thought about the great virtues of Buddhism, called the Ten Perfections: generosity, good conduct, unselfishness, wisdom, fearless energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, lovingkindness, and equal-mindedness. As he concentrated on those good qualities, he walked alone into the city, with his head and tail held high. He also made a silent command in his mind to all who might intend to harm him:

“Let no hand be lifted to throw stick or stone at me.”

And amazingly, not one man became angry at the sight of him. All the people just passed by him without any thoughts of cruelty despite the king’s order.

Meanwhile, the king was sitting on his throne in his hall of justice, where he made important decisions and gave orders. In walked the leader of the dogs, and then he ran straight toward the king and leaped right under his throne!

Everyone was shocked. The king stood up while his servants tried to grab and pull the dog out from under the throne. The king put his hands on the servants' arms and motioned for them to stop.

The leader of dogs, feeling a bit reassured by the king having intervened, crept out from under the throne. He bowed to the king and said,

“Is it you who are having the dogs destroyed?”

The king admitted, “Yes, it is I.”

The dog leader asked, “O king of men, what is their offense?”



The king replied, “They have been chewing the leather harnesses and straps of my carriage.”

The dog leader asked, “Do you know the dogs who actually did this mischief?”

The king admitted, “No, I do not.”

The dog leader reasoned, “But, your majesty, if you don't know for certain who the real culprits are, it's not right to order the destruction of every dog that is seen.”

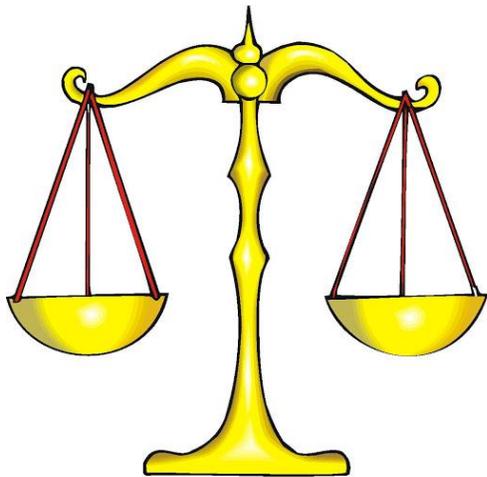
The king asserted firmly, “It was because dogs had chewed the leather of my carriage that I ordered them all to be killed.”

The dog leader asked, “Do your people kill all dogs without exception, or are there some dogs who are spared?”

The king started feeling a bit uncomfortable. He was thinking that of course his special, pampered purebred dogs are nothing like the dirty wild mongrels that prowl the streets, getting into all sorts of mischief - stealing food, knocking over trashcans, fighting, sneaking into chicken coops to fill their bellies, and spreading parasites like fleas and mites around the city.

He answered, "Some dogs are spared – the purebred dogs of my own palace."

The dog leader bravely reasoned, "Sire, you were saying that you had ordered the slaughter of ALL dogs wherever they are found, because dogs had chewed the leather of your carriage. But now you say that the purebred dogs of your own palace are an exception; they aren't put to death. Therefore, you are following the Four Evils: prejudice, dislike, ignorance, and fear. Such thinking is wrong; it is not how a king should think."



He continued, "Kings in difficult situations should be as fair and unbiased as the two pans of a scale when balanced – one should not be lower than the other. But in this instance, since the royal dogs go totally free while the poor street dogs are killed, this is not the doom of all dogs alike, but only the slaughter of the poor dogs."

The king and his advisors and servants remained silent, totally in awe of this amazing dog of the streets who had incredible wisdom. The great dog leader lifted up his sweet, calm voice and continued,

"Sire, it is not justice that you are performing. The purebred dogs raised in the royal palace, so strong and beautiful – it is not these, but only we who are doomed to die. This is not punishment for all alike; it is slaughter of the poor."

After listening to the wise dog's words, the king said, "Do you in your wisdom know who it actually was that chewed the leather of my carriage?"

The dog leader said, "Yes, sire."

"Who was it?" the king asked.

The dog leader answered, "The purebred dogs that live in your own palace."

The king, doubting that could be true, asked, "How can it be shown that it was they who chewed the leather?"

The dog leader said bravely, "I will prove it to you."

"Do so, wise one," the king said.

The dog leader responded, "Then bring your dogs here, and have a little buttermilk and kusa-grass brought in."



The king told his servants to carry out the dog leader's instructions. The elegant purebred dogs paraded in and stood obediently in front of the king.

Then said the dog leader, "Let this grass be mashed up in the buttermilk, and make the dogs drink it."

Bowls containing buttermilk and grass were set in front of each dog. The king said something to the dogs, and they obediently lapped the buttermilk and chewed and swallowed the grass.



Soon, one of the dogs gagged and vomited. One after the other, the dogs started coughing and retching, and eventually each vomited up

what was in his stomach. And there was the proof! In front of each dog in a puddle of vomit were bits of leather!

The king couldn't help but feel full of joy at the wisdom of the great leader of dogs. He cried out, "This is like the judgment of a perfect Buddha himself!"

He offered the dog leader his own royal white umbrella to show his great respect to the dog with amazing wisdom.

The dog leader wanted to convey more teachings to the king. He reminded the king to be always fair and consistent, and treat people with equal-mindedness, without having favorites or prejudices. He taught the king other virtues, including kindness and generosity to all, and the Five Precepts: to avoid killing, stealing, misconduct, lying and drunkenness, intoxication. He respectfully gave the royal umbrella back to the king.

Hearing these words, the king commanded that the lives of all creatures should be safe from harm. He ordered that all dogs should have a constant supply of food like what he himself ate. He was inspired to be generous to those in need and do other good deeds for the rest of his life.

QUESTIONS:

1. What was the king so attached to, that he became enraged when they were ruined? (the new leather harnesses)
2. Why did the servants tell the king that dogs came through the sewer and chewed the harnesses? (the servants had to blame some animal for chewing the harnesses, so they blamed the street dogs)
3. Why didn't the servants or the king think that the palace dogs chewed the harnesses? (they didn't think the palace dogs would do that)
4. What did the dog leader do to avoid being killed while he walked to the palace? (he thought of lovingkindness and Buddhist virtues, the Ten Perfections, and silently commanded people not to harm him)
5. Why did the dog leader tell the king to give the palace dogs buttermilk and grass? (so they would vomit out the leather, proving that they chewed it)

6. In what way was the king unfair? (he blamed and punished the street dogs for something they didn't do, but didn't punish the palace dogs)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Prejudice:

Why was the king so angry when the harnesses were ruined?

Because he was very attached to them, he couldn't stand to lose them.

He was so angry and revengeful that he wasn't thinking clearly and carefully, and just believed what the servants said without asking questions or investigating the situation.

And he had very negative thoughts about street dogs.

He imagined them as filthy, destructive and messy, that they get into mischief to fill their bellies.

But he imagined his purebred dogs to be clean and respectful, that they wouldn't be destructive.

That was a prejudice in his mind.

Prejudice means pre-judging, judging someone negatively before you know them. It means assuming something negative about a group of people; that they are not as good, not as important, not as worthy as others.

When you think of prejudice, what types of prejudice come to mind?

We hear often about racial prejudice – treating someone differently because of their race or skin color.

And we hear about prejudice against national origin or ethnic group – treating someone differently because of the country they were born in or where their parents are from.

Some people have prejudice against people of certain religions, or against people who have a disability, or other “minority” groups.

There are laws that help prevent these types of prejudice, but do these laws prevent everyone from having prejudice?

No, because they don't eliminate the root of the problem, which is in peoples' minds: the negative judgments and assumptions they make about a person based on something that is different about them – their race, color, religion, language, etc.

Why do people have prejudices? Why do they pre-judge others?

Often, it's because they hear a friend, family member or someone on social media talk negatively about people who are different in some way.

For example, we hear someone say that people from a certain place are violent, so we start to believe that people from that place are violent.

Another way that prejudice arises is when we see a person who is different from us in some way behave badly and we generalize - we think that others who are similar to him also behave badly.

For example, we see someone from a certain country stealing something, and we start to think that people from that country steal from others.

Or if we see a certain breed of dog bite someone, we think all dogs of that breed are likely to bite.

Some people have prejudices because they feel badly about themselves in some way and they try to feel better by looking down on or blaming certain other types of people as being the “bad guys” or the cause of problems.

A very common reason why we might have prejudices is that we have a fear of the unknown, we tend to dislike that which is unfamiliar or strange to us, we don't like to approach people who are very different from us.

We think that those who are different might not agree with us, might not understand our feelings, or might not enjoy what we like.

And we tend to be friendly with others who are similar to us – who have the same interests, tastes and background. We know we can get along well with others who understand us, who are just like us.

So we might ignore or avoid people who are different.

Think about who you choose as friends. Are any of your friends of a different race, color, religion, do any speak a different language, or do they have a disability, or does their family not have as much money as yours?

Think about any other kids in your school who are different from you.

How are they different? Are you friendly with them? Why or why not?

If you avoid them, they may feel rejected, unwanted, uncared for.

We cannot have lovingkindness if we have fear, prejudice or dislike of what is different.

Of course, when someone misbehaves, for example being disrespectful or hurtful to others, we should stay away from him.

Someone may behave a little differently because they have a disability.

Instead of staying away, try to learn about their disability and be friendly.

Remember, differences among people make the world interesting and

beautiful, just like different types of flowers make a garden interesting and beautiful.