

Lesson 2 – COMPASSION - Prince Siddhartha's Childhood

King Suddhōdana, remembering the astrologers' prediction that Siddhartha would be either a king of the world or an enlightened holy man, wanted to be sure that when he became old, his son would rule the kingdom. Therefore, he was determined to make his son become a great king rather than a holy man. He gave his son wonderful luxuries and entertainment so that he would love the royal lifestyle and want to be a king in the future.

So, the young Prince Siddhartha had the best of everything. He had the best food, the best expensive clothing, and three palaces of his own - one to stay in during winter, one for summer, and one for the rainy season. During the rainy season, when he mostly stayed inside, he was entertained by talented musicians, singers and dancers.

Three ponds were made for him, one with blue lilies, one with white lilies and one with red lilies. There were 32 ladies to take care of the young prince, and someone always held a white umbrella over him to protect him from heat, cold wind, drizzle and dust. He enjoyed playing with his cousins and friends in his palaces and in the surrounding gardens and ponds.

One day, when Prince Siddhartha was a very young boy, King Suddhōdana brought him, along with some of the ladies who were his caretakers, to a plowing festival. There the farmers with their best, strongest oxen participated in a competition to plow a field, in which the oxen pulled heavy plows that cut into the soil, loosening it so the field could be planted with seeds for food.

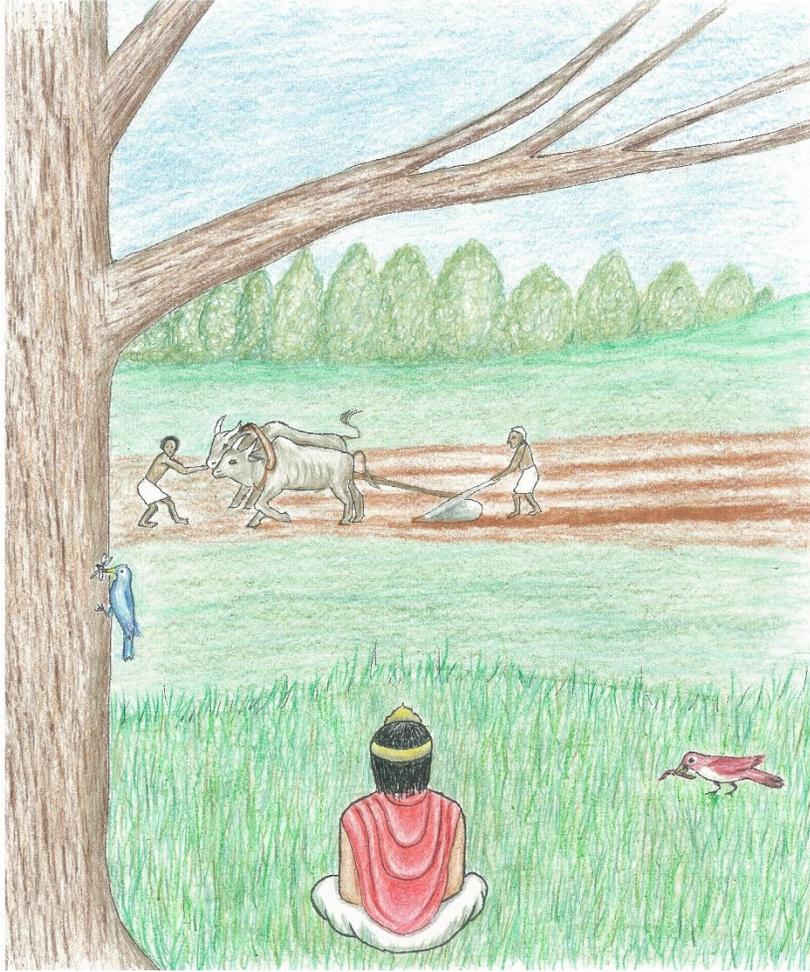
The king went to observe up close the farmers plowing the fields with their oxen, and the ladies stayed with the young prince. They spread a soft rug on the ground for little Siddhartha to sit on.

After a while, they decided to go closer and join the crowd to see the events at the festival for just a few moments. They didn't want the precious little prince to be crowded by all the people, so they left him peacefully sitting on the rug.

As he sat there, Prince Siddhartha watched the farmers plowing the fields. It was a hot day, and the men were working very hard to make the oxen walk as fast as possible as they pulled the heavy plow behind them, and to guide the plow in a straight line. The farmers were sweating in the hot sun, their faces tense with the effort. He saw the oxen straining their muscles to pull the plows faster through the hard soil. They all looked so uncomfortable and stressed!

Then he noticed birds catching worms and insects in their beaks and eating them. The poor worms and insects were killed and gobbled up by the hungry birds.

Prince Siddhartha not only saw, but he also deeply felt, the suffering - the discomfort and misery - of the men, the oxen, the worms and the insects.



Understanding their suffering and wishing he could relieve them of their suffering, he felt great compassion for them.

He went to sit in the shade under a rose-apple tree, and as he sat cross legged, very still with his eyes closed, he began to meditate. He had not been taught to meditate, had never seen anyone meditating, and had never even heard of meditation. But his mind became very calm, still, focused and clear. As he meditated, he felt a very deep peace and happiness.

Meanwhile, his caretakers were enjoying the festival so much that they didn't go back to check on little Siddhartha until quite a bit of time had passed. They had forgotten about their precious little prince! When they suddenly remembered him, they rushed back to where they had left him. Prince Siddhartha wasn't there!

They found him sitting under the rose-apple tree nearby. They and King Suddhōdana saw the little prince meditating. Seeing his son meditating, the king was very concerned, remembering what the astrologers had said, that if he does not choose to have a family life, he will be an enlightened holy man. The king was even more determined to give little Siddhartha everything he could and to train him to be a great king.

When Prince Siddhartha was eight years old, he became the student of the best and wisest teacher in the kingdom. He learned math, science, languages, history, geography, archery, and wrestling. He was also taught about military techniques and war, which was necessary for a future king.

Siddhartha was a very intelligent student, and was very strong, respectful and kind to all. Although he already had read many books before he started school and had a lot of knowledge for a young boy, he was humble and didn't show off to the other students.

Questions:

1. Why was Prince Siddhartha given the best of everything? (his father wanted him to enjoy the royal lifestyle so he will become a king)
2. What did Prince Siddhartha see that was similar about the farmers, oxen, worms and insects? (they were suffering)
3. What did he feel when he saw the men, the oxen and the insects? (compassion)
4. What did he do after he felt compassion? (he meditated)
5. Had he been taught to meditate? (no)
6. Why was the king concerned when he saw his son meditating? (he wanted his son to be a king and not a holy man)

What the Buddha said:

“Sabbe sattā, sabbe pānā, sabbe bhūtā ca kevalā, sabbe bhadraṇi passantu, mā kiñci pāpam āgamā.”

**“May all beings, all breathing things, all who have taken birth,
May all have what is good; may none of them suffer from evil.”**

Khandhaparitta

Dharma Discussion – Compassion:

Prince Siddhartha hadn't seen anyone really suffering at home in the palace with his family and the employees and servants.

But at the festival, he saw real suffering - the men and oxen sweating as they worked so hard in the hot sun, and the worms and insects being eaten by the birds.

We often talk about suffering in Buddhism. What do we mean by suffering? In Buddhism, suffering means any kind of unpleasantness – for example, unhappiness, pain, discomfort, worry, stress, disappointment, loss, fear, grief, embarrassment, loneliness, feeling left out, ignored, jealous, frustrated, or guilty.

Everyone feels at least some unpleasantness, some suffering, every day.

How do you feel when you see someone who is suffering, for example, someone in pain or someone who is crying?

We might be curious and wonder what happened, or who hurt them.

We might feel sympathy – feeling sorry for them.

Or we might care more than that. We might feel empathy – sadness and real concern for them

Or, caring even more, we may feel compassion, which means we understand their suffering and really want to help them; we wish to do something to relieve their suffering.

Compassion means that we truly care about them and want them to feel better.

Compassion is a feeling of kindness and love in response to others' suffering.

Compassion is one of the most important teachings of the Buddha.

Why is it so important? It takes our minds away from our self to care about others.

The more we care about others, the more we feel connected to others.

Also, the more we care about others, the less selfish and egoistic we become.

We become more kind, more helpful, and more loving, and less agitated by our own worries, fears, and desires.

Can you remember a time when you felt compassion?

Maybe you felt compassion for a family member, friend, pet, or other animal when you saw them in pain or distress.

Did you try to help them feel better? Did you ask what you can do to help?

Often, there isn't much we can do to help. For example, little Siddhartha couldn't help the farmers, oxen, insects or worms.

But we can wish that they feel better, perhaps while chanting or saying a prayer.

The Buddha encourages us to have compassion for all beings.

That means to have compassion even for people we don't like, people who hurt others, people who do terrible things.

Why? Because they need help to learn to be kind.

And because they will suffer the painful results of each and every bad action they do, according to the law of karma.

Karma means cause and effect: for each good act that you do, you get a good, pleasant result, and for each bad act that you do, you get a bad, unpleasant result.

The result doesn't happen immediately, but at some time in the future, maybe in a future life.

When we have compassion for someone, we wish they learn to be kind and then not have to suffer so much.

When we think like this, then we don't hate them; instead, we hate what they do, we hate their behavior, but wish that they become a better person.

So, compassion helps us overcome hatred.

Sometimes, when we're not feeling good about ourselves, it's difficult to feel compassion for others. We need relief from our own suffering, we're trying to relieve our own pain, so we don't think about helping others. But if we think about the suffering of others, and especially if we make efforts to help relieve the suffering of others, we forget about our own suffering for at least a little while. For example, if you are feeling miserable about something, and you see someone who is upset and you talk kindly to them, then you both feel better.

Activity – Matching;

Draw a line from the word in the left column to the correct description in the right column:

humble	predicted that Siddhartha would be a king or enlightened
meditation	to understand someone's suffering and wish to relieve it
luxuries	the king, Prince Siddhartha's father
rose apple tree	not arrogant, not showing off
compassion	discomfort, disappointment, unhappiness, stress
suffering	to calm and focus the mind
Suddhōdana	where Siddhartha was found meditating
astrologers	good actions give good results, bad actions give bad results
karma	what the king gave Siddhartha