

NEW CLOTHES (Puppharatta Jataka)

In one of the many past lives of the Buddha, he was a spirit who observed a poor man and his wife who lived in a village in India.



The people of the village were preparing for a special festival at night called the Kattika.

They decorated the whole village with garlands of flowers and leaves, and flags.

Everything looked so colorful and cheerful. Each house had a different special colorful decoration on the door, on the door mat, and hanging from the roof. People made colorful designs with chalk along the streets and in front of their homes.

The villagers were getting out their newest clothes to iron so they could wear it freshly pressed for the celebration. The women chose their most colorful and fancy saris, the clothes women wear in India. The wealthy men bought their wives new saris to wear for the festival. Each married man in the village looked forward to walking around that special night with his beautiful wife clinging to his arm, and each married woman looked forward to wearing her favorite sari and looking her best, so her husband would be proud to walk with her.

The poor man had only a few thick cotton homemade sarongs to wear, and every day he would wrap one around his waist to wear for the day. He

sometimes put on a shawl when the weather was cool. He had washed and ironed his sarongs so many times that they had hundreds of fold-lines in them. He had no special clothes to wear for the celebration. And he had no money to buy any special clothes.

His wife knew this, but she wanted to wear something special to the festival, like the other ladies. She wanted to walk proudly in a very colorful sari, so others would see that she looks beautiful. She thought about her favorite colors, yellow and red. She knew she couldn't get a new sari, but she had an idea. She had some cloths that she could color with dye to make into a sari and shawl. They would look like brand-new clothes.

She said, "My dear, I want a yellow and red sari and shawl to wear, as I walk around at the festival with my arm around you. I can color some cloths with safflower dye to make them a beautiful red and yellow."



Her husband said, "How are poor people like us to get safflowers? Just put on a nice clean sari and we can enjoy the festival."

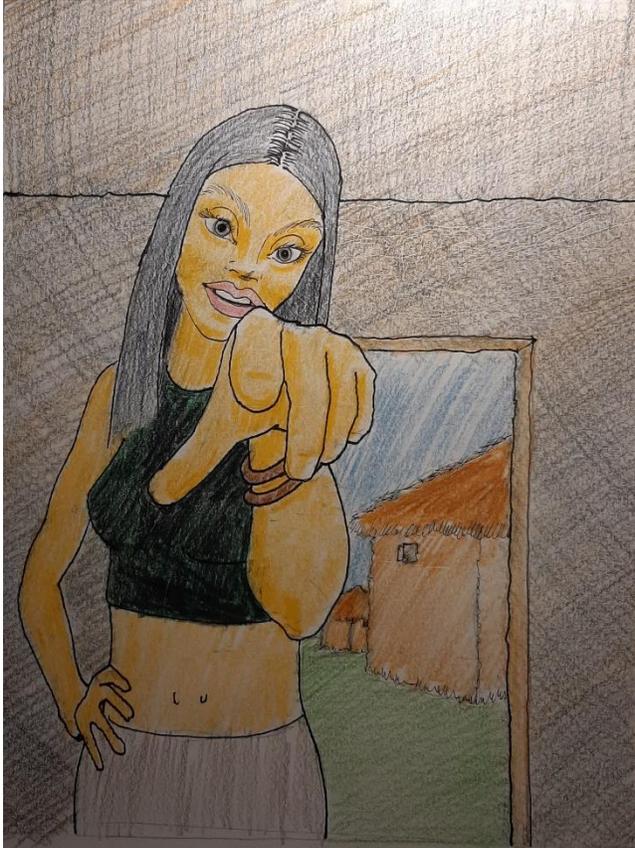
His wife pouted, and looked very disappointed.

She said, "If I can't have them dyed with safflowers, then I don't want to go at all."

She looked like she was going to cry. She thought about all the other ladies in the village smiling and happy with their colorful fresh saris. She thought about how embarrassed she would feel wearing one of her regular old saris; nothing special, nothing new.

She put her hands over her face and with her voice full of misery she said, “Why don’t you just get some other woman to go to the festival with you.”

Her husband replied, “Why are you tormenting me like that? How in the world am I going to get you safflowers?”



The wife cried out, “Where there’s a will there’s a way! Aren’t there safflowers growing in the king’s garden?”

The husband was shocked. She was suggesting that he go and steal from the king’s garden!

He said, “Look, dear. There are guards protecting the garden. Going into the king’s garden is like ... is like ... going into a pool haunted by an ogre! You can’t just go in there, with the big fence around it and those strong guards watching. They’ll kill you in a moment if you try to climb the fence and walk into the king’s garden. Give up this desire of

yours for a fancy safflower-colored sari. Just be content with what you have.”

His wife replied, “But when it’s night-time and dark, they can’t see you. What could stop you from going in at night and doing what you want when no one can see?”

The husband said, “Don’t you think the guards know that people would only try to sneak in at night? They can see by the light of the moon, and they can hear sounds.”

The wife didn’t want to hear that. She insisted, “Oh come on, you can just quickly jump the fence and they can’t hear footsteps in the grass.”

The husband explained, "It's not easy to climb that tall fence. I would have to break it. Then surely the guards would hear it and kill me on the spot, or haul me away to be killed."

The wife cried, "Oh you're just afraid! There are only a few guards and they're not going to see you at night! And what's the problem with taking just a few flowers? It's not that serious!"

The husband said sternly, "It's stealing. I don't steal. I've always been an honest man."



His wife was miserable. She imagined she would be the only woman without a nice colorful sari. She would be the ugliest of them all, with a plain old sari that she wears all the time to work in the field. Everyone would look at her like she is poor and her husband doesn't give her nice things. She would feel so unimportant, so plain and dull, so uncared for. How could she be content with what she has? All she wanted was a few flowers to color a sari. What was so wrong with wanting that?

With tears in her eyes, she said softly, "Just a few flowers. That's all I want. Can't you just for once do something special for me? Don't you want me to look nice at the festival?"

Her husband just looked down at the ground.

She continued, "Don't you want to walk proudly with me, with my arm around you, like all the other men are walking with their wives?"

The husband tried not to give in to her pleading. Still looking at the ground, he said, "Darling, no. It's not right to break in and steal. It's not good to take something that is not given to you."

She pleaded, "Don't you want people to see that you care about me? Don't you love me?"

He looked up at her for a moment. He said weakly, "If that's what you want, then I must get it for you."

They went to bed, and after laying in the dark for a while, he got up. He grabbed his axe just in case he might need it, and left the house. He walked alone in the dark, thinking of how he would just quickly get through the fence, grab some safflowers, get back home, and get back to bed and sleep.

He walked until he saw the corner of the king's garden. He looked at the high fence. He couldn't possibly jump over it. There was only one way to get in. He would have to break a couple of boards in the fence to make a hole, and climb through.



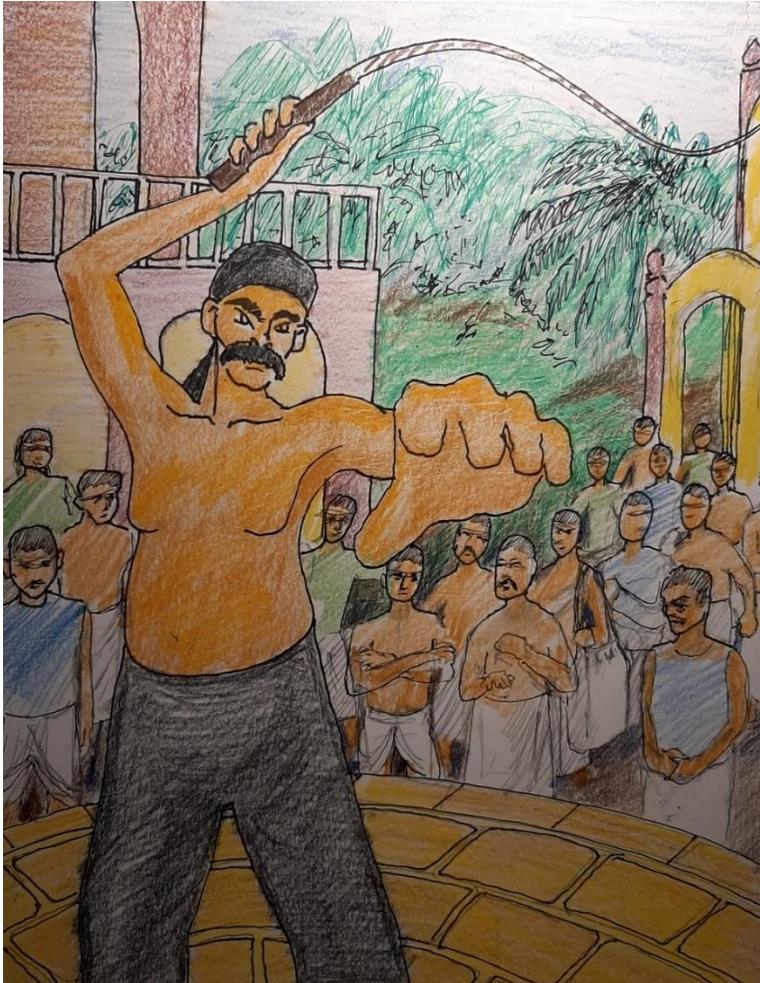
He carefully stuck the head of the axe between two of the fence boards and pulled. One of the boards started to move and then CRACK! It made a loud noise in the night as the wood of the fence split.

His heart was racing, his mouth went dry, and he panicked. He shoved his arm through the fence and grabbed some flowers, and then he ran toward his home as fast as he could.

Just then he heard footsteps, running, coming closer. He panicked again, and froze. He felt like his heart had jumped up into his throat, choking him.

The footsteps came closer, and he heard the guard shout. Now another guard was running toward him too.

The guards caught him and tied his hands together, and took him to a small shed to wait until morning for the king to tell what punishment he would get. The next day, the king ordered his punishment.



As he was whipped on his bare back with big long thorny sticks, knowing that neither he nor his wife could go to the festival, he could only think:

“Oh my wife, I shall miss going to the festival with you dressed in yellow and red with your arm around me.”

Questions (answers in parentheses):

1. What did the wife want to have for the festival? (a colorful sari)
2. What did the wife want to do with the safflowers? (color some cloths to make a red and yellow sari and shawl)

3. Where did she suggest her husband could get the safflowers? (the king's garden)
4. Why didn't her husband want to get the safflowers from the king's garden? (it was stealing, and he might get caught by the guards and killed)
5. How did she feel when at first he didn't want to steal the safflowers? (miserable)
6. Did the wife seem worried about her husband's safety? (no)

What the Buddha said:

"Contentment is the greatest wealth." - Dhammapada 204.

"Full of craving, people run around like a trapped rabbit. Stuck by their craving, they come to suffering again and again for a long time."

- Dhammapada 342

Dharma Discussion - Craving:

When the wife thought about the festival, what was she worried about?

What clothes she would wear,

being embarrassed wearing old clothes, and

what others would think of her, wearing old clothes.

Although she was poor, she desperately wanted colorful beautiful clothes.

She had a good idea to create some colorful clothes by herself,

but she would need her husband to steal something for her (safflowers).

Her desire to have new clothes was so strong that she didn't care that her husband would have to steal.

We often desire things because we see what others have, and we want to have it too – a new toy, new videogame, stylish clothes.

When the desire is so strong that we forget about other things that are important, we call it "craving."

For example, have you ever wanted to eat a favorite food so much that you would sneak some of it when no one is looking?

Did you ever grab something from someone else because you wanted it so much, although you knew they would be angry with you for grabbing it?
Have you ever gotten in trouble for stealing, or taking something you wanted that wasn't yours?
Have you ever forgotten to do homework because you had so much desire to be with a friend or play videogames?

We craved for something so much we didn't think much about what problems it would cause later.

Like the wife in the story who craved for having new clothes so much that she didn't think much about whether her husband would get in trouble.

Or like a person who is shopping and wants to buy something so much she doesn't think about the fact that she doesn't have the money for it, and later she can't pay the bills.

Or like an alcoholic who craves alcohol and doesn't think about what will happen if he drinks too much.

Craving leads to trouble!

When you desire something too much, you're so focused on what you want that you become careless.

You don't think about what bad results might happen.

It may be unsafe, it may hurt someone else, or it may end up hurting you.

Although we think that trying to get what we want will make us happy, actually, craving makes us miserable because we see what we want and if we can't get it right away, we feel frustrated until we get it.

If we can't get it, or if we lose it, we get angry.

If others have it, we feel jealous.

So the Buddha taught us not to crave things, not to have too many desires.

If we are content with what we have, then we feel more peaceful.

Being peaceful is a great accomplishment, especially in today's world where so many people have anxiety, depression and other problems.

Activity to reinforce the lesson:

Bean bag toss: Throw a bean bag back and forth to someone else in the room. Each time a person catches the bean bag and before he tosses it to another person, he must call out one of his favorite things – favorite food, game, hobby, toy, type/brand of clothing, activity, place to go, etc. This helps us be aware of our desires – and possible sources of craving.