



THE ARROGANCE OF KASSAPA

Lesson 11- HUMILITY

Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.

Question to think about before the story: Did you ever think, “I’m better than he (she) is”?

Story: Yasa and the Kassapas

An extremely wealthy young man named Yasa was listening to his lady musicians one evening in his palace, and he fell asleep. When he awoke, he saw them asleep with their instruments in their hands. One had untidy hair, one was drooling and others were mumbling in their sleep, and they looked so disgusting, like corpses, that Yasa exclaimed, “This is horrible,” and left his palace. The doors and gates were opened by unseen celestial beings who knew what was going to happen and wanted to make sure he would become a monk. He walked to the Deer Park, where the Buddha saw him. Yasa said, “It is horrible.” The Buddha said, “This is not horrible. Come Yasa, sit down. I will teach you the Dharma.” Yasa went to the Buddha and bowed, and the Buddha taught him. The Buddha saw that Yasa’s mind was ready, and taught him the Four Noble Truths. Yasa understood fully, that everything that arises must end.

When Yasa’s mother could not find him, his father followed his son’s footprints and went to the Deer Park. The Buddha made Yasa invisible, and the father asked whether the Buddha had seen his son. The Buddha told him, “Sit down, and maybe while you are sitting here you will see Yasa sitting here too. The Buddha began teaching Dharma to Yasa’s father, who then fully understood the Dharma, and humbly took refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha: “Buddham Saranam Gacchāmi, Dhammam Saranam Gacchāmi, Sangham Saranam Gacchāmi.” He was the first person to take refuge in the Triple Gem. Then he saw his son Yasa sitting there, and said, “Yasa, your mother is sad and upset. Go to your mother.” The Buddha said, “If your son has seen the Dharma as you have, would he be able to go back to the palace life? That is what Yasa has done; he cannot go back to what he has left behind and enjoy the home life.” The father said, “It is a great gain for Yasa that he has given up clinging and purified his heart. Please accept today’s meal from me, with Yasa as your attendant monk.”

Yasa then asked to be ordained, and the Buddha ordained him simply as he did the five ascetics. When the Buddha and Yasa went to his parents’ house for lunch, Yasa’s family and friends heard and fully understood the Dharma. The men asked to become ordained, and became Buddhist monks and Arahants. Now there were a total of 60 Arahants, and the Buddha told them, “Go and wander for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, and teach the Dharma. There are some who have only a little ignorance who would be lost if they don’t hear the Dharma, and they will understand it.” He told them to ordain men who wish to be ordained by having their hair and beard shaved off, putting on a robe like Buddha’s robe, bowing to the Arahant and taking refuge in the Triple Gem.

The Buddha went to Uravela where three ascetics who were brothers were living, all named Kassapa, with a total of 1000 students, all with long matted hair. The Buddha asked one of the three, "Kassapa, if you don't mind, I would like to spend one night in your fire chamber." Kassapa said, "I don't mind, but there is a savage royal naga there with supernatural powers. He is terribly poisonous and can kill you." A naga is a celestial being in the form of a snake. The Buddha said, "Maybe he won't destroy me, so allow me to stay there," and he went to the fire chamber and sat meditating. The naga was angry seeing him there and produced smoke, blowing it at him, and then fire. The Buddha produced smoke, and then fire, too, but did not injure the naga.

In the morning, the Buddha put the naga in his bowl and showed it to Kassapa, who thought, "The great monk is very mighty and powerful. But he is not an arahant like me." During the night, four powerful devas, lighting up the forest, went to visit the Buddha and sat like pillars of fire in four corners around him. Kassapa saw it and he thought again, "The great monk is very mighty and powerful. But he is not an arahant like me." The next two nights, Sakka, the King of the Devas, and Brahma Sahampati came to the Buddha, and Kassapa saw them, and again he thought, "The great monk is very mighty and powerful. But he is not an arahant like me." Then when Kassapa had a huge crowd coming for a fire ceremony, he thought, "If the Great Monk does some miracle that these people see, he will become famous and I will not be so famous. If only the Great Monk were not to come tomorrow." The Buddha heard his thoughts and stayed away. Then next day when Kassapa asked him why he didn't come, and the Buddha told him, he again thought, "The great monk is very mighty and powerful. But he is not an arahant like me." The Buddha needed to wash a rag, and Sakka came and scooped out a pond for it to be washed and set down a large stone to scrub it with, and a deva living in a tree bent a branch for him to hang the rag to dry. The next morning, Kassapa saw the pond, stone and bent branch, and asked the Buddha about it, and the Buddha told him, and again Kassapa thought, "The great monk is very mighty and powerful. But he is not an arahant like me." One day, the monks with matted hair could not split the logs they needed for their fires. They thought it was so strange that it must be the Buddha's miraculous powers. The Buddha asked Kassapa, "Should the logs be split?" and when Kassapa answered yes, five hundred logs split instantly. Many more miraculous incidents happened, including a huge rainstorm and flood which the Buddha held back all around him so he did not get wet, and Buddha rising up in the air and into a boat. Seeing these miracles, Kassapa had the same thought.

Finally the Buddha thought, "He will go on forever thinking like this. Suppose I give him a shock." So he said, "Kassapa, you are not an arahant nor are you on the way to becoming one. You are not doing anything to become an arahant." Kassapa bowed with his head at the Buddha's feet and asked to be ordained. Thereafter, the Buddha ordained him, his two brothers and their thousand students, who all shaved their heads and became his students.

Questions after the story:

1. What kind of lifestyle did Yasa have before he met the Buddha?
2. How did Yasa's father feel about Yasa becoming a monk?
3. What kind of lifestyle did the Kassapas have before they met the Buddha?
4. What was in Kassapa's fire chamber?
5. What did Kassapa think when the Buddha showed him the naga in the bowl?
6. Why would Kassapa think that he was an arahant, greater than the Buddha?
7. What made Kassapa change his mind?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

**“Sujīvam ahirikena kākasūrena dhamṣinā,
pakkhandinā pagabbhena saṅkilitṭhena jīvitam.”**

“Easy is life for the shameless one who is as impudent as a crow, is backbiting and forward, arrogant and corrupt.” Dhammapada 244 (18:10)

Application of the moral(s) in the story to our daily lives:

Kassapa thought he was an arahant because he had lived for so long as an ascetic in the forest. But he could not recognize the Buddha's greatness, even though he saw the Buddha's powers. Kassapa did not want to notice the greatness of others because of his pride in his own accomplishment, his arrogance, his conceit; he thought he was better than everyone else. When did he start having humility? He did not have humility until the Buddha showed him many powers and finally told him directly that he was not an arahant. Kassapa is an example of too much pride, or arrogance. Yasa and his father were very wealthy and successful – did they become arrogant? No, they were very humble when they met the Buddha. They are an example of **humility**, not letting success cause arrogance.

What if we have a talent, or we are good at doing something, shouldn't we be proud of ourselves? We notice when we are good at something, that we got a better score, that we are faster, more skilled, or know more than someone else. We get attention and rewards when we do something well, which makes us happy. The world is full of competition, where we get rewarded when we do better than others. The problem arises when we focus too much on comparing ourselves to others, when we often try to prove that we are better than someone else, when we show off, when we think we know everything better, or when we think that we are a better person than the other. These feelings lead to being blinded by pride like Kassapa so that we don't want to notice or admit the success of others. For example, if someone wins, we think he cheated, that others helped him or the score was unfair. Or, if we see someone getting attention for doing something well, we try to find something bad about the person. These feelings also lead to anger, jealousy and hatred. Then we may say bad things about them (called “backbiting”), insult them or act arrogantly toward them. We may act “impudent as a crow,” as if we are great and they are not, by ignoring them or being disrespectful. Another problem is, if we think we know everything better than others, we can't learn from others.

If we have a talent, we do well at something, or we have something special, how can we avoid becoming arrogant? By developing humility, remembering that

everyone has their own talents and skills, that everyone experiences successes and failures in life, that we have good days and bad days, that we are far from perfect, and that other people have helped us be successful. We can have good thoughts like: “I know about this, but there are many things I don’t know,” “I may be talented in this, but everyone has their own talents,” “I may be intelligent, but I have much more to learn,” “I feel thankful that my parents helped me,” “I may have this right now, but I won’t have it forever. Nothing is permanent.” It is also better to compare ourselves with the way we were before than to compare ourselves with others. For example, it is better to think that we have improved rather than thinking that we did better than someone else.

Activity to reinforce the lesson: Attitude Test - Students consider whether the answers describe how they might think or act, then circle the answer that is the most noble way to think. Teacher then discusses different answers, explaining why one is humble and how other answers are, or could be, arrogant/competitive/falsely humble, or neutral.

1. When I get a toy that I really like, I:
 - (a) show it to my friends so they can see it
 - (b) show it to my friends so they can share it
 - (c) share it and remember that it will not always keep me happy

2. When I get an excellent score on a difficult test, I:
 - (a) somehow let other students know my score
 - (b) think about how I have improved my study habits
 - (c) find out what other students’ scores were

3. When I get an award, I:
 - (a) think about all the people who helped me and taught me
 - (b) want to tell my friends about it
 - (c) know I deserved it

4. When I win or do well in a competition, I:
 - (a) look forward to the next competition and want to win that, too
 - (b) remember that everyone has different talents, we all win some and lose some
 - (c) pretend it was no big deal

5. When I know I am good at doing something, I:
 - (a) keep practicing it so I can improve
 - (b) want to teach it to others
 - (c) am thankful to those who helped me learn and I want to teach it to others

6. When others admire me and like my company, I:
 - (a) think that I am more popular than someone I know
 - (b) try to become more popular
 - (c) know that popularity is just temporary, not as important as good character

Closing chant: Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā
May all beings have happy minds!