

TWO BEAUTIFUL FISH AND A TURTLE (Gangeyya Jataka)



There was once a tree spirit who lived on the bank of the famous River Ganga in India, also called the Ganges river.



One day he was relaxing near the area where the River Ganga and the River Yamuna join together. As he peered down into the water from where he was sitting on the branch of a tree, he saw a beautiful fish swimming near the shore of the Ganga river.



The fish had strikingly beautiful scales, glittering in light blue with long golden stripes on the top half and golden dots on the bottom half of its body, and a long gold striped fin all along its back and one all along its belly. It had a delicate pointy mouth, not like the

large mouth that typical fish have, and pearly white spots on its face. The fish glided gracefully and effortlessly through the water as if it didn't have any worry in the world. It looked like the royal jewel of the River Ganga.

Then the tree spirit noticed a small flash of light in the Yamuna river. It was another fish, swimming close to the surface.



It was also stunningly beautiful, with the most dazzling yellow scales all over its strong body, and perfectly white fins. It had a wide-eyed innocent look. Its fins waved gently around in the current as it glided around slowly and gracefully with confidence. It seemed to be the

royal jewel of the River Yamuna.

The two fish were each swimming downstream toward the area where the two rivers joined together. The tree spirit wondered what would happen if the two fish met each other. They were swimming toward each other, and

since they were the brightest, most colorful things in the water, they each noticed the other.



The blue River Ganga fish blurted out to the other what it was thinking,

“I am beautiful! And so are you.”

The yellow River Yamuna fish also spoke what was in its mind.

“Indeed. It’s true that we are each beautiful. But my brilliant color is like the sun itself,

lighting up the river. My perfectly white fins are like the purest snow. Every being that sees me can’t help but admire me. Your beauty is . . . well, it’s different.”

The blue River Ganga fish said, “My beauty is unique, like no other. I always attract attention of other fish with my brilliant blue scales and golden markings, yet I am cleverly designed to blend in with the blue water, bubbles, and long river grasses so that predators don’t notice me.”

Each fish was very proud of its appearance, and felt that it was the most beautiful being in the river in which it lived. But now they were together in one river. There was a feeling of competition – who was the most beautiful one in the river now? Each fish worried that the other would attract more attention, and more admiration. Each fish worried that it would feel left out, ignored, or even criticized by others now that there was another spectacular-looking fish in the river. Would others prefer the slim look or the strong look? Would they be more attracted to brilliant color or to interesting design? What type of mouth and eyes were cuter?

Each fish argued that its characteristics were more attractive and popular than those of the other fish.



Then the yellow River Yamuna fish saw that someone was listening to them. It was a turtle, sunning itself on a rock near the edge of the river.

The blue River Ganga fish noticed the turtle too, called out to him, and said, “You can decide whether we are beautiful or not!”

They swam up near the turtle so he could see them easily. Then they swam slowly around so he could see all sides of each of them.

The yellow River Yamuna fish said, “Which of us is more beautiful, friend turtle, the Ganga fish or me, the Yamuna fish?”

The turtle answered slowly, “The River Ganga fish is beautiful, and the River Yamuna fish is beautiful. But I am more beautiful than you both.”

His answer shocked both of the fish. They thought, “How can he possibly say that? Turtles look clumsy and slow, with no colorful scales, no graceful fins. They just aren’t attractive. No one would say that an ugly old turtle looks good. And he thinks he looks better than ME? Ridiculous!”

The turtle explained,

“The fish of the River Yamuna are beautiful, and the fish of the River Ganga are beautiful. But a four-footed creature with a long neck like mine and a round, spread-out body outshines all of them.”

When the fish heard this, one of them scoffed, “Ah, you jokester Turtle! You didn’t answer our question. But you answer another question that we didn’t ask.”

The other fish said, “We ask him this, and he answers that. What a strange reply! With his own mouth, he praises himself.”

The two fish swam away, disappointed that he wouldn’t answer their question, and no longer confident that they were the most beautiful fish in the river.



The tree spirit thought,

“For some moments they are so proud of their beauty, and in the next moment they are upset that their beauty isn’t good enough! Attachment to outer beauty causes trouble! Poor things, they haven’t developed inner beauty. They only see the mistakes of others - like the turtle bragging – but don’t see their own!”

QUESTIONS (answers in parentheses):

1. When the fish met each other, what was the first thing that came to their minds? (that they both looked beautiful)
2. Did they think they were equally beautiful? (no, each thought it looked better than the other)
3. Who did the turtle think was the most beautiful? (himself)

4. What wrongdoing did the fish notice that the turtle did, but not notice that they did themselves? (brag)
5. What do you think “outer beauty” means? (how we look on the outside – for example, our face, hair, body, clothes, makeup, shoes)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Vanity and beauty:

The first thing that came to the fishes’ minds was how they look. They were extremely proud of their beauty. It was most important to them. So when they saw another who also looked beautiful, they felt competitive.

Most of us care about how we look – we like to look good; we want to be confident, wear nice clothes, and not look messy or too unusual. But thinking too much about how we look - always comparing how we look with others and feeling upset when someone comes along who we think looks better than us or has better clothes than us - becomes a problem. Though we don’t argue like the two fish about who looks better, we have a discussion in our own mind about who looks better.



We might spend too much time and energy thinking and worrying about how we look and what we wear, and how others look.

That makes us unhappy, jealous, and maybe greedy for new clothes.

We might talk about how bad someone else looks.

Being too attached to how we look is called “vanity” or being “vain.”



What happens when someone who has outer beauty – who seems to have a beautiful face - becomes hostile, angry, or jealous, or arrogant? Do they still look beautiful? Their beauty disappears. We might want to get away from them.

If they often have negative emotions like anger, hatred, jealousy or arrogance, then when they get older, their face looks more stressed or dissatisfied. Their smile begins to look fake. Their eyes don't shine with real happiness. Others may feel uncomfortable around them. Their outer beauty fades away when they don't have much inner beauty.

What is inner beauty?

The beauty that arises when we have a good heart. What does having a good heart mean? Having good qualities like loving-kindness, compassion, tolerance, and patience.

Can you think of someone who has these qualities?

How about your parents, grandparents, a monk or spiritual teacher who you know?

What do you like about the way they look at you?

A happy smile? Peaceful, kind eyes? Maybe it's hard to describe.

But you enjoy looking at the face of someone who has inner beauty.

They radiate something beautiful!

It doesn't matter what type of clothes, eyes, nose or mouth they have, how straight their teeth are, how stylish their hair looks, or whether they have teeth or hair!

How do you feel when you see a very sweet old man or woman? Joy!

Lovingkindness!

When we have a good heart, our inner beauty doesn't go away even when we get old.