

Lesson 16 – HONESTY – Rahula and the Dipper

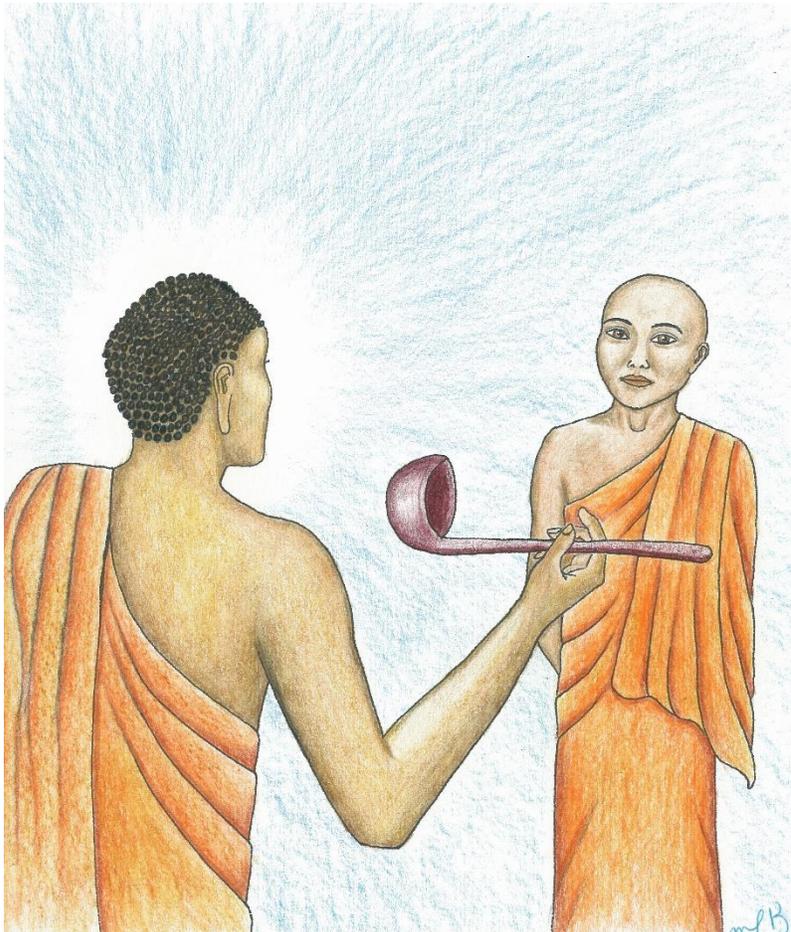
The Buddha's son, Rahula, was ordained as a monk when he was only seven years old. He was well disciplined, intelligent and eager to learn. Venerable Sariputta, who was one of the Buddha's greatest and most advanced students, took care of him, teaching and training him to be a good monk.

One day, when Venerable Rahula was eleven years old, the Buddha came to visit his son. Venerable Rahula saw him coming and according to the tradition, prepared a seat for him and a bucket of water with a water dipper—like a large spoon—to wash his feet. When the Buddha arrived, he washed his feet in the water and took his seat, and Venerable Rahula bowed to him.

The Buddha poured a little water in the water dipper and asked, “Rahula, do you see this small amount of water in the dipper?”

His son replied, “Yes, Lord.”

The Buddha said, “Unless people are careful to avoid telling lies, they have only as little good in them as this small amount of water in the dipper.”



The Buddha then tossed the water in the dipper on the ground.

He asked, “Rahula, did you see that small amount of water I threw away?”

His son responded, “Yes, Lord.”

The Buddha said, “Unless people are careful to avoid telling lies, the good that is in them is thrown away like this.”

This means that when a person isn't careful to avoid telling lies, the goodness in him seems to go away, as if it is thrown away.

The Buddha then turned the dipper upside down.

He asked, “Rahula, do you see this water dipper upside down?”

His son answered, “Yes, Lord.”

The Buddha said, “Unless people are careful to avoid telling lies, the good there is in them is treated like this.”

This means that others will think that because those people lie, they don't have any goodness in them, so they will treat them as if there is no good in them, and have no respect for them.

The Buddha then turned the dipper right side up.

He asked, “Rahula, do you see this water dipper now empty?”

Venerable Rahula said, “Yes, Lord.”

The Buddha said, “Unless people are careful to avoid telling lies, they will be as empty of good as this.”

This means that if a person keeps telling lies and doesn't try to avoid telling lies, they will lose their good qualities.

The Buddha then talked about an elephant fighting in a war. In those days, there were no tanks or planes, so people rode elephants to fight wars. Elephants could fight, knocking other riders off their elephants or horses, by smacking them with their head, ears, tusks, trunk or tail, or by kicking or stomping their feet.

The Buddha said to his son, “Suppose a man rides a big elephant in battle, and the elephant fights with his four feet, his head, his ears, his tusks and even his tail, but not with his trunk. The man on his back would think, ‘Although the elephant uses his whole body to fight, if he doesn't use his trunk, then the elephant has not yet devoted his life to defending the king.’”

“But if the elephant uses his whole body and his trunk also, then the man would think, ‘He uses his whole body and his trunk, and so he has now devoted his life to defending the king, because he is making effort in all the ways that he can. Now he needs no more training.’ So, Rahula, unless people are careful to avoid telling lies, I say they still need more training. You must train yourself in this way. Following the Dharma in some ways is not enough. You must follow Dharma in all the ways that you can. You must train yourself never to say something that is a lie even for a joke.”

The Buddha then asked, “Rahula, what do you think a mirror is for?”

His son answered, “To look at oneself in, Lord.”

The Buddha said, “In the same way, you should keep looking at yourself—the actions of your body, your speech and your mind.”

He explained, “*Before* you act or speak, think: ‘Would this end up harming me? Would this end up harming someone else? Would this end up harming both myself and someone else?’ If it would harm anyone, then it is unwholesome (wrong) and you shouldn’t do it or say it. If it would not harm yourself or others, then it is wholesome; you can do it.”

Also, *when* you are doing or saying something, think ‘Is this going to harm me? Is this going to harm anyone else?’ If so, then it is unwholesome and you should stop doing it.”

Also, *after* you do or say something, think about whether it harmed you or anyone else in any way. If you realize that harm resulted from it, then you learn that it was unwholesome and you should not do it again.”

Venerable Rahula then learned to watch himself, as if looking at himself in a mirror, to be aware of whether his actions, his words, and even his thoughts might be harmful to himself (negative karma) or harmful to others. Also, he learned to later think about his actions, words and thoughts and consider whether they might have been harmful to himself or others.

Questions:

1. The Buddha said that, similar to a little bit of water in the dipper, a person who is not careful to avoid telling lies has how much goodness in him? (a little bit)
2. What happens to the little bit of goodness in a person who isn’t careful to avoid telling lies? (it is thrown away, it seems to go away)
3. How will others treat a person who isn’t careful to avoid telling lies? (others will treat him as if there is no goodness in him, and have no respect for him)
4. What will happen to the good qualities of a person who keeps telling lies and doesn’t try to avoid telling lies? (the person loses their good qualities)
5. An elephant who uses his whole body but not his trunk is like a person who follows the Dharma in some ways but not all ways, and an elephant that uses his whole body including his trunk is like a person who follows the Dharma in what ways? (all ways that he can)
6. What did the Buddha teach Rahula to watch in himself, like watching in a mirror? (his actions, speech (words) and thoughts)

What the Buddha said:

“Ekaṃ Dhammaṃ atītassa, musāvādissa jantuno, vitiṇṇaparalokassa, natthi pāpaṃ akāriyaṃ.”

“For a liar who has violated the one Dharma virtue of truthfulness, he does not care about his future in his next lives, and he will do any evil act.”

Dhammapada 176 (13:10)

Dharma discussion - Honesty:

Rahula, the son of the Buddha, carefully raised as a young child in the palace by Yashodhara, was now a monk, being trained by the great Venerable Sariputta. He was very well behaved and disciplined, so surely he knew not to lie. Yet, the Buddha thought it was important to teach him not to lie, not to be dishonest. Why do you think the Buddha specially instructed Rahula not to lie? Because it isn't always easy to avoid lying, or to avoid being dishonest. We know we shouldn't lie, but there are many situations where we might be tempted to lie or be dishonest.

Can you think of any situations when you were tempted to lie, or when you found it difficult to say the truth? How in those situations might we avoid lying?

As children, we might lie—for example, we say “I didn't do it”--because we're afraid of being punished for our mistake. Or we might lie because we're worried that our parent or teacher would be upset if we tell the truth, and we don't want to upset them. Often, even adults will tell a little fib—or even a big bold lie—to keep the peace, so someone doesn't get angry or upset. Rather than being dishonest, what can we do instead? Admit our mistake and apologize, explain truthfully the circumstances, say why we did what we did, and not be afraid of being punished. Remember that if we get caught lying, the punishment or anger would be much worse. If you're afraid to tell the truth, what can you say to help calm the person? You can say, “I don't want to upset you, but I want to tell you the truth.”

People often lie to get something they really want, or when they feel they desperately need something, they tell a lie to convince someone to give it to them. If you find yourself tempted to lie to get what you want, what can you do instead? Think: if you feel you have to lie to get it, you probably don't really need it. You can survive without it. And you've made merit by resisting the impulse to lie!

People lie to make an excuse for their mistake, when they think others won't understand or accept the true reason they did something wrong. For example, if they're late, they say traffic was bad rather than admit they slept too late.

Most people have lied at some times in their lives to avoid being embarrassed, or to avoid feeling ashamed.

In those situations, instead of lying, maybe we don't need to explain or give an excuse. We can simply apologize without explaining, or, if it would seem offensive not to explain, we can give a general or vague excuse that isn't dishonest, like "I'm having a hard day today."

Sometimes people lie to avoid embarrassing someone else. They don't want to tell something that's bad but true about someone.

How you can avoid lying about the person? It depends on the situation.

If you are talking to someone in authority, like a teacher or other school staff, or your intent is to protect yourself or someone else from harm, it's probably better to tell them the truth about the person, even if it's bad, because it may help the person in the long run.

In other situations, you can try to avoid talking about the person, or just say something positive about them.

Sometimes people lie to fit in with others, when they don't feel confident just being themselves. For example, they say that they like something that they really don't like, or that they did something they really didn't do, so others will accept them. They say what sounds normal but isn't the truth.

How do we avoid this type of dishonesty? By remembering to be yourself, because kind people will accept you just as you are, and unkind people aren't worth trying to be friends with. You don't need to change yourself for others.

Also, others usually are more comfortable with you when you are comfortable being yourself than when you aren't being genuine, when you are too much of a "follower."

Often, people say everything is fine or okay when it's not okay, so others won't ask questions or find out information they don't want to reveal. Sometimes we don't want to make others feel stressed by our problem.

It's quite normal in some cultures to greet someone by casually saying "how are you" and "fine" is the expected response.

But when someone—like a parent, teacher, relative or friend—asks you how you are, should you hide your feelings?

If you do, then you're missing an opportunity to get support and understanding or even help. It's best to open up to those who care about you even if it's difficult, even if you may worry them.

Also, they would be more upset if you waited and things got worse before they found out.

In some families that are having difficulties, the children learn that lying helps them get what they need and helps them avoid conflicts.

When the family difficulties are ongoing, or when there aren't good role models at home, kids may not even realize they are lying. It becomes a way of life.

Usually people lie to avoid pain—their own pain or someone else’s pain.
So if someone lies, it doesn’t necessarily mean that they are a bad person.
We can have compassion for them, hoping they can overcome their difficulty.

There are many reasons why people don’t tell the truth, and many situations where we are tempted to be dishonest.
By thinking about these situations, we can be more aware of when they might come up, so we can try our best to be honest and keep a habit of being honest, avoiding dishonesty.

We should also think about the negative results of lying.
What might happen if we lie?
We could get caught lying. How do you feel if you get caught lying? Ashamed.
The result is usually worse than if you had just told the truth.
Also, if we lie, others won’t trust us.
Remember the Buddha holding the dipper upside down?
People may lose respect for us if they know we are dishonest.

Also, in order to avoid getting caught, we have to remember our lies.
And we might even have to tell even more lies to support the first lie.
What happens if we lie many times?
We develop a habit of lying. One lie leads to another.
If we have a habit of lying, we think we can get away with misbehavior without getting caught, which encourages us to get involved in more wrong behavior.
This is the lesson the Buddha was teaching Rahula: that when we lie, we get involved in more wrong behavior, so the goodness in us disappears, as he showed by throwing away the water in the dipper, and eventually our good qualities are gone, as he showed by the empty dipper.

So, do we actually avoid pain by lying? No—we end up with more pain and difficulty when we lie.

We should try to be aware when we are saying something that isn’t true.
We can only learn to be honest when we’re aware of when we’re being dishonest.
Remember the Buddha teaching Rahula to be aware of what he is doing and saying, like looking at yourself in a mirror.

Activity: Fill in the Blanks:

I SHOULD NOT LIE BECAUSE . . .

1. Lying becomes a bad _____.
2. Others will lose _____ for me.
3. Other people will not _____ me if I lie.
4. I will have to _____ my lies to avoid getting caught lying.
5. If I tell one lie, I may have to tell _____ lies to avoid getting caught.
6. I would feel _____ if I got caught lying.
7. A habit of lying leads to more _____ behavior.

WORD BOX:

TRUST	REMEMBER	WRONG
HABIT	ASHAMED	MORE RESPECT