

### **Lesson 30 – ANGER – Devadatta’s Anger**

Devadatta was a cousin of the Buddha, and a playmate of Prince Siddhartha when they were children. He was the one who had shot a swan and argued with Prince Siddhartha over who owns the swan. When he grew up, he was ordained as a Buddhist monk, so he was a student of the Buddha.

Yet, after having been a monk for many years, he still had desires for popularity, admiration and fame. One day, when the Buddha was 72 years old, Devadatta, also an elderly man, sitting alone, thought,

“Who can I influence so that I can gain a lot of honor and fame?”

Then he thought, “There is Prince Ajatasattu. He is young with a glorious future. What if I win him over so he becomes devoted to me? Then I can get a lot of admiration, popularity and whatever I desire.”

So, he started walking to Rajagaha to visit Prince Ajatasattu, the son of the good King Bimbisara. When Devadatta arrived at the palace, he used his supernatural powers to disguise himself. He changed his form into a small boy with snakes around his body, and then sat on the prince’s lap in order to shock the prince.

Prince Ajatasattu felt very anxious, seeing this strange child with live snakes wrapped around his waist sitting on his lap. He was scared, worried about what might happen. What kind of mysterious person was this? He suspected it was some kind of powerful and dangerous being in disguise. How did it get in the palace, why was it here, and what did it want?

Devadatta in the form of the strange boy asked, “Are you afraid of me, prince?”

Prince Ajatasattu replied, “Yes, I am afraid. Who are you?”

“I am Devadatta,” he replied.

The prince said, “If you are Devadatta, Lord, then please show yourself in your own form.”

Devadatta then appeared in his normal form as a monk, wearing his monks’ robes and holding his bowl, standing in front of the prince.

The prince was very impressed, and thought that Devadatta was one of the greatest, most accomplished monks to have such supernatural powers. So, he served Devadatta with deep devotion morning and evening, with many food offerings and with many carriages pulled by horses to travel around in so Devadatta wouldn’t need to walk.

Devadatta then felt greatly honored, powerful and famous, to have the well-respected Prince Ajatasattu serving him so well. But now that he had that desire fulfilled, he wanted something more. He wanted to rule the monks, to be the leader of all the Buddhist monks. Interestingly, at the same time that he had that wish, his supernatural powers disappeared.

Meanwhile, the Buddha was on his way to Rajagaha. After he arrived, some of his monks said to him,

“Lord, Prince Ajatasattu goes to serve Devadatta each morning and evening with many horse-drawn carriages and lavish offerings of food.” The monks seemed disturbed because Devadatta, while having supernatural powers, was not an exceptionally good monk, so they didn’t think he deserved such honor and devotion.

The Buddha responded, “Monks, don’t be angry or upset about Devadatta’s gifts, honor and fame. If someone holds raw meat under a fierce dog’s nose, the dog will get much more fierce. Similarly, as long as Prince Ajatasattu keeps serving Devadatta as he is doing, Devadatta’s goodness will decrease and not increase. Devadatta’s gifts, honor and fame have arisen for his own self-destruction.”

One day, sometime later, the Buddha was teaching the Dharma, surrounded by a huge crowd of followers, including King Bimbisara. Devadatta got up from his seat, arranged his robe over his shoulder, raised his hands with palms together respectfully toward the Buddha and said to him,

“Lord, you are now old, burdened with age, advanced in life, and coming to the last stage of life. You should now rest, and live in bliss in this life. You can hand over the Sangha of monks to me. I will take care of the Sangha of monks.”

The Buddha responded, “Enough, Devadatta. Don’t think about taking charge of the Sangha of monks.”

But Devadatta insisted, again proposing that he lead the monks. The Buddha said again,

“Enough, Devadatta. Don’t think about taking charge of the Sangha of monks.”

Devadatta was persistent, suggesting again that he should lead the monks.

Then the Buddha said, “I would not hand over the Sangha of monks even to Sariputta and Moggallana. Why should I let the Sangha be ruled by such a lazy person, a clot of spit as you?”

Devadatta, in shock, realized, “In public, including in front of the king, the Buddha has disgraced me with the words ‘clot of spit’ and praised Sariputta and Moggallana rather than me!”

Devadatta was totally offended and enraged. How dare the Buddha speak of him like that!

There was nothing he could do or say, especially in front of all those people. He silently bowed to the Buddha and left.

The Buddha later spoke to the monks. He instructed them to announce to the public that Devadatta had changed, and that whatever Devadatta does is his own responsibility and the Buddha and Sangha of monks have no part in it.

When the people of the town of Rajagaha heard the message about Devadatta, denouncing him, they responded in two different ways. The people who were unwise, without good judgment and without much faith and confidence in the Buddha, said,

“These monks, sons of the Sakyans, are jealous of Devadatta’s popularity, honor and fame.”

The people who were wise, who had good judgment and faith and confidence in the Buddha, said, “This isn’t just an ordinary matter for the Buddha to have had Devadatta denounced and separated from the Sangha.”

With his desire to rule the Sangha frustrated, and having been insulted in public, Devadatta had such intense anger that he started to have terrible thoughts of hatred and revenge. He went to Prince Ajatasattu and said to him,

“Men used to live long, but now they don’t live so long. Maybe you will die while still only a prince. Then you would not be able to rule the land as a king. So why don’t you kill your father and become a king? And I shall kill the monk Gotama and become the new Buddha myself.”

Prince Ajatasattu thought, “The Lord Devadatta is mighty and powerful, so he should know what is the right thing to do.”

The prince fastened a dagger on his thigh and then in the middle of the day, he went toward the inner palace where his father was. He felt fearful, anxious, and worried. The king’s guards at the entry of the inner palace saw him and thought he had a suspicious look on his face. Although he was the king’s son, they didn’t trust him, so they arrested and searched him. They found the dagger strapped to his leg, and asked him,

“What is it you want to do, prince?”

The prince, having been raised to speak only the truth, said, “I want to kill my father.”

A guard asked, “Who prompted you to do this?”

“The Lord Devadatta,” the prince replied.

The palace officers weren't sure what to do in this strange situation. Some thought the prince and Devadatta should be killed, along with all the Buddhist monks because they were associated with Devadatta. Others thought that the monks should not be killed since they had done nothing wrong, but that the prince and Devadatta should be killed. Still others thought that no one should be killed, but that the king should be informed and his orders carried out.

The guards brought Prince Ajatasattu before King Bimbisara, told him what happened, and asked about punishment for the prince, Devadatta and the monks.

The king asked, “What do the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha have to do with this? Hasn't Devadatta been publicly denounced in Rajagaha by the Buddha?” The king then turned to his son and asked, “Why do you want to kill me, prince?”

“I want the kingdom, sire,” answered his son.

“If you want the kingdom, prince, the kingdom is yours,” the king offered.

So, the king gave him the kingdom. Just like that, the father simply gave all his power as king to the son who wanted to kill him.

Now that Ajatasattu was in command of the kingdom, Devadatta made a request to the new King Ajatasattu:

“Great king, send some men to take the monk Gotama's life.”

The new king ordered the men standing near him: “Do as the Lord Devadatta says.”

Devadatta instructed one of the men, “Go, friend, the monk Gotama lives in this place that I will describe. Take his life and return by the path I will tell you.” Then Devadatta privately told the other men to stand along certain points of the return path and wait for the first man to come along the path.

After Devadatta gave him the details, the man took his sword, shield, bow and arrows, and went to where the Buddha was staying. But as he came near the Buddha, he became so frightened that he stood still, his body frozen in fear.

The Buddha saw him and called out, “Come, friend, don't be afraid.”

The man put down his weapons, went up to the Buddha and very humbly bowed to him, saying, “Lord, I have done wrong like a fool confused and blundering, since I came here with evil intent, with intent to do murder. Lord, may you forgive my wrongdoing.”

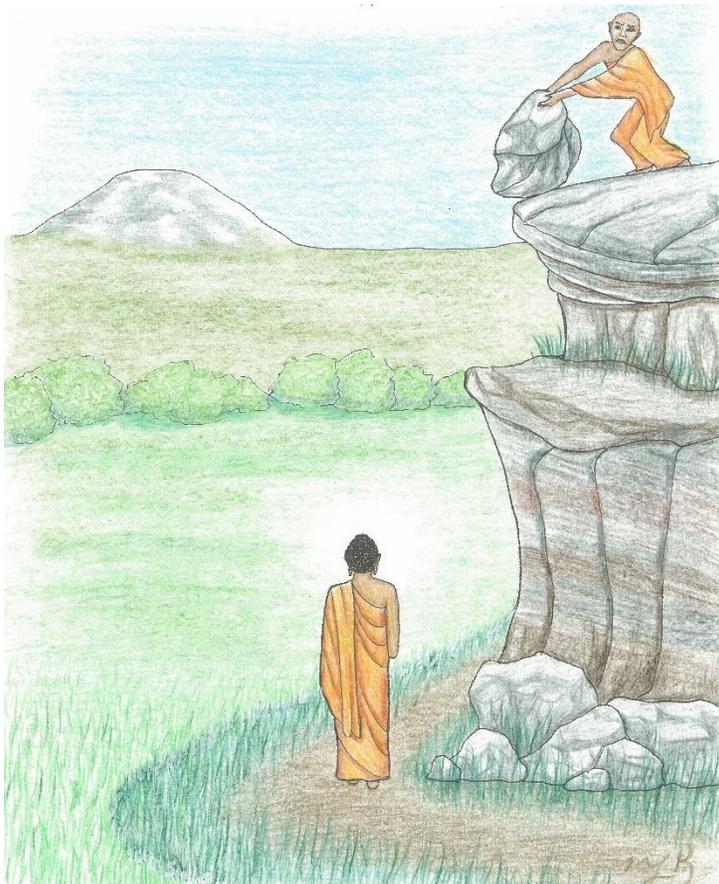
The Buddha said, “Surely, friend, you have done wrong like a fool confused and blundering, since you came here with evil intent, with intent to commit murder. But since you admit that you were wrong, in accordance with the Dharma, we forgive it. The teachings on discipline are increased when a man sees his wrongdoing and acts in accordance with the Dharma and restrains himself from wrongdoing in the future.”

The man heard the Buddha teach the Dharma, and asked the Buddha for permission to become his follower. The Buddha accepted him and instructed him to go back to Ajatasattu’s palace by another path. When the men posted along the original path didn’t see the man returning, they wondered what happened, and went to where the Buddha was sitting at the root of a tree. The men went up to him and when they heard him teach the Dharma, they became his followers.

Meanwhile, when the first man arrived at Ajatasattu’s palace, he went to Devadatta and admitted,

“I have not taken the Buddha’s life, Lord. The Buddha is mighty and powerful.”

Devadatta replied, “Okay, friend, don’t take the monk Gotama’s life. I will take the monk Gotama’s life myself.”



Later, Devadatta climbed up Vulture Peak Rock when the Buddha was walking below in the shade of the rock. Devadatta pushed a huge stone down so it would hit and kill the Buddha. As it rolled down, the stone was caught between two pieces of the rock, but a very sharp piece of the stone fell and cut the Buddha’s foot so that it bled. It was an extremely serious and painful wound.

The Buddha looked up and said to Devadatta:

“Misguided man, you have made much bad karma, for with evil intent, with intent to commit murder, you have caused a Buddha to bleed.”

Devadatta did not seem to care, as he soon had another plan.

In Rajagaha there was an elephant named Nalagiri that had violently killed a man. Devadatta went to the elephant stables, and started talking to the elephant-keepers. He mentioned that he knew the king very well and that he could influence the king to increase their pay and food, and then suggested,

“When the monk Gautama comes down this road, let the elephant Nalagiri loose into the road.”

That was simple enough to do, and they hoped Devadatta could get the king to give them more pay and more food, so the elephant keepers agreed.

The next morning, the Buddha and a group of monks went to the city to receive food. They walked along the road that Devadatta mentioned to the elephant keepers.

The elephant-keepers saw them coming and let Nalagiri loose on the road. Nalagiri saw the Buddha coming in the distance, and he raised up his trunk and tail and spread out his ears, and then charged toward the Buddha.

The monks saw the elephant in the distance and exclaimed,

“Lord, the savage elephant Nalagiri, the man-killer, is loose on the road! Lord, turn back! Lord, turn back!”

The Buddha calmly said, “Come, monks, don’t be afraid. It is impossible, it cannot happen, that anyone can take a Buddha’s life by violence. When a Buddha dies, it is not because of violence by another being.”

Nevertheless, the monks begged the Buddha to turn back. They didn’t want him to be injured or attacked by the elephant.

People in the area anxiously looked at the elephant and monks on the road to see what would happen.

The Buddha thought only of loving-kindness toward Nalagiri. The elephant felt the intense love of the Buddha, and then lowered his trunk and walked up to him, and stood in front of him. The Buddha patted Nalagiri’s forehead and spoke kind words of instruction about karma. With his trunk, Nalagiri picked up dust on the road around the Buddha’s feet and sprinkled it on his head, and then quietly walked back to his stable, now a tamed and peaceful elephant.

The people of the town spread the news about Devadatta trying to kill the Buddha, and Devadatta’s fame and honor faded away. The people who doubted the Buddha then began to have faith and confidence in him.

*Questions:*

1. What did Devadatta want to have when he went to visit Prince Ajatasattu? (honor, fame, popularity, admiration, whatever he wants)
2. What did Devadatta do with his supernatural powers to influence Prince Ajatasattu to believe he was a great and powerful monk? (he changed his form into a small boy with snakes around his waist)
3. Why did Devadatta become so angry at the Buddha? (the Buddha wouldn't let him be the leader of the monks and insulted him, and praised Sariputta and Moggallana)
4. Why did Prince Ajatasattu try to kill his father, the king? (Devadatta told him to do it)
5. What did the Buddha explain to the monks about why Devadatta could not kill the Buddha? (Buddhas cannot be killed by violence)
6. How did the Buddha tame the man-killing elephant Nalagiri? (with loving-kindness, he patted the elephant and spoke kind words about karma)

*What the Buddha said:*

**“Paradukkhūpadānena, attano sukhamicchati, verasaṃsaggasaṃsatṭho, verā so na parimuccati.”**

**“Entangled by the bonds of anger, he who seeks his own happiness by causing pain to others is never free from anger.”**

Dhammapada 291 (21:2)

*Dharma Discussion - Anger:*

Were there any strange events in this story that you found difficult to believe? One strange event was a monk transforming his body into a young boy with live snakes around him.

You might wonder, why would a monk have supernatural powers? And how did he get them?

The Buddha had supernatural powers that were used for showing people that he was fully enlightened, so they would believe in what he had to teach, the Dharma. Some monks also developed supernatural powers as a result of their intense meditation and spiritual practice, but the Buddha cautioned them not to show off with them or use them for other negative or selfish purposes.

Devadatta had these powers but did he follow the Buddha's advice? No, he used his powers for selfish purposes.

Another strange event was that the Buddha insulted Devadatta. We might expect the Buddha to behave always as an example of perfect behavior. Then why would he insult someone? His purpose was to teach others the Dharma, and sometimes the best way to teach was to do or say something that might seem unkind but eventually would be most helpful to them. He insulted Devadatta because he knew that it would reveal the hidden, destructive anger inside Devadatta, and that ultimately it was the best way for Devadatta, and others, to learn.

Sure enough, it had the intended result: Devadatta became extremely angry. Why did he become so angry? Was it only because he was insulted? No, it was also because he had a strong desire for more power, popularity and admiration, and the Buddha frustrated that desire.

We, too, experience anger when our desires are frustrated, when we really want something and we can't have it, or it is taken away from us. The more desires and expectations we have, the more often we feel disappointed or angry.

Can anger be useful, something that can help us? Yes, anger motivates us to get away, or protect or defend ourselves or others from someone who is harmful. We show anger to tell someone they are misbehaving. For example, we may show anger toward someone who is abusive, and a parent may show anger toward a child who is misbehaving. Those are constructive, or useful, types of anger.

But when anger is not constructive, or when we hold onto our anger for too long, it harms us. Then it is destructive. How is it destructive? Let's think about what happens in the mind when we are angry. What kind of thoughts might arise in your mind about a person who makes you feel very angry? We may think about how terrible that person is, we wish that they suffer for what they did, or we may have thoughts of revenge. We may feel envy or jealousy toward a person who got something we didn't get. We may feel anger toward a person who got something good but didn't deserve it. These thoughts of hatred, ill-will, revenge or envy disturb our minds.

When you have these thoughts, are you able to concentrate well on other things? Can you communicate well and make good decisions? Probably not. Anger distracts us, and takes away our ability to think, speak and act carefully and reasonably. It can make us say or do things we later regret, that make us suffer later. For example, we say or do things that hurt others, then we may lose friends. Can anger harm our body, too? Yes, having a lot of anger over time causes harmful changes in the body, including harm to the heart, immune system, and digestion.

How can we let go of our anger so we don't hold onto it for too long, and so that we don't do or say something we would regret later?

Here are some ideas that may help you in different situations:

When a friend upsets you, think about whether you really want to hurt or lose the friend. To keep your friendship, try to avoid talking when you're very angry. Wait until you calm down so you can communicate better.

When someone is trying to upset you, remember that calmness can be the best weapon. Acting calm can make them lose interest in trying to upset you.

Remember that "hurt people (are those who) hurt people"—those who hurt others are hurting inside. This helps you develop compassion rather than hatred.

Remember that everyone will receive the results of their karma. Those who harm others will suffer the results of what they do, and it's not your responsibility to punish them, which might create negative karma for yourself.

Wish or pray that the person who upset you becomes happy and peaceful, and then they will stop upsetting you.

Try to think of good qualities of the person who upset you, or good things they have done.

Remember that you can choose when to let go of your anger. The sooner you let go of it the sooner you can enjoy your day.

Breathe deeply—breathe out anger, breathe in peace.

Close your eyes and be mindful, by noticing everything you hear and feel.

Chant or say a prayer.

Go outside, take a walk, or do an outside activity--skateboarding, basketball, etc.

Talk to a friend.

Write in a journal or diary.

Draw a picture or cartoon.

Read a book.

Listen to music.

Clean your room.

Lay down, or take a nap.

Take a bath or shower.

Drink cold water or juice to cool your mind.

Look in a mirror—rather than looking angry, try to relax your face.

*Activity:*

Make a list of ways to control anger -- Each student lists on paper some ways to calm anger, then posts the list in a handy place at home so it can be referred to when they are struggling with anger.