

THE QUEEN WHO COMPLAINED TOO MUCH (Sujāta Jataka)

A very long time ago, there was a good king named King Brahmadata who ruled over Benares, a place in India that was considered very holy.



He had a very beautiful wife, the queen. They had a son, who grew up to be a very intelligent young man who studied at the famous Takkasila University.

Unfortunately, one day the good King Brahmadata died. The son then became the next king, and being very fair, well-mannered, patient and kind like his father, he ruled the kingdom well, like his father.

His mother, the queen, was very different from her son. Living in a palace, she had a comfortable life, and many servants.



But she was arrogant and demanding, so much so that as she got older, her face always looked annoyed and had become set in a permanent scowl. She was always complaining. Also, she was impatient and often dissatisfied. She was not happy with the meals she was served, whining,

“Ugh, we’re having THIS again for dinner?”

She was not content with all the clothes and things she owned. She would haughtily say, “I don’t have anything to wear. Oh, this ugly old thing. I need a new one!”

And she was not pleased with what others did for her. She had complaints like, “Why did you bring that one? That’s not really what I wanted. That doesn’t go together!”

She was often loudly grumbling or shouting about something, like “Don’t touch my stuff! Don’t look at me like that! Get out of my way! Why do they have to take so long?”

Or, she was criticizing someone in a harsh voice, shrieking, “That’s WRONG! What were you thinking? How could you be so blind? Are you an idiot? What’s wrong with you?”

She had a habit of saying bad things about others. Insulting words flew out of her mouth, and she was very cruel to those who displeased her, shouting at them with a piercing voice so loud that everyone around her wanted to cover their ears. Just the sound of her voice from a distant part of the palace was enough to make a person want to walk away. But being near her was almost unbearable.



Her son was embarrassed by her behavior. He wanted to tell her to quit complaining, be patient and not be so demanding.

He wanted her to be kind to others, and stop criticizing, insulting and talking badly about them.

He looked at her pleadingly when she misbehaved, hoping she would see the disappointment on his face and recognize how terrible she sounded. But she was focused on whatever she was complaining about and didn’t seem to care about how he felt, or how anyone else felt, for that matter.

He kept waiting for a chance to hint to her that she needed to change her ways. But she would ignore him whenever she was caught up in her criticisms and insults.



Time after time he saw the hurt look on the faces of those she criticized.

She was causing so much agony to others, and he felt powerless to prevent it, even though he was the king. She was his mother, and he couldn't be disrespectful to her. He felt compassion for the pain she must be feeling inside to behave in this way. He wished he could take away her unhappiness and teach her how to be content, how to calm her mind, how to have lovingkindness and compassion for others.



One day he went on a walk with his mother outside the palace. As they walked along the road, a blue jay suddenly screeched loudly with a very unpleasant, harsh sound in a tree above them. It screeched again and again. Even though the blue jay is beautiful to look at, the people nearby put their fingers in their ears and said,

“What a harsh voice!” “What a loud shriek!” “Bird, don't make that noise!”



The king and his mother then walked through a park. There was a cuckoo bird perched on a tree that began to sing with a sweet soft sound. All the people nearby were delighted at the bird's voice. They clasped their hands or stretched them out toward the bird, in appreciation of its beautiful voice.

They said, “Oh what a soft voice!” “What a kind voice!” “What a gentle voice!” “Sing away, birdie, sing away, we love it!”

They stood there, stretching their necks high to see the cuckoo bird perched in the tree, eagerly listening.

The king, noticing these events with the two types of birds, thought, “Here is my chance to drop a hint to my mother!

He said, “Mother, when the people heard a blue jay’s cry on the road, everyone plugged their ears and called out ‘Don’t make that noise.’ No one likes those harsh sounds.”

Then he continued, “There are those who may be beautiful or handsome to look at, but if they have a harsh voice, they are not loved by anyone. There is a bird that you may often see, the cuckoo, which isn’t very pretty, but its soft voice is so pleasant to hear that everyone loves that bird.”

He said respectfully, “Therefore, your voice should be gentle and sweet, with wise words, not puffed up with arrogance, with conceit.”

When the king had explained this to her, he won her over to his way of thinking. From then on, she learned to stop focusing on herself, her discomforts, desires, likes and dislikes, and instead to consider how others might be feeling, and how her complaints, criticisms and demands cause so much pain to all. Rather than seeking attention and respect by being demanding and critical, she learned to care about others and earn their love and respect through kindness.

QUESTIONS:

1. How did the queen look when she was young? (very beautiful)
2. How did she look when she got older? (she looked angry, her face always in a scowl)
3. Why didn’t her son just tell her to stop complaining? (he didn’t want to be disrespectful)

4. Why did the people dislike the beautiful blue jay? (they didn't like its harsh voice)
5. How should one's voice be, according to the king? (gentle and sweet)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Complaining:

The queen in the story felt that she was powerful – she was rich and beautiful, and she was the boss, along with her son, the king. Others had to listen to her and obey her. She could get whatever she wanted, and she could make others do things for her.

But as many people with such power discover, they are still not satisfied. They think that more power or getting more things might make them happy, so they expect and demand more and more.



They may become arrogant with all their expectations and demands.

They may enjoy or even crave the attention when they make others do what they want, and may enjoy the admiration or envy of others who wish they could have such power.

But not all people who are very rich or powerful behave this way.

For example, who in the story was rich and powerful, yet kind-hearted, respectful, and humble?

The king.

There are some people who aren't particularly rich and powerful but still want to feel powerful and get attention, so they demand, complain and criticize a lot, putting on a show of acting "high maintenance."

They think that makes them look important.

When others try to fulfill their demands and respond to their complaints, they feel superior and what happens to their ego? It grows, it gets boosted. But do you think that they really feel confident?

Probably not. They likely don't feel confident in themselves as they really are without putting on a show, without trying to look important.

Having a big ego is not the same as having confidence.

People with a big ego think about themselves too much so they don't care much about how others feel.

But people can be confident as well as kind and compassionate.

How do you think the queen was feeling after her husband died?

Maybe she was lonely or sad.

She seemed unhappy. That's what made her complain so much.

By focusing on herself, what she likes and doesn't like, she didn't care much about others and didn't show lovingkindness that would attract others to be friendly with her.

So, she sought attention instead by making others do things for her.

When we see someone who behaves that way, we can be like the king and have compassion for them, knowing that deep inside they aren't really happy, that they don't have the joy and true friendships that come from having real lovingkindness and compassion for others.

And what if we start behaving like the queen?

We should notice if we start to demand, complain and criticize a lot.

Does it ever happen to you? It may happen sometimes when we feel irritable, upset, tired, or in a bad mood.

But if it becomes a habit, then like the queen we can try to stop focusing on ourselves, our likes and dislikes, and remember:

How do our complaints, criticisms and demands sound to others?

Annoying!

Remember that if you want others to help you, what kind of voice should we use? Using a kind voice rather than a demanding one leads to a better response from others.

Rather than seeking attention by being demanding and critical, how can we earn the love and respect of others? Through kindness.

Try doing random acts of kindness, even to your family members, to put yourself in a better mood.

Or, think of others who are suffering worse than you are, and wish that their suffering disappears.