



DILIGENCE IN FOLLOWING DHARMA
REGARDLESS OF WHAT OTHERS THINK

Lesson 13 - DILIGENCE

Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.

Question to think about before the story: Have you ever wondered, “If I am really **dedicated to Dharma**, will I still have a normal life and fit in with my friends?”

Story: Return to Kapilavasthu

King Suddhōdana heard that his son, who now had become the Buddha, was in Rajagaha, so he sent a message for his son to come back home to Kapilavasthu. The Buddha walked for two months with thousands of bhikkhus until they finally arrived in Kapilavasthu. Many people of Kapilavasthu were proud and did not feel like worshipping him. The Buddha knew this, so he made jets of fire and jets of water spray out from his arms and legs at the same time - this was known as the “Twin Miracle.” When the people saw his miraculous power, they were convinced that he was indeed enlightened, and King Suddhōdana and others bowed to him.

In Kapilavasthu, the Buddha and his monks went as usual to houses, and stood silently at the door holding their bowls for food. When King Suddhōdana heard about it, he became annoyed and went to the Buddha and said, “Why do you disgrace me, son? Why are you begging for food? Why don’t you take food in the palace?” The Buddha explained, “I am not putting you to shame, this is our custom.” The king said, “What do you mean, ‘our custom’? No one in our family had to beg for food.” The Buddha replied, “That is not the custom of the royal family. It is the custom of the Buddhas. All former Buddhas lived by receiving food like this.” The king then invited the Buddha to the palace for lunch.

When the Buddha came to the palace for lunch, he taught them Dharma by telling them about one of his past births. Hearing this, the king became an anagami, which is a person who has attained the third level to enlightenment, who has such purity and wisdom that he would never take another birth as a human or in lower worlds. His queen, the sister of the Buddha’s mother, became a sotapanna, which is a person who has attained the first level of enlightenment or “stream entry,” who has such purity and wisdom that she would never be born in a lower world, and would live only a maximum of 7 lives as a human or in a heaven-world until she reaches enlightenment.

The Buddha’s relatives and friends all came to see him, except Yashodhara, who was in her room, thinking, “He is now a Buddha. Should I go to him? If I have any virtues, then he will come here and I will show him my reverence.” The Buddha asked where Yashodhara was and gave his bowl to the king, who told him that she was in her room. The Buddha went to her room with the king, Ven. Sariputta and Ven. Moggallana, telling them, “Let her respect me as she likes. Say nothing.” Yashodhara went to him and bowed, holding his feet and placing her head on his feet. The Buddha kept quiet. Then she sat down. The king said, “When she heard that you wore orange robes, took only one meal per day, and

avoided high seats, garlands and perfumes, she did the same. When relatives offered to support her, she would not even look at anyone, so virtuous was my daughter-in-law.” The Buddha said, “Not only in this birth, but in a past birth, she protected me and was devoted and faithful to me,” and he told the story of that birth.

The queen, the Buddha’s aunt, had one son, the Buddha’s half-brother, named Nanda. Everyone in the palace was getting ready for his marriage in a couple of days. When the Buddha got up to go back to the park, he gave his bowl to Nanda to hold. Nanda did not know what to do with the bowl, so he just followed the Buddha, waiting for him to take back his bowl. As the Buddha left the palace, with Nanda following him, Nanda’s wife called out to Nanda, “Come back soon, Prince.” When they arrived at the park where the Buddha and his monks were staying, the Buddha asked him, “Would you like to leave the householder’s life and become a monk?” Nanda was very much looking forward to his marriage, but he greatly admired the Buddha and did not want to be disrespectful. So he said “Yes,” and the Buddha ordained him.

But Nanda kept thinking about his beautiful bride waiting for him to come back. He was very unhappy, and the other monks noticed that and told the Buddha. The Buddha then went to Nanda and showed him the body of a female monkey which had been burned. It was a very ugly sight. Then the Buddha showed Nanda some devas. Nanda thought that the devas were the most beautiful and happy sight he ever saw, and wished to be with them. The Buddha asked him, “Which are more beautiful, your bride or these devas?” Nanda replied, “My bride is like the burnt monkey compared to these devas.” The Buddha said, “If you follow the Dharma as I teach, then you can be with them.” Nanda then became happy being a monk, and he learned and practiced the Buddha’s teachings very carefully.

On the seventh day after his arrival, the Buddha went again to his father’s palace for lunch. Prince Rahula, the son of the Buddha and Yashodhara, was now seven years old, and he had never seen his father. When the Buddha was at the king’s palace, Yashodhara showed Rahula the Buddha, with all the monks, and said, “That is your father, Rahula. Go and ask for your inheritance, the property and wealth which a father gives to his son.” Prince Rahula walked up to the Buddha and said, “Even your shadow is pleasing to me, Bhante.” The Buddha got up and went away, so Prince Rahula followed him and said, “Give me my inheritance, Bhante.” Rahula asked again, and the third time he asked, the Buddha said, “I will give you the greatest wealth. Money is not the greatest wealth. Truth is the greatest wealth. Being ordained as a monk you can find the Truth.” The Buddha then asked Ven. Sariputta to ordain little Prince Rahula to be a monk.

Questions after the story:

1. Why did the people of Kapilavasthu not immediately bow to the Buddha when they saw him?
2. Why was the king annoyed when the Buddha went to houses to receive food?

3. What do “anagami” and “sotapanna” mean?
4. What did the king tell the Buddha about Yashodhara?
5. Why do you think the Buddha gave Nanda his bowl?
6. Why was Nanda unhappy?
7. How did the Buddha convince Nanda to be happy as a monk?
8. What did the Buddha give to his son Rahula ?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

**“Appamādaratā hotha, sacittamanurakkhatha,
duggā uddharathattānaṃ panke sattova kuñjaro.”**

“Delight in diligence! Guard well your thoughts. Pull yourself out of the mud of evil, just as an elephant pulls himself out of the mud.”

Dhammapada 327 (23:8)

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

The Pali word “appamāda” means diligence, dedication, and alertness; doing something carefully with great interest, attention, effort and energy. If we play a sport, we play it with dedication - we love the sport, so we give it a lot of our attention and time. We are diligent in our practice of the sport. What does that mean? We listen carefully to the teacher or coach, we remember well and practice what he taught, we learn how to improve our skills, and we practice regularly and often and with all our effort. Then we become highly skilled in the sport.

The Buddha taught that we should practice Dharma in the same way, with great interest, attention, effort and energy. How do we do that? We listen carefully to Dharma talks, we read about Dharma when we get a chance, we remember the teachings well, we remember to apply them every day, we meditate to train our mind, we learn how to improve our practice of Dharma, and we put all of our effort into it.

This is easy to say, but very difficult to do, like an elephant trying hard to pull himself out of the mud. Many people find that their friends are not so dedicated to the Dharma, or don’t know much about it, so they keep their Dharma practice a secret from their friends. Have you ever felt embarrassed to bow in reverence, to meditate, or to be seen doing religious activities? Would you tell a friend that you are going to the temple? Do you mind being seen wearing traditional clothes that are not “in style”? Do you stay away from kids who don’t act according to Dharma? Do you feel that if you do these things, you won’t “fit in” with your friends and classmates?

The Buddha was not embarrassed to go to houses for donations of food, even though he knew that did not at all “fit in” with his family and childhood friends. They thought going to houses for food was only for poor beggars. But fitting in with the Dharma of the Buddhas, being dedicated to the custom of the Buddhas, was more important to him. Even Yashodhara, living in a palace, did not care to “fit in” with her friends, because it was more important to her to become

dedicated to Buddhist practices like the monks, wearing orange robes, eating only once per day, and not wearing jewelry or perfumes.

Nanda was not ready to be so dedicated to Dharma; he wanted to get married and enjoy a wealthy family life. But the Buddha knew how important it was to practice Dharma with appamāda early in life, so he had to convince Nanda in a way that he could understand, that there are much more wonderful things than just wealth and family. How did he do that? He showed Nanda the burnt monkey and the devas. The Buddha showed how important it is to be dedicated to Dharma even when we are very young, not only by ordaining Nanda even when he was about to be married, but also by ordaining little Prince Rahula when he was just 7 years old.

Why must we be dedicated to Dharma when we are so young? Just like we must train and practice a lot over a long time to become skilled in a sport, we must train and control our mind, our mouth, and our actions to become skilled in Dharma. We never know what will happen in our lives. If we have not done meritorious deeds in our early life, then we may not be so lucky in the future. We get involved in school and other activities, and as adults we get involved in our jobs, our children and responsibilities. If we have not learned gradually to control our mind, it is more difficult to start later on in life. Then we are like a weak elephant who can't pull himself out of the mud.

Here is an example. What happens if we eat a lot of junk food when we are young? We get a habit of eating unhealthy. What happens then? When we are older we get overweight or illnesses. If we learn to eat healthy food when we are young, then it is easier to eat healthy food and stay healthy when we are older. How does that happen? Because we developed a good habit of eating healthy.

Similarly, if we are selfish, speak unkindly and think bad thoughts when we are young, what happens? We get bad habits, we don't think about doing merit, and then it is very difficult to change for the better when we are older. Then we are stuck in the "mud of evil" like the Buddha says. But if we make merit and learn to control our actions, mouth and mind when we are young, then what happens? It is easier to make even more merit and control our actions, mouth and mind even better when we are older. The merit and self-control will give us great happiness, peace and wisdom in the future.

Activity to reinforce the lesson: Students draw a picture of an elephant pulling himself out of mud, and color with crayons, colored pencils or markers. Then students write today's quotation of the Buddha neatly on the picture, first in pencil and then writing over it in marker or crayon.