



THE VIRIYA OF SIDDHARTHA

Lesson 7- EFFORT

Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.

Question to think about before the story: Have you ever had determination to do something, but later you thought that it's too much **effort**, and you wanted to give up?

Story: Mara's Challenge and Sujatha's Offering

After Siddhartha decided that it is best to keep the body healthy by eating normally, he went daily to the village called Senani so people would give him alms (food) in his bowl. He was now 35 years old. Now that he started to eat again, his strength and noble beauty returned, and the 32 special marks of a Buddha appeared again on his body.

The chief of the village of Senani had a daughter, Sujatha, who had wished to get married. She had made a vow (promise) at a big beautiful banyan tree, saying to the tree's deity: "If I marry a good husband and have a son, then I will offer 100,000 gold coins to the deity of this tree every year." Soon thereafter, she got married and had a son. Now she knew she must perform the vow. She fed her cows special food so they would make sweet, rich milk.

When the moon was full in the month of Visakha in the Springtime, Sujatha ordered the cowherds to milk the cows. As soon as the new cans were placed under their udders, the milked flowed from them immediately! Sujatha stared in wonder. Then she boiled the milk, and large bubbles rose up and turned to the right, and none spilled. Sujatha was thrilled, and she turned to her servant, Punna, and exclaimed, "Our deity is pleased! Run to the banyan tree and prepare the place for the offering."

Meanwhile, the night before, Siddhartha had five dreams which indicated to him that he would be enlightened that day. Siddhartha found that same big beautiful banyan tree where Sujatha made the vow. He thought it was a good place to meditate, and he sat under it, with his face radiant, golden and serene, deep in meditation. When Punna arrived at the banyan tree, she saw Siddhartha sitting there and she thought that was the deity of the tree waiting to receive the offerings. She ran back to Sujatha and told her what she saw. Sujatha was overjoyed, and gave her gifts of beautiful clothes and jewelry. Sujatha took a golden tray worth 100,000 gold coins and put the milk-rice (kiribat) on it, and covered it. She put on a fresh dress, and carried the tray on her head to the banyan tree. Thinking that Siddhartha was the tree deity who she had made the vow to, she placed the tray in Siddhartha's hands, asking him to accept her offerings, and then walked away. Siddhartha said to her, "Sister, what is to be done with this tray?" Sujatha replied, "It is for you." Siddhartha said, "It is of no use for me." Sujatha said, "You may do with it whatever you wish." Siddhartha got up and went to the river to bathe, and then made 49 lumps with the milk-rice, and ate it. He threw the tray into the river, thinking, "It will go upstream against the current if I will be successful in becoming enlightened." The tray traveled far upstream, to where a Black Naga, a powerful snake deity, received it.

Siddhartha then found a beautiful place near the Nerañjara River and placed a pile of dried grass beneath a Bodhi Tree. He sat cross-legged on the grass under the tree and made a firm determination: “Even if my skin, flesh and blood become dry, I will not leave this seat until I attain Enlightenment, the highest wisdom, Nirvana, the end of suffering.”

Then Mara, hoping to prevent Siddhartha from becoming enlightened, approached Siddhartha at the Bodhi Tree and tried to scare him, telling him that his home town Kapilavasthu had been conquered and his clan, the Sakyans, had been chased away, and showing ghostlike visions of Yashodhara, Devadatta and the Sakyans escaping. Siddhartha did not panic, he did not even worry; he was unmoved. Mara said “It is impossible for you to get enlightened!” Mara was very angry, and as he approached Siddhartha, he shouted to his demon helpers, “Seize and bind this low-born! He doesn’t know he is a worm born as a human being!” He threw a fire-shower at Siddhartha, with black smoke and terribly loud thunder, and shouted, “Siddhartha, how is it that you are in my seat? Get up or I’ll tear your heart out!”

Siddhartha calmly looked into the terrible face of Mara, and with great love and compassion looked at Mara as a father looks at his son playing at his feet. Siddhartha said, “I have come to point out death and decay, and help people cross over from this Earthly existence. Your army I will conquer by wisdom, like an unbaked clay bowl broken with a stone. This throne is for me. The Earth is my witness.” Siddhartha put his hand to the ground and it shook, and a great noise came from the Earth, and a thunderbolt came roaring through the air. Mara felt terror that he had never known before and ran away.

Questions after the story:

1. Why did Sujatha offer Siddhartha the milk-rice?
2. Why didn’t Siddhartha keep the golden tray?
3. What did Siddhartha do when he sat down under the Bodhi Tree?
4. Why did Mara approach Siddhartha?
5. How did Siddhartha look at Mara?
6. What did Siddhartha say he would use to defeat Mara’s demon army?
7. Why did the ground shake and thunderbolt come when Siddhartha touched the ground?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

“Yo ca vassasatam jīve, kusīto hīnavīriyo, ekāhaṃ jīvitaṃ seyyo, vīriyamārabhato dalhaṃ.”

“Better than living a lazy life for a hundred years without making effort, is to live for one single day strongly making effort.” Dhammapada 112 (8:13)

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

Viriya means perseverance, persistent effort, when we determine to do something good and keep trying, struggling, overcoming difficulties and failures,

not giving up. Siddhartha had viriya, confidence and determination to keep seeking enlightenment even when he had starved and tortured his body trying to become enlightened, and all his extreme efforts failed. He had viriya and courage even when Mara tried to scare and threaten him to make him give up his effort. Because of his viriya, he had developed good habits and self-control. Instead of getting angry at Mara, how did Siddhartha act? He was calm and compassionate. Instead of getting frustrated that after six *years* of suffering starvation, severe discomfort and pain struggling to be enlightened, he still did not get enlightened, Siddhartha did not get angry and did not give up.

Anger makes us agitated and unable to concentrate, and wastes our energy. After the angry mood ends, we feel more weak and exhausted. If Siddhartha had gotten frustrated and angry that he failed to get enlightened, or gotten angry at Mara, he may not have had the strength to keep trying; he would have given up, or collapsed and died when he was starving himself. When he became healthy again from eating food, he had so much viriya and determination to become enlightened that the golden tray went *up* the river against the flow, the ground shook and the thunderbolt came when he touched the ground.

What are some experiences that you have had with viriya? Learning to ride a bicycle, to swim, to play a musical instrument; memorizing a gatha, or doing a difficult project for school, like a science fair project. We make mistakes, we don't do things perfectly, things go wrong, it's not fun, but we keep trying. Also, it takes a lot of viriya to be able to meditate well. When we overcome problems and failures with our viriya, we gain more courage and confidence. We also gain more concentration, willpower, and energy to do good things, and so it won't feel so difficult. Then we can do many more good things.

What happens if we don't have viriya? We allow ourselves to be lazy, we don't try very hard, we make excuses and we give up easily. Then, we develop a bad habit of laziness and doing things halfheartedly, and we lose confidence.

We are not exactly like Siddhartha, but when we are trying to do something good and we are having difficulties, we can remember Siddhartha's challenges and failures. So, if we feel lazy, frustrated or angry, we want to avoid doing something we should do, don't want to finish our work, don't try to do it well, what can we do? Remember the strength and confidence Siddhartha had even after he had tried extremely hard and failed. Then we get inspired to keep trying, not to give up. Each time we decide not to be lazy and not to give up, we build up our viriya to become a stronger and more confident person.

Activity to reinforce the lesson: Draw a scene from the story with crayons, markers or colored pencils, for example: Siddhartha and Mara, Siddhartha sitting under the tree accepting milk-rice from Sujatha, or Siddhartha throwing the golden tray.

Closing chant: Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā
May all beings have happy minds!