

CHAPTER 11 – HOT OIL ATTACK

A young lady named Uttara and her parents were very devoted Buddhists. Uttara's father arranged for her to be married to the son of a rich man. But after she was married, she was unhappy in her husband's home because her husband wouldn't allow her to offer food to the Buddha or listen to him teach the Dharma. Her husband said that if she did this, then she wouldn't be at home to cook for him and clean the house and the laundry.

She told her father, "Why have you put me in this cage? Here I cannot see any monks and I have no opportunity to do any acts of merit!"

Her father felt sorry for her so he sent her a large amount of money. She asked her husband to allow her to spend her money to hire a lady to do the cooking and cleaning for him for a few days. He gave his permission, and then Uttara hired a lady named Sirima to do these chores for fifteen days.

During this time, Uttara carefully prepared large amounts of food at home and brought it to the Buddha and his monks for each day's meal. On the fifteenth day, her husband was observing her as she was busily preparing food in the kitchen to bring to the monastery.

Then he smiled and muttered to himself, "How foolish she is! She doesn't know how to enjoy herself. She is tiring herself out with this food offering ceremony!"

Sirima saw him smile. She thought that he was smiling at her. She felt flattered that this rich handsome man was smiling at her. So, she didn't want him to be Uttara's husband anymore; she wanted him all to herself. She forgot that she was hired by and was being paid by Uttara.

Suddenly she wanted to get rid of Uttara. She was very jealous of Uttara's beauty and jealous that Uttara was married to this handsome wealthy man.

There was a pot of oil heating on the stove. Unable to control herself, she went over to the stove and took a ladle full of burning hot oil, intending to pour it over Uttara's head.

Uttara saw Sirima coming. Uttara had no hatred or anger toward Sirima, and felt no hostility—no ill will—toward her.

Uttara thought, "Because Sirima took care of all the housework, I was able to listen to the Dharma, serve the Buddha and the monks, and perform other acts of merit. I feel so thankful, so grateful to Sirima."

Suddenly, Sirima came very close and by the cruel expression on Sirima's face, Uttara realized what Sirima was about to do—she was about to pour the boiling hot oil over her!



Still, Uttara had no ill will—she didn't want to harm Sirima. Uttara made a firm resolution: "If I have any ill will toward Sirima, may this boiling oil burn me. If I have no ill will toward her, may it not burn me."

Sirima quickly lifted the ladle and poured the oil on Uttara's head. But, because Uttara had no hostile feeling toward Sirima, the hot oil was as harmless as if it was just cold water!

Sirima, expecting Uttara to scream in pain and anger, heard nothing from Uttara. She thought, "The oil must have become cold!" So, she ran to get another ladle full of burning hot oil.

Uttara's assistants caught Sirima and beat her for doing such a horrible thing.

Uttara, with oil dripping from her hair and clothing, stopped her assistants from beating Sirima and told them, "Instead of beating her, rub her with healing ointment."

Sirima then remembered that she was being paid by Uttara to work for her. She felt terribly ashamed of what she had done—trying to harm the woman who had given her a job.

She cried out to Uttara, "Oh madam, please forgive me!"

Uttara replied, "I have my father, I shall ask him whether I should accept your apology."

Sirima said, "I will go to your father and apologize to him for what I have done to you."

Uttara explained, "When I said 'my father,' I wasn't referring to the father that brought me into this rebirth. I was referring to my father the Buddha, who has helped me break the cycle of rebirths, who has taught me the Dharma, the Noble Truths."

Sirima responded, "Please take me to see the Buddha!"

Uttara agreed, and arranged for Sirima to offer the meal to the Buddha and his monks on the following day at Uttara's house.

After the meal, the Buddha was told what had happened between Sirima and Uttara. Sirima admitted that she had done wrong to Uttara and begged the Buddha to advise Uttara to forgive her.

The Buddha asked Uttara, “How did you feel when Sirima poured boiling oil on your head?”

Uttara answered, “Lord, because I am grateful to Sirima, I resolved not to lose my temper or have any ill will toward her. I only radiate my lovingkindness toward her.”

The Buddha applauded her, saying, “Well done, well done, Uttara! By not having any ill will you have been able to conquer one who abuses you through hate.”

He added, “By being generous, you should conquer one who is stingy; by speaking truth you should conquer one who tells lies.”

The Buddha advised Uttara to forgive Sirima, and Uttara did so.

Questions:

1. Why was Uttara unhappy with her husband? (he wouldn't allow her to make offerings to the Buddha, see any monks, or hear the Dharma)
2. Why did Sirima feel jealous of Uttara? (she was jealous of Uttara's beauty and jealous that Uttara was married to the rich handsome man)
3. Why did Uttara feel grateful toward Sirima? (because Sirima took care of all the housework so Uttara could hear the Dharma and offer food to the Buddha and the monks and perform other acts of merit)
4. What did Uttara say to herself when she realized Sirima was going to pour hot oil on her? (if I have any ill will toward Sirima, then may the oil burn me, but if I have no ill will toward Sirima, may it not burn me)
5. Was Uttara burned by the oil? (no)
6. What did Uttara do when her assistants beat Sirima? (she told them to stop beating her but rub her with healing ointment instead)

What the Buddha said:

“Akkodhena jine kodhaṃ, asādhuraṃ sādhuṇā jine,
jine kadariyaṃ dānena, saccena alikavādināṃ.”

“Conquer anger by non-anger, conquer evil by good,
conquer the miser with generosity, and conquer the liar with truth.”

Dhammapada 223 (17:3)

Dharma discussion – Ill Will and Lovingkindness:

Sirima attacked her employer, Uttara, in a fit of jealousy.

She suddenly wanted to harm her. This emotion is called ill will.

Ill will is a feeling of hostility, wanting to hurt someone, or hoping that they get hurt or get their feelings hurt.

Ill will often arises along with anger, hatred, jealousy, or vengeance (wanting revenge).

Someone might have ill will toward us if they are jealous of the attention we get from others, or our skill, our talent, our popularity, or how we look.

Imagine how you would react if someone attacked you, hit you or harmed you in some way.

Naturally, we might feel angry, shout at them, stay away from them, and report their behavior to a responsible adult.

We do that to protect ourselves, as a warning, and to show we won't let them abuse us again.

But afterward, when they're no longer with you, how would you feel toward them?

Some of us might feel ill will, and want to hurt them in return or hope they get hurt so they “learn a lesson” and never do it again.

But does ill will help us feel better? No.

It makes us more stressed; we feel tense when we see or even think about the person.

It fills our mind with bad thoughts about the person; these thoughts are not pleasant.

So, we are harming ourselves with this stress long after the person hurt us.

How can we avoid the stressful feeling of ill will?

First, we can calm ourselves by remembering that their bad actions—their negative karma—will punish them automatically; there is no need for us to punish them.

Remember that if we punish them, then we increase our own anger and ill will, and we risk creating negative karma for ourselves. And, they may retaliate and hurt us in return.

So, since there is no need to punish them, we can relax and think about better things.

Next, we can calm our feelings of anger and ill will by remembering that they tried to hurt us because of their own pain, their own suffering.

No one attacks or threatens another when they are happy; it's because they feel so unhappy that they want to harm others.

We can try to feel compassion for their suffering.

If they were happy, peaceful and free from suffering, then they wouldn't want to harm others.

So, we can wish that they be happy, peaceful and free from suffering.

If the person is a friend, brother, sister, someone you don't know, or someone who isn't usually misbehaved, or if they apologize, you could assume—or tell them—that they must have been having a bad day that made them so upset with you.

So you can forgive them, at least in your own mind, and wish that things get better for them. Then, it's easier to be friendly with them again.

Another way to avoid the stressful feeling of ill will is to think of something good about the person—something that they did that was kind or helpful to you.

Then, like Uttara, you can feel grateful for that kindness or help they gave you.

Or, consider that their bad behavior helped you learn to control your anger and ill will, and to practice patience.

In that way, they have helped you become a better person. And you can feel grateful for that.

Finally, we can calm our anger and ill will by practicing lovingkindness.

Like Uttara, we can radiate our lovingkindness to that person as well as to all beings in all directions, like a candle flame radiates light in a dark room, or like the sun radiates light in all directions in dark space.

It's easier to calm our feelings of anger and ill will when we practice lovingkindness meditation and when we practice lovingkindness toward others in our daily life.

An example of lovingkindness meditation is to say aloud and contemplate:

May I be well, happy and peaceful.

May my family and friends be well, happy and peaceful.

May all beings who are angry, hateful, harmful, or jealous be well, happy and peaceful.

May all beings be well, happy and peaceful.