

THE MONKEY BRIDGE (Mahakapi Jataka)



There was once a big, strong monkey who was very kind and also very wise. He was the leader of a huge group of thousands of monkeys, so he was called the king of the monkeys, or the monkey king.

This group of monkeys lived by a river where there was a big mango tree with the sweetest, most tasty mangoes. The monkeys often went to the tree to eat the wonderful mangoes.



One day while eating the fruit with a group of monkeys, the monkey king noticed that one of the branches of the tree hung over the river, so some of the mangoes fell into the water. He thought,

“Someday danger will come upon us because the fruit of this tree is falling into the water.”

He knew that the mangoes might float downstream where someone else might find out how sweet they are and want to have more of them. The monkey king told his group of monkeys to eat or throw down all of the flowers that grow on the branch that spread out over the river, so that no fruits would develop from the flowers that grow on that branch.

But one day, one ripe fruit did fall into the river. It floated all the way down the river to where a king was swimming. Some fishermen had put 2 nets across the river so the king could have his own special pool to swim, in between the nets. The mango got caught in the net.



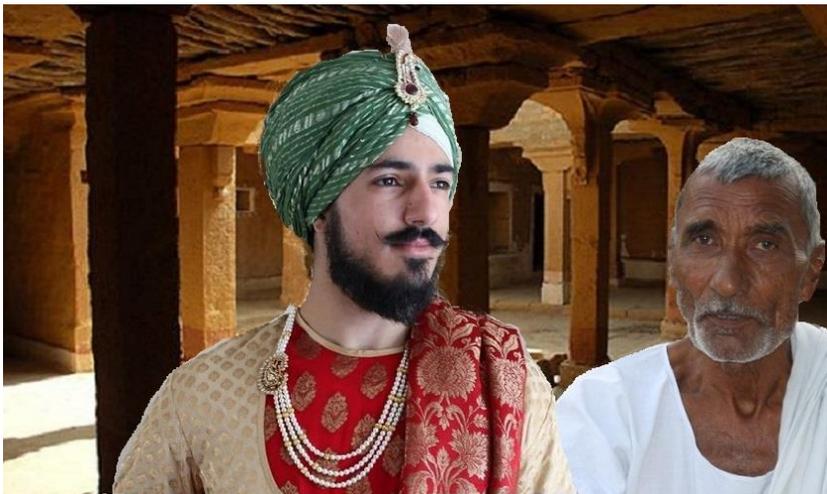
When the king was finished swimming and the fishermen pulled the net out of the river, they found the mango in the net and, not knowing what it was, they showed it to the king.

He asked them, "What is this fruit?"

One of the fishermen said, "We don't know, sire."

The king said, "Well, who would know?"

The fisherman said, "The men who cut wood in the forest. They know all about trees and fruits"



So the king had some woodcutters called to his palace. He asked them,

"What is this fruit?"

One of them said, "It is a mango, sire."

The king cut it with a knife and said, "Here, try it. See what it tastes like"

They did, and they said "It is delicious!"

The king ate some, and gave some to his advisors. He was shocked at how sweet and tasty it was, with a sweetness that seemed to fill his whole body. He had never eaten anything like it! He decided he must have more.

He asked the woodcutters where the tree is that made that wonderful fruit. The woodcutters told him that it must have grown on the riverbank near the Himalayan mountains.



The king ordered them to make several rafts for him, a big group of his men, and the woodcutters to paddle up the river so they could find the tree that had dropped that fruit into the water.

As they paddled up the river, the woodcutters looked carefully for a big healthy mango tree with a branch hanging over the water, and finally, after several days of traveling, they found it. One of the woodcutters pointed it out to the king, saying, "Sire, there is the tree."

The king ordered them to stop paddling, and he and his group of men got off the rafts, waded to the riverbank, and admired the big tree and its plentiful fruits. The king ordered his men to arrange some blankets for him to sleep under the tree for the night, and after he had eaten some of the delightfully sweet fruits, he lay down in the bed they had arranged. His men built a warm fire, and at each side of the bed, a man stood guard while the king slept. But his men were tired after the long journey, and they all soon fell asleep after the sun went down.

While they slept, early in the morning just before sunrise the big group of monkeys walked from branch to branch on the mango tree, picking and eating the fruits.

As the sun rose, the king woke up and saw monkeys all over the mango tree. He thought, "They're going to eat all the mangoes!" Shouting to wake up his men, he ordered them,



“Surround these monkeys that eat the mangoes so they can’t escape, and shoot them! Tomorrow we can eat mangoes with monkey meat.”

His men obeyed, surrounding the mango tree with arrows in their bows, ready to shoot the monkeys.



The monkeys ran to the monkey king, saying,

“They are standing around the tree saying they will shoot us! What are we to do?”

They were shaking with fear. The monkey king said, “Don’t worry, I’ll save you.”

He looked across the river, knowing that was their only escape from the king and his men. He thought about how they could get across the river. It was so deep and wide that they couldn’t jump across it.



So he ran way out to the end of a branch that spread out over the river, made a huge jump using all his strength to get across to the other side of the river, and landed on a bush on the riverbank.

He estimated how long his jump was, and then cut a bamboo plant at the base of its stem and stripped off the hard wood so he had a rope-like strip of bamboo fiber.

He saw that it was as long as his jump over the river plus enough length to tie the end to the mango tree, so the monkeys would be able to escape by walking over the river on a rope-like bridge made of the bamboo fiber. He tied one end of the bamboo to a tree on that side of the river, and the other end he tied around his waist. Then he made an enormously long jump back to the other side of the river.



But the bamboo was a bit too short! He hadn't taken into account the length that was tied around his waist. He reached way out and grabbed a tree root. Hanging firmly onto the root, he told the monkeys,

“Go quickly and with good luck, walking over my back and along the bamboo rope to cross over the river.”



The monkeys lined up along the riverbank. One by one, they asked permission to step on his back before quickly walking along his back and then along

the bamboo to get safely to the other side of the river.



One monkey stood near the monkey king, and watched each monkey go across. In a future life as a human, he would be named Devadatta, so we will refer to him in this life also as Devadatta. He had critical thoughts about each monkey who crossed over the monkey king's back.

Seeing a mother carrying her babies as she crossed over, he thought,



“All those babies! Why is she carrying them? They should walk by themselves!”

When she asked permission to cross over, the monkey king welcomed them, saying,

“Hold tight, little ones! Your mother will get you across safely”



Next in line was a monkey who was shy and afraid.

Devadatta was thinking that the shy monkey wasn't important as others, so he should wait until after others go across.

The monkey king looked at the shy monkey with great love and tenderness, and said,

“Don't worry, step on my back and come across, you'll be safe.”

Hundreds of monkeys walked over the monkey king's back, one by one. The monkey king's arms and hands ached and cramped from gripping onto the root, and his back got very sore from the weight of all those monkeys stepping on him.



When a big strong monkey stood next in line, Devadatta thought,

“What a lazy guy! He should be making HIS body into a bridge instead of the king. And he’s so greedy. He needs to stop eating so much.”

But the monkey king lovingly welcomed him to walk on his back to safety.



Devadatta, seeing a very elderly monkey, sneered impatiently and said, “You’re walking too slow. Come on! You’re taking too long.”

Gripping tightly with only one hand on the root, the monkey king held up his hand for the old monkey to steady himself as he stepped on his back, so he slowly and safely got to the other side of the river.

Devadatta couldn't stand the monkey king's kindness to everyone. He was jealous of all the attention the monkey king got from the other monkeys.



He suddenly climbed way up a branch of a tree and looked down on the monkey king's back. He thought,

“This is my chance to get rid of him. Let's see what happens to Mister Nice Guy NOW!”

He jumped down and landed hard on the monkey king's poor aching back.

The monkey king was injured and in terrible pain. Devadatta ran off into the forest.



The king had watched how the monkey king rescued the whole group of monkeys, and thought,

“This animal, not worrying about his own life, brought his whole group to safety. It's not right to kill this king of the monkeys. I will get him and take care of him somehow.”

So his men gently bathed the monkey king to clean and soothe his injuries, put a yellow robe on him, gave him tasty sugar water to drink, put healing oil on his body, and laid him on a comfortable bed.

And then the king spoke to the monkey:

“You made your body into a bridge so the monkeys could safely cross the river. Who are you to them, and who are they to you?”



The monkey king replied,

“Victorious king, I guard the monkeys, I am their chief. When they were afraid of you and your men, I jumped over the river with bamboo around my waist, and holding onto a branch, the monkeys passed over my back and are safe now. I have no fear of pain or

death, I only want them to be happy. A lesson for you, O king, is this: if you want to be a good leader, you must deeply desire the happiness of your whole kingdom, all your people, and you must treat each one of them with loving kindness.”

The monkey king then died of his injuries after he said those words. The king was very sad to see the wise monkey die, and ordered his advisors to respect his body as if he were a human king, with the highest honor.

The men did as they were told, and burned the monkey king’s body in a ceremony as if he was a great human king. They took the ashes and covered the skull in gold, and made them into a shrine where flowers, lamps and incense were then offered in honor of the monkey king at the king’s palace gate. The king honored the shrine for the rest of his life, to remember the great lovingkindness of the monkey king, who put his love into action to save his whole monkey group.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did the king want his men to shoot the monkeys? (They were eating the mangoes and he wanted to have the mangoes)
2. Why did the monkey king have to use his body as a bridge? (the bamboo was a bit too short to reach across the river for the monkeys to go across)

3. What type of thoughts did Devadatta have about the monkeys?
(unkind, critical thoughts)
4. What kind of thoughts did the monkey king have about the monkeys?
(loving and kind thoughts)
5. Why did Devadatta jump on the monkey king's back? (he was
jealous of the attention the monkey king got from the monkeys)
6. Why did the king make a shrine of the monkey king? (to remember
his great loving kindness)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Lovingkindness:

The monkey king taught the human king about lovingkindness, and he was a great example of lovingkindness.

He had so much lovingkindness that he was willing to let his body suffer in pain to let all the monkeys escape to safety.

He had kind, welcoming thoughts toward all of them, not critical thoughts like Devadatta.

What does lovingkindness mean?

When we say “loving,” who do we think of? Those who we love – our family members, our friends, our pets.

That kind of love usually means attachment – love with “we want” attached. We want to be with them, we want to enjoy their company, we want them to love us, we want to feel happy with them. We're attached to them.

But does lovingkindness mean attachment - loving and being kind to someone so they will make us feel happy?

No. It means we have kind thoughts, kind words and kind actions with a wish to make them feel happy.

So, lovingkindness means to be loving - to wish from our hearts for the happiness of others - plus, treating them with kindness.

Lovingkindness is not just for the people we know and love.

We should try to have lovingkindness for all beings – all people, all animals, even insects.

Should we have loving-kindness to *all* people, even those who behave terribly, hurting others or even killing others?

We know we should stay away from people who misbehave, so that we don't end up getting involved in bad behavior.

And it's difficult to love someone who we are afraid of.

But we can have kind thoughts and good wishes for them - that they find happiness and peace without misbehaving.

Having good wishes for them is a way to have lovingkindness for them.

Did Devadatta the monkey have lovingkindness?

Maybe he had lovingkindness to his family and friends, but he had negative thoughts toward others.

Because he was so busy having negative or critical thoughts about them, he couldn't have loving or kind thoughts towards them.

What kind of negative thoughts did he have? He was critical of the mother monkey for the way she took care of her babies, and he was critical of other monkeys for being unimportant, lazy, or slow, or eating too much.

When we notice something that is different or unusual about a person, for example, something about the way they look, talk, dress, act, eat, or laugh, we can think about it in a kind, accepting way.

Or, we can think about it as weird, ugly, stupid, unpopular, gross, or in some other negative way.



When we have negative thoughts, we might unconsciously make a face like this, which probably hurts the person's feelings. Even if we don't make such an extremely unpleasant face, even a little "side-eye" or frown can be insulting.

Asking the person why they are different, for example, "why do you do that?" "why do you wear that?" "why do you like that?" also can be insulting to them.

It may not seem hurtful to you, and maybe you are curious to see what they say, but it shows them that they are different, that they don't fit in, that they are not accepted.

So even our thoughts and questions can show unkindness toward someone, which blocks us from having lovingkindness.

What can we do to avoid having these negative thoughts toward others? It seems like so many people around us judge and criticize others. Our family members might criticize each other, to help each other learn what is acceptable and what's not acceptable.

But we should try not to think negatively about someone just because they are different in some way.

Does thinking that a person is not attractive, not popular, or not cool, make you better? Does it make you more attractive, more popular, or more cool? Of course not.

We uplift ourselves by uplifting others, not by putting them down.

So, if you notice you are having negative thoughts about someone, try to turn them into positive, kind thoughts: notice something good about the person, or wish that they be peaceful and happy, or that something really nice happens to them.

This is how we develop lovingkindness!