

THE FISH AND HIS FRIEND (Maccha Jataka)



A long, long time ago, there was a man who was a wise advisor to a powerful king in India, and this advisor had a very special skill. He could understand what animals were thinking, and he could speak to animals and they would understand him.

One day, the king's advisor traveled up the river in a small boat, slowly paddling along.



He saw the local fishermen who were going out to the river with their nets to catch fish.

They depended on catching fish to feed their families and to sell at the market.

The king's advisor looked deep into the clear river water. He could see many fish swimming around.

One fish looked especially beautiful. He was very colorful, shiny bright blue with purple down the sides. It was surrounded by several other fish, who followed wherever he swam. He appeared to be their leader.



The other fish were always watching the blue fish, and never strayed too far away from him. He seemed to be quite popular!

There was one fish, with many dark spots, who followed especially close to the blue fish.

Everywhere the blue fish swam, the spotted fish followed right behind. His eyes were always looking at the blue fish. When the blue fish swam close to the surface and flipped his body around in the air to dive back down, the spotted fish did exactly the same thing.



The spotted fish was watching the blue fish so much that he didn't pay much attention to any of the other fish around him.

He was fascinated by his friend, the blue fish, who was entertaining and knew so many interesting things.

The blue fish knew where to find the most delicious tiny fish and insect larvae to eat. He led the other fish, his followers, to a place where tall grasses and reeds grew in the shallow water. There the fish hid from each other and played joyfully together.



He showed the other fish some other shallow areas of the river where the frog eggs would hatch into little tadpoles. And he showed his friends where the tadpoles went when they developed legs and began to jump out of the river onto the land.

The parents of the spotted fish warned him it was dangerous to go in the shallow water, where large birds swoop down and grab fish out of the water, and where crocodiles catch fish in their big powerful jaws. But he didn't want to pay attention to their advice; he just wanted to have fun with his friend!



A little further down the river, the fishermen were casting nets into the water.

The blue fish swam down the river and right up toward the net, brave and curious about what it was. The spotted fish was right behind him.



The blue fish noticed that the net seemed somehow strange, not like something that naturally is in the river, so he suddenly swam away from it.

But the spotted fish was daydreaming, wondering where they would go together later.

He was thinking that maybe they would go see the tadpoles. So he didn't notice the danger of the net, and didn't swim away as the blue fish did.

He felt the net rub against his scales, and soon he realized that he was trapped in the net.

The fishermen saw that they had caught some fish in their net, so they pulled it out of the water and onto the shore. One of them saw the spotted fish, pulled him out of the net, and set him on the ground, saying,

“We can cook this one on the coals and eat it.”

He sharpened a stick, preparing to poke it through the fish and roast him over a fire. Then the fishermen went to gather firewood.



The spotted fish couldn't get any water to breathe through his gills. His mouth opened and closed, trying to pull in water that he needed to survive.

He desperately flopped around and tried to flop himself back into the river. He flopped and flopped, but he could not get back to the water. He was in agony.

The king's advisor walked over to where the spotted fish was wriggling and gasping for water. He understood that the fish was communicating – he was saying,

“It's not the fire that scares me or the stick they would poke through me. But it's the thought of my friend! Oh where did my friend go? Where is he? I need to find him! Oh fishermen, free me again, let me go free!”

The advisor thought, “This fish is so miserable because he is blindly loyal to his friend. If he dies here with his agony and desire to find his friend, then he will suffer terribly in his next life. So, I must save him.”

The advisor walked up to one of the fishermen and said,



“Friend, you have never given the king a special fish. Today will you give us a special fish?”

The fishermen replied

“Certainly! Please take any ones you want.”

The advisor picked up the spotted fish in his hands, and said, “This one looks delicious.”



Then the advisor looked into the poor suffering fish’s eyes, and said,

“You are so foolish! If I did not see you, you would have been killed. Your blind loyalty to your friend is making you suffer so much! Don’t get trapped by your attachments!”



The advisor tenderly put the spotted fish back into the river when the fishermen were not looking.

The fish realized how fortunate he was, that the good man saved him.

He thankfully pumped the fresh cool water through his gills and swam deep into the river, happy to be alive.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did the spotted fish like the blue fish so much? (he was fun, entertaining, and knew many interesting things)
2. What did the spotted fish's parents warn him about? (the shallow water is too risky, with birds and crocodiles that eat fish)
3. What happened when they got near the net? (the blue fish swam away but the spotted fish got caught in the net)
4. What was he thinking about when he was caught? (where they would go later, maybe to see the tadpoles)
5. What was the spotted fish thinking about when he was gasping for water? (his friend)
6. Why did the advisor ask the fishermen for a fish? (he wanted to save the fish)
7. What would happen in his next life if the spotted fish dies in agony and desire to be with his friend? (he will suffer in his next life)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Blind Loyalty:

The king's advisor told the fish that his blind loyalty to his friend is making him suffer so much.

What is "blind loyalty"?

First, it means being loyal to someone – believing and following what they say, helping them, joining in and supporting whatever they do, being there for them, not abandoning or disappointing them.

Loyalty is often a good thing, such as being loyal to a good friend, brother or sister.

But "blind loyalty" is not a good thing.

It means being so loyal, it's as if you are blind – you can't see anything wrong in what they say or do. It means being too much of a follower.

So you believe them without question, you do what they want without thinking enough about whether it's the right thing to do.

It seems a bit ridiculous – who would behave like that?

Actually, many adults do!

For example, followers of cult leaders, supporters of politicians, and fans of sports stars and music superstars.

People who have blind loyalty think the person is so cool – usually because of the person’s power, talent, beauty, personality or charisma. Do you know what the word “charisma” means? It means being charming, having the ability to influence others, having a persuasive personality.

They admire the person so much that they want to be like them - be part of their group, act or talk like they do, or follow what they do - without considering carefully whether it’s a good idea or not.

Similarly, in the story, the spotted fish followed and imitated what the blue fish.

And what happened to the spotted fish as a result? Big trouble! He got caught.

So, we see that being too much of a follower is dangerous.

Do you think, “I would never be too much of a follower!”

Most of us don’t think so. But many of us, sooner or later, encounter someone who we admire, or who has some influence over us, and we may not realize how much we have become a follower.

Maybe you just want a certain friend to like you, and you don’t notice whether you are becoming too much of a follower.

You do what they like to do, talk or behave a bit the way they do.

You feel tempted or pressured to do something you wouldn’t normally do, or they may dare you to do something.

Has that ever happened to you? Or have you seen someone else do that?

And if their behavior isn’t as good as yours, you might not notice, but your behavior starts to get worse.

What are some ways our behavior could get worse? Using unkind words, being disrespectful or dishonest, showing off, being aggressive or selfish.

The king’s advisor in the story warned the spotted fish not to get trapped, not to get in trouble from his “attachments.”

What are “attachments”? Things we want, things we are attached to.

We get trapped by them when we want them so much that it causes problems.

It happens when you want so much for a friend to like you, you are so concerned about pleasing the friend, that you only think about what the friend wants, and you get careless - you don't use your common sense. Like the spotted fish, you might go somewhere dangerous, or get in trouble because of what your friend wants to do.

Not only kids, but many adults make this mistake!

Could that happen to you?

Were you ever so focused on a friend that you forgot about something else that was important? Or ignored someone else, or hurt their feelings?

Remember that you are extremely lucky to have parents who want you to learn the Dharma, and that your friend may not be so lucky – they may not have learned how to behave with the good values as you have.

So, instead of blindly following a friend into negative behavior or trouble, remember the story of the spotted fish following the blue fish, be mindful of what you are doing, and be aware of the danger of getting trapped by our attachments, and being too much of a follower.