

THE DRUM BEAT (Bherivada Jataka)

Once there was a man who was a drummer in a small village. He heard that soon there would be a big festival in the city, and he wanted to play his drum at the festival, hoping he could make some money. He decided to go to the festival with his son, who was learning to play the drum, so they could play their drums together.



They got up early in the morning, and walked for hours on a long road through a forest, until finally they arrived in the city.



There was so much to see at the festival! There was a big crowd of people from all the surrounding villages dressed in colorful clothes. People were selling all kinds of foods and sweets. There were small and large groups of talented drummers and other musicians.



The father and son joined with some other men and played their drums.

The people enjoyed the father and son playing their drums. Some even danced to their drumming. Many people gave them money in appreciation.

After they made a lot of money, the father said,

“Let’s look around the festival for little while, and then we must walk home soon so we won’t have to walk in the dark. But don’t wander away! Stay near me and don’t lose sight of me. It’s easy to get lost here with all these people. But if you do get lost, meet me where we were playing the drums.”



The son agreed, and they walked around together. They saw a man performing with snakes. They also saw men performing stunts on horses. That was exciting!

While his father was talking to some men, the boy saw an elephant. He had never seen an elephant before! He really wanted to go see it. It was boring just standing around with the men, so he started walking toward the elephant, while carefully keeping his father in sight.



He got close enough to see the elephant clearly. But then, its owner started walking away with the elephant.

The boy wanted to watch the elephant - it was so interesting! He slowly walked along with the elephant. Soon he couldn't see his father anymore, but he thought, “I know where he is, I’ll find him again.”

He fed the elephant a banana. It

was thrilling when the elephant raised his trunk and trumpeted! He wanted to watch the elephant's every move.

After a while the elephant's owner led it outside the city to go back home. The boy raced back to where he last saw his father.

But his father wasn't there. He went to where they had been playing drums earlier, and the father wasn't there either. He started to feel bad that he had wandered away, disobeying his father. Soon he began to panic, worrying that he had made his father upset. Where was he? He frantically walked around looking everywhere. He worried that it would be getting dark soon and they had a long walk home. Had his father started walking home already? The boy wondered whether he should start walking down the road. His anxiety grew more and more by the minute. His mouth dry with fear and his heart thumping wildly in his chest, he walked all around the festival area searching and searching.

Finally, he found his father. With a very worried look on his face, his father said,



“Son, why did you walk away? I waited for you for a long time where we had played the drums and you didn't meet me there.”

The boy wanted to explain, “I saw an elephant and I wanted to see him up close, and I even got to feed him.”

But he didn't want to just give excuses. He had made his father worried and upset. He felt ashamed that he didn't follow his father's directions. He

should have at least told his father that he wanted to see the elephant. So he just said humbly,

“I’m sorry, Dad.”

The father said, “It’s past time to start walking back home. It’s getting late, and soon it will be getting dark.”

They had to walk a long way back through the forest. The father warned,

“Watch out for robbers. They could be hiding behind the bushes and suddenly run out and catch us and steal all our money.”

The son was thinking, “Oh Dad, you’re always worried.” But he didn’t want to say anything disrespectful. The father said,

“Many people have been robbed when they walk down this road.”

The son didn’t want to think about that. He started playing his drum. He had learned new rhythms to play on the drum, and he wanted to play them faster. He loved his new talent, and it was so much fun to play fast and loud!

His father said, “Son. Son! Calm down. Don’t beat the drum so fast and loud.”



The son said, “But why? I want to play it like this.”

He felt brave with his wild drum playing. He thought that he could protect himself and his father from the robbers better if he beat loudly on his drum.

The father said,

“Don’t do it like that. Just beat the drum here and there, occasionally, as if some great king were passing by. Then the robbers will think we are a big group protecting a king and they won’t attack us.”

The son said, “But it’s boring to play slowly.”

His father was disappointed hearing his son disrespecting his advice. So he was silent. The son slowed down his drum playing for a little while, and then started playing faster and faster.

He thought, “Robbers would be more afraid of a powerful confident drummer, so I’ll beat my drum really loud and fast so they’ll stay away.” Ignoring his father’s advice, he beat the drum furiously, imagining anyone on the path will be scared away by the loud pounding on the drum.

Far up the road, a gang of robbers was waiting. They heard the pounding of a drum coming down the road. They thought,

“Here comes another big group of people with drums – we better hide and leave them alone.”

But as the drumming came closer, the robbers listened to the fast, loud beat. One of them said,



“This sounds like a person who is scared, like a frightened little dog barks loud and fast when he is scared.”

Another robber agreed and said,

“With such a frightened drummer – that’s no king or big group coming. Let’s take a look.”

Staying out of sight, the robbers went down the road closer to the sound and hid behind some trees and brush. Peeking out from behind the trees, they saw the father and son with their drums alone on the road. The robbers rushed out from behind the trees and pushed the father down on the ground. They hit him and grabbed his bag, robbing him of all the money he had earned at the festival.

After they ran away, the father said, "With your constant drumming you have lost all our hard-earned money! You shouldn't overdo things. By drumming too much, we lost what our drumming had earned."

He and his son trudged home, feeling very disappointed.

Questions:

1. What did the boy do that was disobedient to his father's instructions while they were at the festival? (he wandered away from his father)
2. What distracted him that tempted him to wander away? (the elephant)
3. When they were walking home, how did the boy disobey his father? (he played the drum loud and fast)
4. How did the father instruct him he should play it to prevent robbers from attacking? (slow, like when a king is coming)
5. How did the son think the drums should be played to scare off the robbers? (loud and fast)
6. Why didn't the son just follow his father's advice? (he enjoyed drumming loud and fast, and thought that was the best way to scare away the robbers)

DHARMA DISCUSSION - Following instructions and advice:

Did the son in the story seem to be a generally a disobedient, disrespectful person? No, he seemed to care about how his father might feel, and he worried about upsetting or disrespecting his father.

But he did end up disobeying his father – his father told him to stay close to and keep him in sight, and not to wander away, and he didn't follow those instructions.

Why did he disobey? Because of the elephant – it was so interesting that he either forgot what his father had said, or maybe he had made excuses to himself, like "I'll watch it for only a moment," "I'll follow it only for a little while," or "My father is busy talking and won't go anywhere."

And he disobeyed his father's instructions about how to play the drum while they were walking home.

Why did that happen? Did he just not care about what his father said?

No, he really loved playing what he learned, and he thought playing fast and loud made him feel brave and confident.

And he thought he knew better than his father what would scare away robbers.

Has it ever happened to you, that you wandered away from your parents?

Did you ever intend to do what a parent told you to do, but you got distracted and forgot?

Did you ever disobey your parent or teacher, while you thought of some excuse like "I'll do it later," or "my parents won't notice" or "I'll just do this for a little while longer"?

Did you get in trouble or did your parent get upset?

Sometimes we are enjoying something and we think we can just follow directions later.

But like we learned in the story, that can lead to trouble.

We may cause big problems for ourselves and others when we forget to follow directions or when we think we'll just do it later.

How can we avoid forgetting?

By practicing mindfulness more often, we become more aware of what we are doing and thinking, and of what we are supposed to be doing.

Sometimes we're given instructions and we don't *want* to follow them,

We have our own idea that we think is better.

Have you ever ignored your parent's advice, thinking that you know better than your parent, like the boy in the story?

Sometimes, advice to do something differently can seem like criticism.

We might feel proud of the way we do it, or we feel like we are very talented or knowledgeable about it and we don't like to hear criticism.

How do you feel when someone tells you “Don’t do it like that, do it like this”?

Maybe it depends on who is telling you.

How would you feel if a teacher tells you? Or a parent?

Would you feel differently if a friend, or sister or brother tells you instead of a teacher or parent?

Whether or not we have talent or expertise, we all like to be right, we like to show others that we know what we’re doing.

So it’s not pleasant to hear criticism, to hear that we are doing something all wrong.

But if we don’t listen to advice or criticism, sooner or later we end up with problems or embarrassment from not doing something correctly.

What if you are sure you know how to do something but someone tells you to do it differently. How would you respond?

Should you say “I know how to do it” and ignore their advice?

At least you should listen respectfully. Be open to it, and appreciate it, even if it seems like criticism.

You might learn something very valuable!

You may learn something new, or a different perspective.

The other person might know better than you do, or may show you another way to do something, or how to avoid problems or mistakes.

Then maybe you can share your ideas.

Exchanging ideas is much more valuable than insisting on your own idea.

Collaborating and exchanging information is often better than competing, trying to prove you know better.

So we should be grateful to the person who gives us advice or constructive criticism, even if we didn’t want it.

How would you respond to these situations?

1. Your friend looks at your homework and says that you did not follow the directions, and that you are going to get a bad grade on it.
 - a. You tell your friend she didn’t understand the directions.
 - b. You look at the directions again and make sure the homework is done correctly.

- c. You tell her that you already read the directions and you did it correctly.
- d. You look at the directions again, make sure the homework is done correctly, and thank your friend.

2. Your mother says you are not dressed warmly enough, that it will be colder outside later.

- a. You put on a jacket.
- b. You tell her that you will be warm enough.
- c. You tell her, "you always say that."
- d. You thank her and put on a jacket.

3. Your art teacher advises you to put more details on your art project.

- a. You say "But this is the way I want do it."
- b. You say "But no one else put details on theirs."
- c. You ask her what details to put in, and follow her advice.
- d. You start a new art project.

4. A friend says that you didn't explain clearly enough.

- a. You explain with more detail.
- b. You ask, "what do you mean?"
- c. You tell him he didn't listen carefully.
- d. You tell your friend to listen, and then you repeat what you said before.

5. An older teammate says you are not performing well for the team.

- a. You say, "I'll try harder next time."
- b. You ask "What can I do to improve?" and then follow his advice.
- c. You point out the mistakes of other teammates.
- d. You give an excuse why your performance was not so good.

Answers: 1 d , 2 d , 3 c , 4 a , 5 b