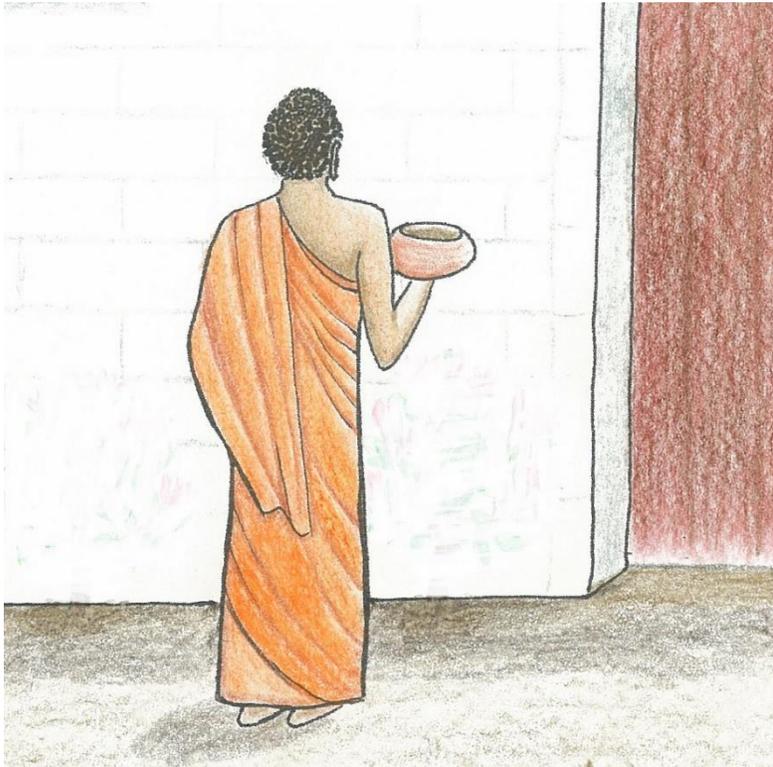


Lesson 6 - ATTACHMENT – Becoming a Renunciant

Siddhartha, having left the palace and his life as a prince, was now a renunciant, one who has given up the household life to live without family, home or wealth, to seek enlightenment, the end of suffering. And now had to find a way to get food to survive. Wearing monk's robes, he walked to the city of Rajagaha (also known as Rajagriha) in the morning.



He went up to some houses in the city and stood at the door silently, holding his bowl. Seeing his empty bowl, people understood what he needed, and offered him food by putting it in his bowl.

King Bimbisara, the king of the Magadha kingdom, looked out from his palace and saw Siddhartha walking in the city. He said to the people around him,

“Look, sirs, how handsome is that man,

how noble, how pure and perfect is his conduct. With his eyes looking down and mindful, looking only a few feet in front of him, he is not from any poor family. Send the royal messengers at once to follow the path that monk takes.”

Messengers from the palace were sent out to follow Siddhartha. They saw him wander from house to house. They noticed that he didn't look around, distracted by his surroundings and whatever made noise, as most people do. Instead, he seemed to be controlling his mind, being mindful only of where he was going, looking directly in front of him. They saw that as soon as his begging bowl was full, he walked away from the town to a nearby mountain where he sat alone in a cave on the mountain to eat.

He had received food from several families, so as Siddhartha looked in his bowl, he saw that different kinds of food were all jumbled together in the bowl. This looked strange and unpleasant to him. At his palace, he always had the best foods served to him neatly on plates. When he tasted the mixed-up food in his bowl, he

didn't like it at all; it was repulsive to him. He felt sick and didn't want to continue eating it.

He thought, "I am a renunciant, which means I must eat the food that people offer me. Why am I so repulsed? What is the meaning of this repulsion?"

He thought about why he was disgusted with the food. The food was not stale; it was healthy, fresh food. He knew his disgust was only in his mind - his mind was disturbed and disgusted because he was attached to the food at his palace. As a renunciant, he had to get rid of his attachments – his desires, preferences and expectations. Once he understood that his attachments were disturbing his mind, he could eat the food with contentment.

The king's messengers returned and told King Bimbisara, who decided to immediately meet personally with the noble looking man who was begging for food. He went out in his carriage and his driver quickly took him to the mountain. When they went up the mountain as far as the horses could go, the king got out of his carriage and walked up the mountain to where Siddhartha was sitting. The king greeted him and asked whether he was in good health and then said,

"You are quite young, a youth in the first phase of life. You have the good looks of a man from a noble warrior family, fit to lead the best army, to lead troops of elephants. I offer you a fortune of wealth; please take it. And tell me who your family is."

Anyone would be thrilled with this extremely generous offer of wealth from a king!

Siddhartha, explaining where he was from, replied, "There is a wealthy country, sir, in the foothills of the Himalaya Mountains, where a people known as the Kosalans live, of the Sakya clan. But I have not left the household life to seek pleasures of the senses. Seeing the dangers in them, I left to get away from them, renouncing them. That is my heart's desire."

The king understood, and returned to his palace. Siddhartha went in search of a great master who could instruct him in meditation and teach him the way to end suffering, old age and death. He went to the famous teacher Alara Kalama, and said,

"Friend Kalama, I want to lead the holy life in Dharma and discipline."

Alara Kalama said, "Venerable one, you may stay here. This teaching I give is such that that in a short time a wise man can realize through direct experience what his own teacher knows."

Siddhartha learned his teachings. He asked Alara Kalama what he had experienced through direct knowledge with this teaching. Alara Kalama told him that the deepest level of meditation he attained was a direct experience of nothingness.

Siddhartha knew that he as well as his teacher had faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and understanding, which are necessary for meditation, so he was determined to practice the teachings to reach the same level as his teacher. When he meditated according to the teachings, after a while he had direct experience of nothingness. He then asked Alara Kalama about the experience of nothingness, and said,

“I, too, friend, have reached this level, myself realizing it through direct knowledge.”

Alara Kalama said, “We are fortunate, friend, we are indeed fortunate, to have met each other to be friends in the holy life. The teaching that I have realized, you also have realized through direct knowledge. So you know the teaching that I know, I know the teaching that you know. We are the same. Come, friend, let us now lead this community of students together.”

The great master Alara Kalama had given his student Siddhartha the highest honor of inviting him as an equal or partner to teach his students. And Siddhartha could live comfortably as a highly respected teacher of many students together with this great master. This would be the dream of almost any renunciant!

But Siddhartha thought, “His teachings do not lead to detachment, purity, peace, enlightenment, Nirvana. It only leads to nothingness.” He wasn’t satisfied with that teaching. So, he left Alara Kalama to find another teacher who could help him to find the deepest peace.

He went to the very famous teacher Uddaka Ramaputra, and said to him, “Friend, I want to lead the holy life in the Dharma and discipline.”

Uddaka Ramaputra invited him to stay there and learn his system of meditation.

Siddhartha soon learned his teachings and then practiced them. In his meditation he had an experience that was deeper than nothingness, called neither perception nor non-perception. He then asked Uddaka Ramaputra about what he had experienced through direct knowledge with this teaching.

Siddhartha said, “I, too, friend, have reached this level, myself realizing it through direct knowledge.”

Uddaka Ramaputra was pleased that Siddhartha had mastered his teachings and realized the same deep level of meditation. So he invited Siddhartha to take over as the leader and teacher of his whole community of students.

This was the highest honor, even higher than teaching together with this famous meditation master. Almost any meditator would want to stay there and lead such an excellent group of students.

But Siddhartha realized that the technique he taught did not lead to detachment, purity, peace, enlightenment, Nirvana. It only led to the experience of neither perception nor non-perception. He was not satisfied with the teachings, so he left Uddaka Ramaputra's community to find what leads to true purity and the deepest peace.

He wandered around the kingdom of Magadha and when he arrived at a place near Uruvela, he saw a beautiful forest by a river with clear water, near a village where the villagers might give him food. He thought it would be a good place to meditate, so he decided to stay there.

But he knew that living in the forest or jungle alone is not easy. Most people don't want to be alone in the wild. He thought, "A monk could go crazy if he has no ability to meditate, or if his mind is impure with greed, hatred, anger, desires for pleasure or fame, laziness, stress, arrogance, or fear." He knew that he didn't have those impurities, so he felt peaceful being alone in the forest.

But he dared himself to stay in places that other people might find frightening, and wondered if he would be scared. Sometimes a deer or peacock would make a noise nearby, and sometimes the wind would rustle the leaves. Was it a snake? A tiger? A leopard? A scorpion? Any of those could kill him.

When he heard those sounds, he started to think, "I am getting scared." But then he thought, "Why am I always expecting to get scared? Why not control my fear and just not react when fear starts to arise?"

So, if he was walking and fear started to arise, he just kept walking and didn't stop until he had calmed his mind of all fear. If he was standing, sitting or lying down when fear started to arise, he just stayed in the same position and didn't move until he calmed his mind of all fear. In that way, he didn't let fear take over his mind.

Questions:

1. Why didn't Siddhartha like the food the people put in his bowl? (it was mixed up, jumbled together in his bowl)

2. What was disturbing his mind, that made him think the food in his bowl was disgusting? (his attachment to the food at his palace)
3. What did King Bimbisara offer Siddhartha? (a fortune of wealth, money)
4. Was Siddhartha attached to wealth? (no)
5. Why did Siddhartha leave his teachers Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputra? (their teachings didn't lead to enlightenment)
6. How did Siddhartha control his fear when he heard noises in the forest? (he didn't react but kept doing whatever he was doing – walking, standing, sitting or lying down)

What the Buddha said:

“Ratiya jayati soko, ratiya jayati bhayam, ratiya vippamuttassa, natthi soko kuto bhayam?”

“From attachment comes grief, from attachment comes fear. For one who is wholly free from attachment, there is no grief; how can there be fear?”

Dhammapada 214 (16:6)

Discussion – Attachment:

When Siddhartha was given food that he didn't like, what did he do?

He didn't throw it away.

Rather than being spoiled by the food he had at his palace, he learned not to be choosy but to be content with eating whatever people put in his bowl.

He gave up his attachment to the tasty food at the palace that was served neatly on separate plates.

What other nice things did he have - that he was attached to - that he gave up?

He gave up his attachment to a comfortable life in the palace with his family.

He gave up attachments to everything he owned, including his horses.

He could have had an easy, pleasant life as a teacher of Alara Kalama's students or Uddaka Ramaputra's students. Many monks and renunciants would have become attached to living there as a well-respected, popular teacher.

But Siddhartha didn't get attached to it, and left to live alone in the jungle.

What do we mean by having “attachments” to something?

Wanting to have - and wanting to keep - the things, experiences, and activities that we like.

Do you have attachments? Of course. We all have many attachments – we are attached to our toys and things, our homes, our favorite foods, our favorite sports, hobbies and games.

Siddhartha, as a renunciant, had to give up his attachments so he doesn't get distracted by them, so he could stay focused on his goal, to find the way to enlightenment, the end of suffering.

We are not renunciants, so we don't have to give up our attachments.

But what happens if we have too many strong attachments?

If we're too attached to things, then we get very upset or angry when something unexpected happens – if something gets lost, broken, damaged, if we can't do our favorite activities.

And, if we're too attached to getting new things, then we're not content with what we have.

We always want something else, because we get bored with what we have.

We want something more, or something else, something that others have, or something better, bigger, or newer than what we have.

It's like an addiction - we are never satisfied for long. We get something nice, and then we want something else that goes with it, and another one, and then a newer one, and then something that our friend has, and so on.

So, what happens when we have too many strong attachments?

We are more often dissatisfied, disappointed, angry, unhappy, or stressed.

We are more peaceful when we're content with what we have, and when we are open to changes without too many expectations, without always insisting on what we want.

We can make our lives more peaceful by reducing our attachments.

Can you think of some ways to reduce attachments and be more content?

Remember that contentment with what you have leads to more happiness than having many attachments and always wanting more.

Remember to be open-minded rather than being too choosy, insisting on getting whatever you want, insisting on having too many things.

Remember that everything is impermanent and always changing, so we don't get too upset when things don't go exactly as you want them to go, when we lose something, or don't have it anymore.

Activities:

1. Make a list or a picture of all the people, things, and activities that you like the most – that you are most attached to. This helps us be aware of our attachments.
2. Or, with several people sitting in a circle, throw a ball or bean bag to another person as you call out something you are attached to – a person, object, activity, event, or place that you really like. The person who catches it calls out something he is attached to as he tosses the ball or beanbag to the next person. Keep going until every person has caught several tosses.