

## **Lesson 24 – BLAME – The Story of Sundari**

Very often during his life, the Buddha lived and taught at Jetāvana Monastery in the town of Sāvatti (also known as Sravasti), the capital of the Kosala kingdom near the Himalayan mountains. The people of Sāvatti showed their great devotion to the Buddha and his monks by providing them with plenty of good food, new robes, medicines, and ample housing at the monastery.

Also staying in Sāvatti were some wandering ascetics who were not so well cared-for. They appeared to be holy people, dressing in rags and surviving on offerings of food, but they were not making much effort to develop virtues and purify their minds. They didn't receive much food or other offerings from the people of Sāvatti. They felt that the people had forgotten about them ever since the Buddha and his monks had arrived in town. They felt very jealous and couldn't stand all the attention and respect the Buddha and his monks were getting. Among those ascetics was a wandering young lady ascetic called Sundari, who was very beautiful.

One day, one of the ascetics said to her, "Sister, will you do a favor for us, your relatives?" Although they weren't really relatives, they wanted to express their close connection to her to make her feel important.

She answered, "What would you like me to do? What can I do for you? I would do anything for my relatives, even give up my life for you."

They said, "Then sister, visit Jetāvana Monastery regularly."

She agreed. She knew what they wanted her to do. She must visit the monastery regularly at night as if she was privately visiting with the Buddha, like a secret girlfriend. That would ruin his reputation, because monks aren't allowed to have girlfriends. The people of Sāvatti would be so disgusted with the Buddha that they would stop making offerings to him and his monks. And then the people would make their offerings to the ascetics instead. It seemed like a great plan!

Sundari then walked to Jetāvana Monastery in the evening, when the people were leaving the monastery to go home. They thought it was unusual for a lady to go alone to the monastery after the program was over. After she passed them, she went back to the ascetics' campsite. Early in the morning, when the people were coming to see the Buddha, she left the campsite and was seen walking out from the monastery.

After a few days, when many people had seen her going to the monastery in the evening and leaving in the morning, the ascetics paid someone to kill her and bury her body in a ditch at the monastery. They did that so people would think that the Buddha or his monks had killed her and hidden the body to try to prevent others from finding out that he had a girlfriend. That would make the Buddha and his monks look really, really bad!

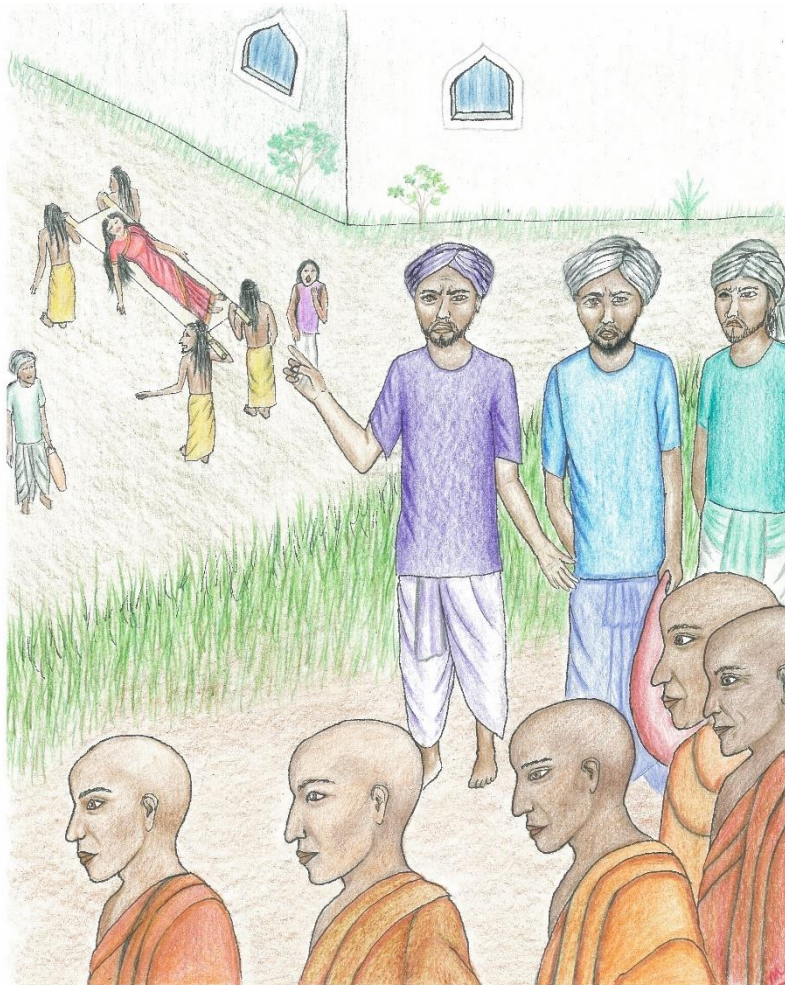
The ascetics went to King Pasenadi, the king of Kosala, and reported to him, “Great king, the wanderer nun Sundari cannot be found.”

The king asked, “Where do you suspect she is?”

They replied, “In Jetāvana Monastery, great king.”

“Then search Jetāvana Monastery,” the king said, giving them permission to search there.

The ascetics went to the monastery and pretended to look for her, searching all around. Then they dug her body up out of the hole in the ditch where she had been buried. They put her body on a stretcher and carried her through the town of Sāvattthi, walking through every street, shouting,



“Look at what the monks, the sons of the Sakyans, have done! These sons of the Sakyans are shameless, bold wicked liars who do evil! They claim to practice the Dharma with purity, to speak truth, to be virtuous and good - but they are not monks, they are not holy men! Where are the monk and holy man in them? They are far from being monks and holy men! How can they do this to her and then kill her?”

The people of Sāvattthi were horrified and angry. When they saw the monks, they repeated the words of the ascetics, shouting,

“These sons of the Sakyans are shameless, bold wicked liars who do evil!”

They shouted insults and rude, horrible names at them. They aggressively humiliated the monks with the worst words possible.

The monks calmly and silently continued walking, and then reported to the Buddha what was happening. The Buddha said,

“Monks, this uproar won’t last long. It will only last seven days. At the end of seven days, it will disappear. When people insult monks like that, say this: ‘The liar goes to the hell-world, and so does a person who does evil and says ‘I didn’t do it.’ Both of them have this result in the next life, as men whose acts are evil.’”

When the monks went out in the town again, the people insulted them again. The monks calmly told them what the Buddha taught them to say:

‘The liar goes to the hell-world, and so does a person who does evil and says ‘I didn’t do it.’ Both of them have this result in the next life, as men whose acts are evil.’”

When the people heard that, they reasoned that since the monks believed that when they died, they immediately would go to a hell-world if they lied or falsely claimed they didn’t do anything wrong, then they wouldn’t do that - they wouldn’t lie or deny that they did wrong. They wouldn’t do anything that would result in going to a hell-world after striving so hard in the disciplined life of a Buddhist monk seeking enlightenment. So, they concluded that the Buddha and his monks must not have killed Sundari.

They said to one another, “These monks, these sons of the Sakyans, did not do it. It was not done by them. They swear to that.”

The people talked among each other over the next few days, and sure enough, after seven days, the accusations, insults and shouting stopped.

Several monks went to the Buddha and said, “It’s wonderful, Lord. It’s marvelous how well that was predicted by the Blessed One!”

The Buddha then advised them, “People who are careless provoke others with words that are like darts thrown at an elephant in battle. But when harsh words are spoken to a monk, let him just endure them with an undisturbed mind.”

Later, the king investigated what happened, and the ascetics confessed their crime of hiring someone to murder Sundari. The Buddha and his monks were then honored even more than before, and from that time on, were well taken care of by the people of Sāvatti.

### *Questions:*

1. Why were the ascetics envious of the Buddha and his monks? (the Buddha and his monks were getting plenty of good food, robes, medicines, and housing, and the ascetics were not getting much from the people of Sāvatti)

2. Why did the ascetics ask Sundari to regularly visit Jetāvana Monastery? (so the people would think that she was secretly visiting the Buddha at night)
3. Why did they have her killed? (so it would appear as if the Buddha or his monks killed her and hid the body to prevent others from finding out he had a girlfriend)
4. What did the monks do while the people were shouting terrible things about them? (they calmly and silently continued walking)
5. What did the monks say would happen to them if they lied or denied that they did an evil act? (they would go to a hell-world in their next life)
6. How long did the Buddha say the people would continue blaming and insulting the monks? (seven days)

*What the Buddha said:*

**“Netam ajjatanāmiva, nindanti tuṅhimāsinam, nindanti bahubhāṇinam, mitabhāṇinampi nindanti, natthi loke anindito.”**

**“Indeed, this is an ancient practice, not one only of today: they blame those who remain silent, they blame those who speak much, they blame those who speak in moderation. There is none in this world who is not blamed.”**

Dhammapada 227 (17:7)

*Dharma Discussion – Blame:*

In a previous chapter, we discussed admitting mistakes, being honest and apologizing when someone is upset about a mistake you made, even if it was unintentional or not your fault.

But what do you do when someone blames you for something you didn’t do?

The wandering ascetics, and then the townspeople, blamed the Buddha and his monks for killing Sundari. The whole town was against them, believing they were murderers.

Imagine how the monks felt! They probably felt terrible that their dear master was being accused of such a horrible crime. It would be so embarrassing to be shouted at, insulted and called terrible names. And these people used to be their friends and kind, generous supporters!

Did the monks react as they were being shouted at? No, they kept walking, saying nothing. They were probably shocked, and they couldn’t say anything in their defense, because they didn’t know what happened, who killed Sundari. They had no way to prove that they didn’t do it.

So they went to the Buddha for advice.

Did he advise them to just keep quiet and say nothing? No. If they say nothing, what might the people think? They might think the monks are guilty of the crime. Did he advise them to fight back and shout at the people? No. What do you think would happen if they did? Probably more fighting and shouting.

What did he advise them to do? Defend themselves - say something in their defense to show that they didn't do what they were being accused of.

Have you ever been accused of doing something really bad that you didn't do? How did you feel? Maybe you felt humiliated, embarrassed, stressed, frustrated, or angry.

We might worry that if we are being blamed, then others dislike us or think we're a bad or foolish person. So, we might lose our confidence.

Of course, if you are wrongly blamed, you can say you didn't do it, and explain why it wasn't you. If you know who did it, you might have to tell on them.

But sometimes we can't prove that we didn't do what we are accused of.

So, what can we do to calm the bad feelings – the hurt, embarrassment, stress, anger – of being wrongly blamed?

Remember that you're not alone; at some points in our lives we all experience being blamed for something bad that we didn't do.

The Buddha has said that no matter what we do, no matter how good we are, whether we are talkative or quiet, we all get blamed for doing bad things at times. He said there is no one in the world who has not been blamed.

Even the Buddha was blamed for the worst crimes, as we see in this story.

So, being blamed doesn't mean there is something wrong with you.

It could be an honest mistake – maybe the person mistakenly thought you did it. But sometimes it isn't so honest; there's something wrong with the person who is blaming you.

That person may be trying to turn others against you.

In the story, the ascetics were trying to manipulate the townspeople, trying to turn them against the Buddha so the ascetics would get all the attention instead.

Or, the person may be jealous of you, like the ascetics were jealous of the Buddha.

Or maybe the person does the kinds of bad things he is accusing you of doing.

By blaming you, he thinks that no one will notice he does such things.

Maybe the person is trying to upset you so that he can feel power over you.

There are many reasons why others may wrongly blame you.

To calm yourself and avoid losing your confidence, remember the Buddha and his monks being wrongly blamed by the ascetics.

Remember that you are a good person; don't let others' negativity confuse you.

A person who blames you for no reason is creating negative karma. Try to feel compassion for that person, because he is confused by his negative emotions, creating suffering for himself, and try to have good wishes that he overcomes those emotions and his suffering.