



MUCALINDA SHELTERS THE BUDDHA

Lesson 9 - GRATITUDE

Opening chants and meditation.

Question to think about before the story: What do you feel **grateful** (thankful) for in your life?

Story: The First 7 Weeks After Enlightenment

After the Buddha became enlightened, he stayed sitting under the Bodhi Tree for one week. He was feeling the ultimate happiness and peace of enlightenment. He concentrated on the causes and effects (results) of many things. He knew exactly how suffering arises, and how it can end. He knew that everything has a cause, and everything changes, nothing of the world lasts forever. He was very peaceful, he had no disturbing thoughts, and he did not even need to eat.

The second week after his enlightenment, he got up and stood near the Bodhi Tree for seven days, looking at it without moving his eyes, meditating with gratitude to the tree for sheltering him during his enlightenment. The third week, the Buddha became aware that the devas (who are kind shining beings who live in a heaven-world), did not know whether he was completely enlightened. To show them that he was, he created instantly a golden bridge with jewels on it, and he walked on the bridge for one week. The fourth week, the Buddha instantly created a jeweled chamber with a seat in it, near the Bodhi Tree. He meditated in it for one week, understanding the highest wisdom. A halo made of rays of light surrounded him, with blue light the closest around him, then yellow light a little further out, then red light a bit further, then white, then orange, and then a mix of all of the colors.

The fifth week after his enlightenment, the Buddha walked away from the Bodhi Tree and walked to the Ajapāla Banyan Tree, where he sat for seven days in deep peaceful meditation. A Brahmin walked up to him. A brahmin is a person who was respected as a member of the highest caste, which included many priests. The brahmin walked up to the Buddha and greeted him, and then asked, "What is a brahmin, Master Gautama? What things make a person a brahmin?" The Buddha replied, "A brahmin has no evil about him and is not arrogant. He is pure and self-controlled, perfect in knowledge and living a moral life. He does not want to show off." The brahmin thought about what weaknesses he had, bowed to the Buddha and went away.

Then Mara appeared to the Buddha, and said, "You are alone, aren't you in grief? Do you have no friends? Do you want friends?" The Buddha replied, "I have gotten rid of the cause of suffering, so I have no desire, no attachments. I am peaceful in meditation." Mara said, "If you think that anything is yours, there is no escape from me." The Buddha said, "Nothing is mine. There is no 'me' or 'mine.'" Mara was disappointed, and left. His three daughters, Tanha, Rati and Raga, saw their father looking upset. They asked, "Why are you upset? We will bring Gautama to you." So they went to the Buddha, and bowed to him, and said,

“We will serve you.” The Buddha ignored them. They danced and made themselves look very beautiful to tempt him to look at them. But he did not pay any attention to them, so they disappeared.

The sixth week after enlightenment, the Buddha walked to another tree. A big storm came, with big dark clouds, wind and rain. Mucalinda, who is a great royal Naga, a celestial being in the form of a huge snake, came from his celestial world and wrapped his body around the Buddha. Mucalinda coiled his body around the Buddha’s body seven times, and spread the great hoods with his five heads over the Buddha to protect him, thinking, “Let the Buddha not feel any cold, heat, insects, wind, sun or creeping things on his body.” After he protected Buddha from the storm, the sun came out, and Mucalinda unwrapped his coils from the Buddha and changed his form into a brahmin boy, standing in reverence before the Buddha. Thankful for his protection in the storm, Buddha taught him some Dharma, saying “Being alone is happiness for a person who is contented, who has learned and understood the Dharma. Friendliness to everyone in the world is happiness for a person who does not harm any living beings. Detachment from the world is happiness for a person who does not have desires. But to stop thinking about ‘I’ is the greatest happiness of all.”

The seventh week after enlightenment, the Buddha went from the Mucalinda Tree to the Rajayatana Tree and stayed there for seven days, meditating and feeling the peace of enlightenment.

At the end of the seventh week after the Buddha’s enlightenment, two merchants (salesmen), named Tapussa and Bhalluka, heard a message from a relative who had passed away and been born as a deva. The message was for them to go to the Rajayatana Tree, where the newly enlightened Buddha is, and offer him rice cake and honey, and they will be blessed with welfare and happiness. So, they went to the Buddha and bowed, and offered the rice cake and honey. The Buddha thought, “The Buddhas do not accept food into their hands. How shall I accept the rice cakes and honey?” Then the devas of the four directions, who were aware of his thought, brought four crystal bowls, and offered them to the Buddha, who then accepted the rice cake and honey into one of the bowls and ate. Then Tapussa and Bhalluka said, “We go for refuge to the Buddha and to the Dharma. From today may the Buddha consider us as his followers.”

Questions after the story:

1. Why did the Buddha look at the Bodhi Tree for a week without moving his eyes?
2. Why did the Buddha create the golden bridge?
3. What are the colors of the halo light rays that came from the Buddha (the “Buduras”)?
4. Which people and other beings came to the Buddha in the first 7 weeks after he was enlightened?
5. What did the Buddha mean when he said to stop thinking about “I”?
6. How did the Buddha show gratitude to Mucalinda?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

“Gāraṇaṃ ca nivāto ca, santhutṭhī ca kataññutā, kālena dhammasavanaṃ, etaṃ mangalamuttamaṃ.”

“Reverence, humility, contentment, gratitude and listening to the dharma, this is the best way.”
Mahamangala Sutta

Application of the moral(s) in the story to our daily lives:

What does gratitude mean? Being thankful; for example, being thankful to those who helped us, being thankful for the things that we have, being thankful that we are healthy, that we have a nice family, that we have enough food, that we have good teachers. What happens if someone has no gratitude, if he is ungrateful? He does not appreciate the efforts that people make for him, he just expects them to do things for him and give to him. He does not think of how they feel. So he expects to get what he wants, and when he gets it, he only thinks of his own pleasure. When he doesn't get what he wants, he is unhappy. He loses friends by not appreciating what they do for him. An ungrateful person is not thankful for the fortunate things that he has, such as his wealth, his job, his family, his food, his home. He just thinks that he should have them and also have more and better things. So an ungrateful person is selfish, arrogant and often unhappy.

On the other hand, a grateful person notices all the good things he has, and remembers the good things that people have done for him and given to him. These are happy thoughts! When you have thankful thoughts toward others, you are feeling metta (loving-kindness) to them and wishing that they are happy. So, gratitude makes you have happy, kind and wholesome thoughts. Other people like your gratitude toward them, so then you have good friends. Remembering often to be thankful becomes a good habit which keeps you happy.

Sometimes it is easy to forget the good things that we have, when we are thinking about what we don't have. For example, there is a story of a person who was miserable that he had no shoes until he saw someone who had no feet. He did not have gratitude that he had a healthy body that can walk, but only thought about what he didn't have – shoes. The Buddha showed us by his example of looking at the Bodhi Tree to be thankful even for the shade of a tree! And he showed his gratitude to Mucalinda for protecting him from the storm, by giving him something extremely valuable - a Dharma teaching. We can think of so many things in our lives that we are lucky to have or lucky to experience. So, when we find ourselves thinking unhappy thoughts about what we don't have, we can remember to be thankful for what we do have, even the little things.

Activity to reinforce the lesson: Each student writes: “I am grateful for . . .” and writes a list of things, people, events, experiences and circumstances that he or she is grateful for. This list can be kept by the student in his or her room to look at when he is feeling unhappy.

Closing chant: Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā
May all beings have happy minds!