THE TURTLE WHO LOVED TO TALK (Kacchapa Jātaka)

There was once a king who was very talkative. Once he started talking, he wanted to continue talking for a long time. Other people who were around him couldn’t say much because the king was so busy talking and wouldn’t give them a chance. When they started speaking, the king often didn’t listen carefully, and soon changed the subject and started talking about whatever he wanted to talk about.

The king loved to tell long stories. He also loved to make others laugh, so he often told funny stories. He was enjoying the attention from all the people listening to him. He thought the people always wanted to hear all of his stories, because they were listening politely. But, important work wouldn’t get done because they were sitting around him, listening to him talk. And no one dared to interrupt his stories, because they feared upsetting him. So, they couldn’t interrupt even to tell him important messages or to ask him questions that were important for him to answer to take care of responsibilities in the kingdom,

Therefore, many of the king’s family members, friends, ministers and staff, and even visitors to the palace, would get very annoyed.



The king had a very wise adviser who would help the king make important decisions. The adviser often had very important information and advice to give the king, but he had to wait for the king to stop talking for a moment before he could say anything. It was frustrating for the adviser to wait when he had important work to do.

He wanted to teach the king to control his excessive talking. So, the adviser kept waiting for an opportunity, some way to demonstrate to the king that his excessive talking was a problem.

Meanwhile, in a pond in a valley near the king’s palace there lived a turtle. The turtle, like the king, loved to talk. Ever since he was a tiny young turtle, he would talk to other animals all the time. Often, they wished he wouldn’t talk so much. Sometimes he interrupted them to talk when they were busy, trying to sleep, or concentrating on something. Or he talked about things that didn’t interest them. He had long conversations when they really wished he would find something else to do.

They would sometimes act as if they were bored, looking away, munching on grass or slowly walking away from him, to let him know they didn’t want him to talk so much. But the turtle didn’t notice, and just continued talking. If anyone said something that he didn’t like, he always blurted out a loud reply. The other animals didn’t want to upset him or hurt his feelings, but his constant talking was annoying them.



One day, two young wild geese were searching for food near the pond. The turtle greeted them and started a friendly conversation with them. The geese listened to his interesting stories and laughed at his funny comments. Soon they became good friends with him.

But they noticed he had trouble controlling his mouth. He didn’t seem to notice when they wanted to say something, or when they were getting tired of listening to him. He just kept on talking.

So one day, one of the geese said to him, “Hey Turtle Friend, we have a lovely home on that mountain there. It’s in a golden cave! Will you come with us and see it?”



The turtle replied, “Well, you can fly up to the mountain, but how will I get there?”

The geese said, “Oh, we can take you! If only you can keep your mouth shut, and say not a word to anyone!”

The turtle said, “Well yes of course I can do that. Take me along, I’d love to go!”

So they made the turtle hold a long stick in his mouth. Then they each took hold of one end of the stick in their beaks, and they sprang up and flew into the air. The two geese flew side by side, firmly holding the stick in their beaks with the turtle between them, hanging onto the stick with his mouth.

Some children in the village below saw them flying together. They laughed and said, “Look, there are two geese carrying a turtle by a stick!”

The turtle felt angry that they were laughing at him, and wanted to shout back at the children, “Well, so what if my friends carry me, what’s it to you?”



So he opened his mouth to shout, “Well, so wh---“ but...aaaah! When he opened his mouth, he wasn’t holding onto the stick anymore!

The geese flew on with the stick. But the turtle was falling down, down, down, until he landed, crashing down into the king’s courtyard on the hard stone floor.

The people in the palace came running up to the turtle and cried, “A turtle fell in the courtyard and he’s all broken!”



The king and his adviser, hearing their cries, came out into the courtyard to see what happened, and then a whole crowd of people came up to see the injured turtle. They wondered how a turtle suddenly could just fall from the sky into the courtyard.

The king asked his adviser,

“Wise sir, what made this creature fall?”

The adviser thought, “Now is my time! For a long time I have been wishing

to teach the king to control his mouth, and I have been looking for an opportunity to do it.” With his special psychic powers, he knew what had happened to the turtle—that the turtle and geese became friendly, and that the geese must have intended to carry him to the mountains by having him hold a stick in his mouth while they flew with the stick held in their beaks. The turtle must have heard someone speak to him and he wanted to blurt out a reply, and not being able to control himself from speaking, he let go of the stick, fell from the sky and crashed here in the courtyard.



He said to the king, “Oh dear king, they who have too much action with their mouth, that don’t pay attention to their talking, they come to a bad result like this. The turtle felt he must speak when he held a stick to be carried in the air by some geese, so he let go of the stick and fell. And now, mighty king, notice: one must speak wisely, and at the right time. The turtle fell because he didn’t think before he spoke.”

The king thought to himself. “He must be speaking about me and my talking,” so he asked, “Are you speaking about me?”

The adviser replied, “Whether it is you, oh great king, or another, whoever talks without control comes to some misery, some great unhappiness.”

The king thought about what the adviser had taught him, that not controlling his talking will lead to unhappiness. From that day on, he spoke less, and he thought before he spoke, considering whether it’s the right thing to say and the right time to say it, or whether it’s better to wait or not say it at all.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why were people annoyed when the king told stories? (They couldn’t get work done, and they couldn’t speak, give him important messages or ask important questions while he was talking)
2. What were some other animals doing when the turtle wanted to talk? (they were busy, concentrating on something else, or wanted to sleep)
3. Did the turtle notice that they didn’t want him to talk? (no)
4. Before the adviser counseled the king about the turtle, did the king know that others were annoyed with all his talking? (no)
5. Why did the turtle fall? (he opened his mouth to shout at the children who were laughing at him; he didn’t think before he spoke)
6. What did the king learn would happen if he doesn’t control his talking? (it would lead to a bad result, great unhappiness, misery)

WHAT THE BUDDHA SAID:

“One is not wise because one speaks a lot. He who is peaceful, friendly and fearless is called wise.”

Dhammapada 258

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Talking Too Much:

Do you know someone who loves to talk so much that you feel annoyed sometimes?

Have you tried to get them to stop talking so much?

What happens if we shout, criticize them harshly, or insult them for talking too much?

A brother or sister withwhom we often squabble may not seem to care, and other people may not look like they’re upset, but we really don’t know whether—or how much—it hurts them. They might actually feel very hurt.

As a Buddhist, we try to avoid hurting others.

And we might even be able to help them learn better social skills, so they don’t annoy others.

What can we do avoid hurting them, but let them know that talking too much is annoying?

First, remember to have compassion, kindness and patience.

They might not realize that they’re annoying others.

They may have a special circumstance that makes them talk so much, such as autism or hyperactivity, or they may have experienced trauma or some instability or problem in the family that makes them feel the need to talk a lot to get attention. But we shouldn’t ask them about it, as they may not be aware of it, or it may be embarrassing for them.

You can feel grateful that you don’t have that circumstance.

And think about how you can help them learn to take turns talking.

Can you think of some kind ways to let a person know they’re talking too much?

You can look away, not respond, or say “um hmm” and change the subject.

In a kind voice, you can point out when they’re interrupting you.

When they’re talking at the wrong time, you can put your finger at your lips.

Or, say that it’s not the right time to talk, and explain why (because you need to do something, the teacher is talking, etc.).

If you’re busy, you can say, “How about telling me later, I need to do my work first.”

If they’re talking about something that doesn’t interest you, you can ask, “I heard all about that, now can we talk about something else?”

When they’re talking too long, you can ask them to give you a chance to talk, and explain how you feel.

For example, you might say that it’s hard to listen for so long without being able to respond to what they’re saying.

Or you can say, “I’ve been listening to you, now will you listen to me?”

Or, “We need to take turns talking so we both can enjoy the conversation.”

If they’re not responding to those suggestions, then you could ask them to hold a toy or stuffed animal while they’re talking, and then hand it to you when it’s your turn to talk. Then continue taking turns to hold the toy when talking. It helps them to be aware of giving others a chance to talk, and to stop interrupting.

Whenever we notice annoying behavior in others, it’s good for us to pay attention to our own behavior to see if we sometimes do the same thing.

Even if we have a quiet personality, we all occasionally talk without thinking about whether others might be annoyed by our talking.

Maybe we have enjoyed talking with someone so much that we didn’t notice that others were annoyed by our talking loudly or talking in the wrong place or at the wrong time.

For example, maybe we have talked during class or at a temple at a time when we’re supposed to be silent.

Maybe, like the king in the story, we like to tell a long story with all the details that we find interesting, but others get bored or have something important to do and wish we wouldn’t talk so long.



Maybe, like the turtle, we enjoyed having others listen to us, being the center of attention, and we weren’t so interested in listening to others.

Maybe we have blurted out something without thinking first, and then realize that we shouldn’t have said that.

Maybe we sometimes interrupt others who are talking or who are busy, without considering whether they’re ready to listen.

Have you ever been late for something because you were so busy talking?

Have you ever been the last one talking when the teacher is trying to start the class?

We all have done these things sometimes. But we should think about whether they’re becoming a habit that will lead to problems.

We might not notice if it’s becoming a habit until people get very annoyed and clearly let us know it.

Do people often look at you with an angry face, make fun of you, walk away or shout at you because you were talking too much or at the wrong time?

Do you get often scolded for talking when you were supposed to be quiet?

Do your teachers often have to tell you to stop talking?

Although some people may think that being very talkative and loud makes one gain more respect, attention and popularity, it’s actually more likely to make one appear foolish.

Think about it: when a person is much more interested in talking than in listening, the person can’t learn as much.

The Buddha teaches us that a person is not wise because he speaks a lot. This means that talking a lot doesn’t show lots of knowledge or intelligence.

There is an expression by Plato, the famous ancient Greek philosopher, that “empty vessels make the most noise,” which means that those with the least knowledge and wisdom are often the ones who talk the most and the loudest. (A vessel means a kettle or pot. Empty ones rattling against each other make more noise than full ones.)

There is also an ancient Latin proverb that says, “Still waters run deep,” which means: just as calm streams have the deepest water, similarly, people who are quiet and calm have the deepest thoughts and wisdom.

Those who are better listeners, who are good at taking turns talking and listening, are better able to make and keep close friendships.

Everyone wants to be treated fairly, to be heard and to be given an equal chance to talk, and not always be interrupted.

We should try to treat others how we like to be treated.

How can we do that, exactly?

We try to notice when others are busy, or are talking, or are not ready to listen, and then wait to find the right time to talk.

We pay close attention to the person we’re talking to, noticing their reactions, facial expressions and body language—whether they seem impatient, annoyed, uninterested, bored, or uncomfortable with our talking.

What facial expressions or body language might show they feel this way?

Looking away, not making eye contact, frowning, sighing, fidgeting, moving around, stepping away a bit, or not responding to you.

When we try to be more aware of these things, then we learn how to take turns talking and when to stop talking, so others will be more willing to listen and pay attention to us.

What practice in Buddhism do we have that helps us become more aware?

Mindfulness! The more we practice mindfulness, the more we become aware of others and their feelings.