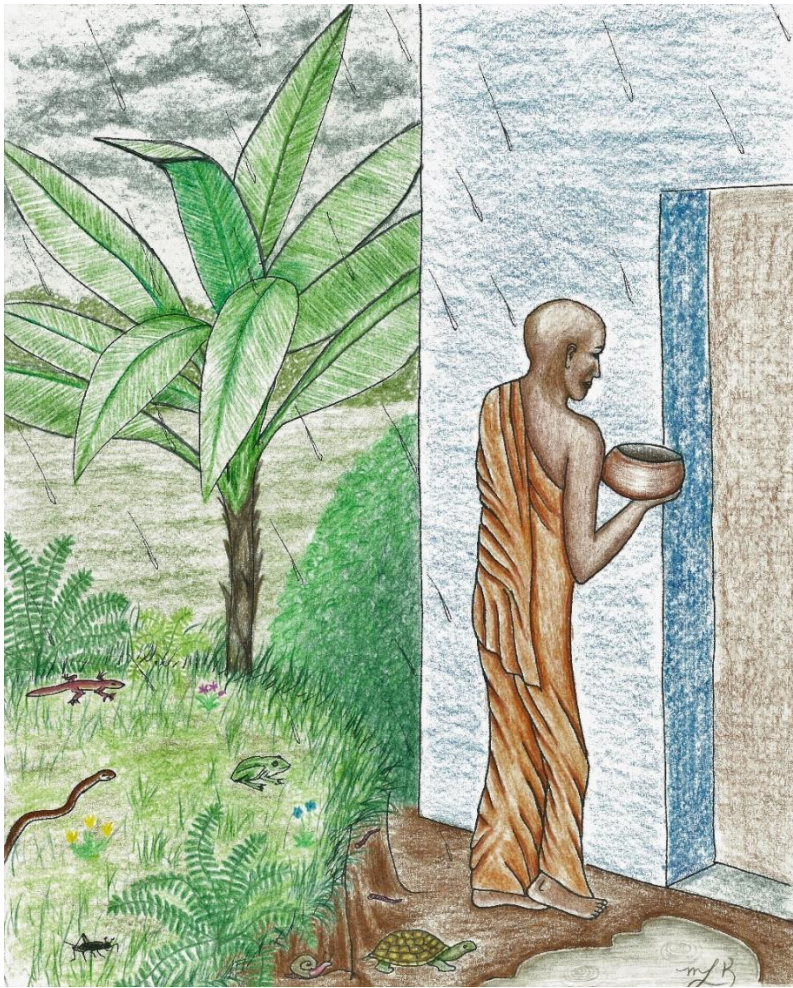


LESSON 18 – LOVING-KINDNESS - The Rainy Season

The number of monks who were students of the Buddha was growing. More and more men wanted to become monks with the Buddha as their teacher. After they heard his teachings and practiced and understood them, the Buddha instructed the monks to go out and teach the Dharma so that many more people could learn the way to enlightenment. This was not just for the benefit of the people, but also for the monks to practice loving-kindness— truly caring about all people and wanting them to be happy and peaceful, and therefore walking very long distances to many towns and villages, camping along the way in uncomfortable conditions, in order to help people learn the Dharma.



The monks traveled in large groups, walking from place to place, from one town or village to the next, during all types of weather—in the winter, summer and rainy season. When they traveled in such large groups during times of rainy weather, they were walking on the soft, soggy, wet ground at the time when the new grass was just starting to grow and the young plants were just sprouting up from the ground. The tender new grasses and plants were trampled crushed, and broken by the many feet stepping on them. Tiny creatures coming out of the ground to enjoy the rain, such as

insects, spiders, frogs, snails, caterpillars and worms, were stepped on. Wide, muddy paths appeared where the monks had walked.

The people in the villages noticed this. They also observed that the students of other holy men stayed in one place during the rainy season and therefore didn't trample the grass and plants and didn't create any muddy paths. The villagers were annoyed at the Buddha's monks and said among each other,

“How can these monks, the sons of the Sakyans, go wandering in all three seasons, trampling down the green grass, injuring plant life and bringing harm to so many little creatures? These other holy men with their mediocre teaching at least stay inside during the rainy season. Even the vultures that make their nests on the tree tops stay in their nests during the rain. But these Sakyan monks go wandering in all three seasons, trampling down the green grass, injuring plant life and bringing harm to many little creatures!”

Some monks heard the villagers complaining. The monks wondered, “What should we do?” They wanted to help the people but they didn’t want to hurt the little creatures. If they stopped traveling, then many people wouldn’t be able to learn the Dharma. Should they rescue the human beings or should they rescue the tiny beings from suffering?

The monks told the Buddha what the villagers were saying. It didn’t surprise the Buddha at all. He knew everything that was happening. But, as usual for him, he waited until someone told him about a problem so that he could give a solution to the problem along with a Dharma teaching that people would always remember.

The Buddha felt intense loving-kindness toward all life, including the small creatures and tender plants that were being trampled in the mud, and he taught his students also to develop that great loving-kindness for all and never to harm any being. Yet, it was important for the monks to reach out to as many people as possible so they could hear the Dharma and have an opportunity to make merit by their offerings to the monks.

However, now that more people had heard of the Buddha, there was another problem: they wanted to go and see him and his monks, and it was difficult for them to find the monks during their travels. He had a solution to all these problems: if the monks stayed in one place during the rainy season, then people easily could find them at least during that season, and there wouldn’t be huge groups of people trampling the soft ground.

So, he announced, “Monks, I allow you to stay in one place during the rainy season.”

From that time onward, the monks stayed in one place during the rainy season where the people could visit them, hear them teach the Dharma, and provide them food and medicine.

The Buddha set a rule for the monks that they were to stay in retreat—that is, stay at one location to focus on meditation and learning his teachings—during the entire three months of the rainy season and if they must leave for an unusual situation, such as to visit someone who is ill, they must return within seven days.

There was a group of thirty monks who started traveling to visit the Buddha where he was staying at Savatthi. On the way, the rainy season started, so

according to the new rule, they had to stop and stay in retreat. They stayed at a place called Saketa which was rather close to Savatthi, but too far away to see him within seven days. Finally, after the end of the rainy season, they started to travel, but the road was wet and full of big puddles. Their robes became soaking wet and muddy, and they became uncomfortable and tired as they walked long distances day after day in the same wet robes. When they finally reached the Buddha at Savatthi, he asked them,

“Did you have any difficulties? Did you get enough food? Did you spend your retreat in peace, with friendly discussion without quarreling?”

The monks responded, “We had no difficulties, we got enough food, we did not quarrel. But we could not reach Savatthi in time to be with you during the rainy season, so we stayed in Saketa. You were so close, but we couldn’t see you. We were anxious to see you, so we traveled here quickly, and now we are tired and wet.”

The Buddha felt great compassion for them. He was pleased that they obeyed his rules and were so disciplined. So, he announced that all monks who obeyed his rules and stayed in one place during the rainy season could accept new robes at the end of the rainy season. He gave the group of thirty monks several pieces of fabric which had been donated to him, and told the monks to make a new robe with those pieces and to choose which monk among them should receive it.

The robes were made from ten pieces of fabric stitched together, because one large piece of fabric is valuable, and monks don’t own valuable things. When monks had to find cloth on their own to make robes, they sometimes used cloths that had been put on dead bodies or that were thrown away by others. The cloth pieces were then washed carefully and dyed an orange, yellow, reddish or brown color.

So now, at the end of the rainy season, people could bring fabric for the monks to make new robes and offer it at a Robe Offering Ceremony. They also could offer other things needed by the monks, such as a belt, a bowl, a razor, needle and thread, and a water strainer to strain out insects and dirt from drinking water. And, one monk who performed his duties and discipline very well would be chosen by agreement of all the other monks in that community to receive a special robe which was stitched and dyed while monks were constantly chanting.

These traditions for the Robe Offering Ceremony are still practiced today in temples practicing the Theravada Buddhist tradition, including in south Asian countries.

Questions:

1. Why did the monks travel around so much? (to teach the Dharma to many people in different towns and villages)
2. What happened on the ground when big groups of monks traveled in the rainy season? (the new grass and young plants that were just starting to grow were trampled, crushed and broken; tiny creatures were stepped on; and wide, muddy paths were created)
3. Why did the Buddha wait until the monks told him about the villagers' complaints to give a solution to the problem? (he usually waited until someone told him about a problem so he could give a solution and Dharma teaching that people would always remember)
4. What was the Buddha's solution for the harm to the tiny creatures and the monks needing to teach the Dharma to many people? (the monks must spend the rainy season staying in one place)
5. What are the monks supposed to focus on during the rainy season retreat? (meditation and learning the Buddha's teachings)
6. What happens at the end of the rainy season? (the Robe Offering Ceremony)

What the Buddha said:

“Apādahehi me mettaṃ, mettaṃ dvipādahehi me, catuppadehi me mettaṃ, mettaṃ bahuppadehi me.”

“I give my loving-kindness to those with no feet, I give my loving-kindness to those with two feet, I give my loving-kindness to those with four feet, I give my loving-kindness to those with many feet.”

Khandhaparitta

Dharma Discussion – Loving-kindness:

What was the Buddha always focused on?

Teaching the Dharma to help people become enlightened.

Why? Because he knew that all unenlightened beings in the world are suffering—feeling stress, discomfort, unpleasantness, disappointment—and the only way for suffering to end, to have true happiness and peace, is to become enlightened.

So he had extreme loving-kindness and compassion, wishing and helping all beings everywhere find true happiness and peace and be free from suffering.

Why do we say “loving-kindness”? Why not just love, or just kindness?
The word “love” is not enough, because it often means a feeling of affection toward someone with the expectation that they will give us affection in return. It’s an exchange of joy—I give you joy so you so give me joy.
So, we get attached to the joy we get, and we get angry if they don’t give us joy. Then the kindness is gone!
The word “kindness” is not enough because it includes doing kind things and saying kind words without love; being kind just because we ought to be kind, so other people will see that we did the right thing.

Loving-kindness is love along with thoughts, words and acts of kindness. Loving-kindness means truly caring about other beings and wishing for their peace and happiness, while being kind in our actions, words and thoughts.

The Buddha teaches us to have loving-kindness for all living beings.

It’s easy to have loving-kindness for our family, friends and others who we like. But what about those who harm, bully, or abuse others, or who are hateful? We naturally dislike them; we fear they may do something harmful, so it’s difficult to have loving-kindness for them.
And if we’re kind to them, they may try to control or manipulate us. It’s best to avoid them.
So how can we have loving-kindness toward all beings, including them?

We can start by learning to have loving-kindness for animals that may harm us. Can you think of some animals or other creatures can harm us or bite us? Poisonous snakes, spiders, sharks, jellyfish, scorpions, hornets, bears. Also, we can learn to have loving-kindness toward creatures we think are disgusting. Are there any animals you don’t like? Slugs, worms, rats, centipedes?

The Buddha advised us to learn to have loving-kindness for all beings by practicing having loving-kindness for these creatures. How can we do that? Be careful not to harm them, and rescue them from danger if we can. We can see that they’re like us—they want food, and to be safe and comfortable. They’re usually scared of us; they are just trying to defend themselves. They are interesting; when we learn more about them, we appreciate them more. Similarly, when we learn more about why people behave the way they do—for example, problems they have in their family—then it’s easier to care about them.

When we have loving-kindness toward creatures we don’t like, then it’s easier to have loving-kindness toward people we don’t like.
And by being careful not to harm any living beings, we develop a habit of caring for others, wherever we are.

Are there other ways we can have loving-kindness for people we don’t like? We can try to see that their hate, anger, greed, and other negative qualities are like an illness that makes them confused and ignorant.

They may be intelligent in other ways, but they're confused about emotions. They think they're strong and powerful when they act with hate and anger. But they're hurting inside; they're reacting to something painful or threatening. And they're creating a worse future for themselves with their negative karmas. We can't see their good qualities when they're covered with negative emotions. What do we do when there is someone with a contagious illness around us? We stay away so we don't get sick. And we feel compassion for them. Similarly, we stay away from a person with hatred and anger so we don't get influenced or upset by their behavior. And we give them our loving-kindness from a distance, by sending them our wish that they learn to be happy and peaceful so their hatred and anger will disappear. In our mind, we can say something like, "May you be happy and peaceful."

But can just wishes and thoughts really help? Yes! First, they help us relax. If we don't like a person, then we have negative thoughts about them—and maybe anger, hatred, revenge, jealousy or worry—that distract us and tangle up our mind with stress. When we send loving-kindness toward the person, we can't have negative thoughts at the same time. So what happens to our negative thoughts? They disappear! So the person doesn't bother us anymore, at least for a while. And we see that we have the power to overcome our negative thoughts. The more we do that, the more power we have over our mind!

Second, the good thoughts and wishes create merit. Whenever we do, say or think something that is good, according to the Dharma, it is merit: a good karma, a cause for a good result. Whenever we get rid of a negative thought and replace it with a good thought, we're purifying our mind, giving us more peace and bringing us closer to enlightenment. Merit gives us a good result, plus it gives peace and happiness to others when we dedicate our merits—offer them to other beings.

Are there any other ways we can practice loving-kindness? Being considerate—wherever you are, consider how others around you might feel, and treat them as you would like to be treated. Look for ways you can help others—your parents, teachers, sisters, brothers, relatives, new students, and so on. Do loving-kindness meditation and prayers, wishing that all beings be happy, peaceful and free from suffering.

Activity:

Draw a heart or a lotus flower, and write "Loving-kindness" inside it. Around the heart or lotus, draw people, animals, insects and other beings. Draw arrows from the heart or lotus toward the beings to represent sending out our loving-kindness.