

Lesson 12 - HUMILITY - Yasa and the Kassapas Meet the Buddha

One evening, a very wealthy young man named Yasa was listening to musicians in his palace, and he fell asleep. When he awoke, he saw the musicians asleep with their instruments in their hands. One had her hair loose and wild over her face, one was drooling and others were mumbling in their sleep. Yasa thought that they looked so disgusting—like dead bodies or ghosts—that he exclaimed,

“It is frightening, it is horrible!”

He put on his golden shoes and went to the door of his palace. The door was suddenly opened by invisible heavenly beings who knew what was about to happen—Yasa was going to become a monk—and they wanted to encourage him to go. He walked down the road to the entrance gate of the walled city. That gate also was opened by invisible heavenly beings who wanted to make sure he would become a monk. He walked out the gate and went to the Deer Park, where the Buddha was staying.

Although the sun had not yet risen, the Buddha was walking outside and saw him coming in the distance. As Yasa approached, still upset about the disgusting scene at his palace, he exclaimed,

“It is frightening, it is horrible!”

The Buddha said, “This is not frightening, this is not horrible. Come, Yasa, sit down. I will teach you the Dharma.”

Yasa, now feeling happy and hopeful, took off his golden shoes and went to where the Buddha was sitting. He bowed with respect, and the Buddha taught him about generosity, virtues, the heaven-worlds, the dangers of attachments and the blessings of becoming a monk.

The Buddha saw that Yasa’s mind was ready, eager to learn, and trusting, so he taught him the Four Noble Truths. Yasa then had a pure vision of the Dharma and experienced a deep understanding of how everything arises and ends.

Meanwhile, the mother of Yasa couldn’t find him, so Yasa’s father followed the footprints of Yasa’s golden shoes, which led him to the Deer Park. Seeing Yasa’s father approaching, the Buddha, with his supernatural power, made Yasa invisible to his father.

Yasa’s father asked, “Lord, have you seen Yasa?”

The Buddha responded, “Now, sit down, and perhaps while you are sitting here you may see Yasa sitting here too.”

Yasa's father was glad to hear this, and he bowed to the Buddha, who taught him as he had taught his son. Yasa's father then deeply understood the Dharma, and he had no doubts about the Buddha and Dharma.

He exclaimed, "Magnificent, Lord! The Dharma has been made clear in many ways by the Blessed One! It's like revealing what was hidden, like showing the way to one who is lost, like holding a lamp in the dark for those with eyes to see. I go to the Buddha for refuge and to the Dharma and to the Sangha of monks. Beginning from today, Lord, receive me as your follower who has gone to you for refuge as long as I live."

He was the first person to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, also known as the Three Jewels or the Triple Gem.

The Buddha knew that while he was teaching the father, Yasa had a deep experience of the Dharma, and that his mind became free of impurities, so he couldn't enjoy life at home anymore. The Buddha made Yasa visible again.

The father then saw his son Yasa sitting there, and said, "Yasa, my son, your mother is sad and upset. Go to your mother and make her happy again."

Yasa looked at the Buddha, who said to the father, "How do you imagine this? If Yasa has understood the Dharma as you have, and if by letting go of attachments his mind is purified, would he be able to go back to the home life and enjoy it as he used to do?"

Yasa's father replied, "No, Lord."

The Buddha said, "But that is what Yasa has done; now he is no longer able to go back to what he has left behind and enjoy pleasures of the home life as he used to do."

The father said, "It is a great achievement for Yasa that through having no attachments his heart is purified. Lord, may you with Yasa as your attendant monk accept today's meal from me."

The Buddha silently accepted the invitation, and Yasa's father went home. Yasa then asked the Buddha,

"Lord, I wish to receive from you the ordination to be a monk."

The Buddha ordained him simply as he did the five ascetics, saying, "Come, monk, the Dharma is well announced. Lead the holy life for the complete ending of suffering."

The Buddha and Yasa, who was now an arahant and a new monk called Venerable Yasa, went to his parents' house for lunch. Yasa's mother and his

former wife heard the Buddha teach the Dharma, and, like Yasa and his father, they had a pure vision of the Dharma and experienced a deep understanding of how everything arises and ends. Also like Yasa's father, they took refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and asked the Buddha to accept them as his followers for the rest of their lives. They were the first women to become followers of the Buddha.

Yasa's friends heard that he had shaved his hair and beard, put on a yellow robe and become a monk. They thought, "This can't be some ordinary dharma, or some typical ordination to be a monk, for Yasa to have done this. It must have been really special."

So, they went to see Venerable Yasa, who took them to see the Buddha and requested him to advise and instruct them. After they heard the Buddha teach, they requested him to ordain them as monks. Hearing the Dharma made their minds free from attachments and impurities, and, like Yasa, they became Buddhist monks and arahants.

The Buddha then addressed the arahants, now a group of sixty monks, saying to them, "Monks, I am free from all shackles, and you too are free from all shackles. Go now and wander for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, and teach the Dharma. Explain a holy life that is totally perfect and pure. There are beings who have only a little dust on their eyes who will be lost if they don't hear the Dharma, and they will understand it."

He meant that the monks, being arahants, were now free from attachments, desires that bind them to an ordinary life of trying to get what they want and avoid what they don't want. He advised them to wander around and teach the Dharma to help others attain happiness, and that there will be some people who have enough wisdom to understand it.

The Buddha told the monks to ordain men who wish to be ordained by having them shave their hair and beard, put on a robe like Buddha's robe, bow to the arahant monk, and then kneel with palms together and say three times, "I go for refuge in the Buddha, I go for refuge in the Dharma, I go for refuge in the Sangha."

While the monks wandered in groups to different villages and towns, the Buddha went to Uruvela where there were three ascetics who were brothers, all three named Kassapa, who taught a total of a thousand students. The three teachers and their students let their hair grow naturally, so they had beards and dreadlocks—long matted hair—which was typical for ascetics, who lived a meditative life in forests in rough conditions with almost no possessions, and didn't need to be bothered with grooming, styling or shaving hair and beards.

The Buddha asked the leader of the three, "Kassapa, if you don't mind, I would like to spend one night in your fire chamber."

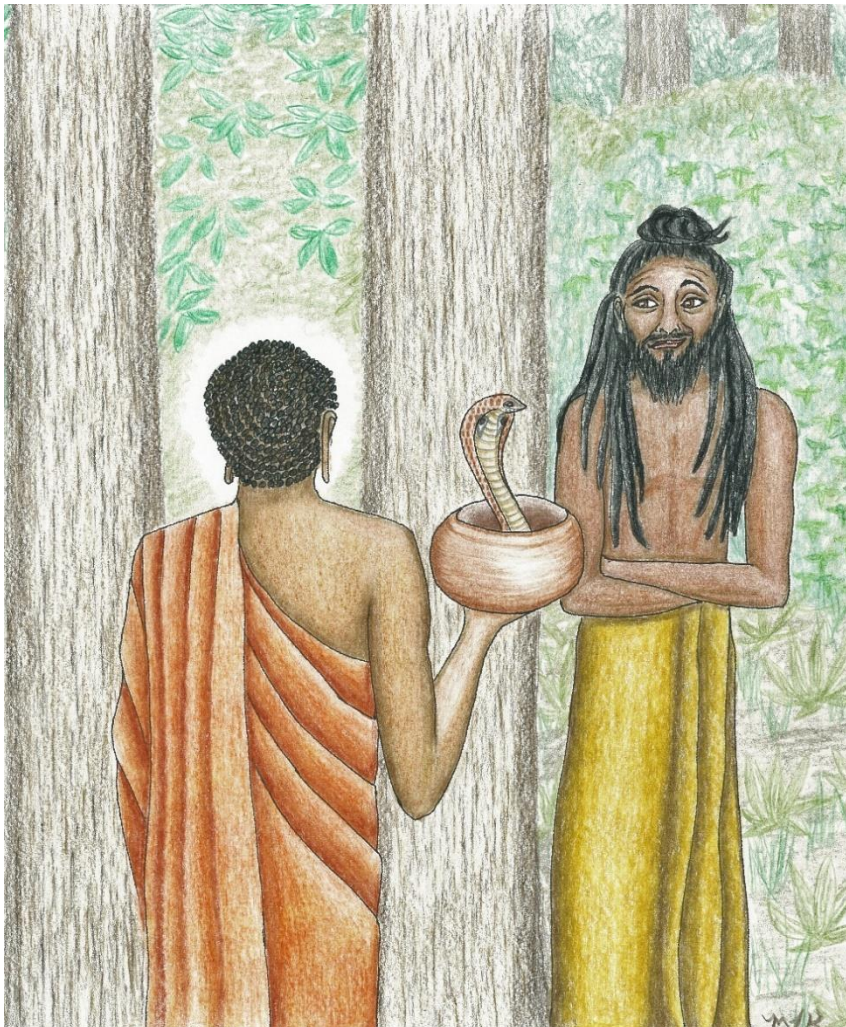
Kassapa said, “I don’t mind, great monk, but there is a savage royal naga serpent there. He has supernatural powers. He is terribly poisonous and can kill you.”

A naga is a spirit who appears in the form of a snake, and a royal naga is one with great supernatural powers. The Buddha said,

“Maybe he won’t destroy me, Kassapa, so allow me to stay in the fire chamber.”

Kassapa said, “Then stay as long as you like, great monk.”

The Buddha went to the fire chamber and sat down to meditate. When the naga saw the Buddha come in, he was angry, and blew smoke from his mouth. The Buddha, careful not to burn the snake, also blew smoke from his mouth. The naga became more angry, so he blew flames from his mouth. The Buddha, who had control over elements such as water and fire, blew flames from his mouth too, but carefully avoided injuring the naga. The ascetics gathered near the fire chamber as they saw flames and smoke coming from it. They thought, “The great monk, who is so beautiful, is being destroyed by the naga.”



When the sun began to rise, the Buddha put the naga into his bowl and showed him to Kassapa, saying,

“This is your naga, Kassapa. His fire has been countered by fire.”

Kassapa thought, “The great monk is very mighty and powerful since he is able to fight with fire against the fire of the royal naga. But he is not an arahant like me.”

The Buddha then went to stay in the woods nearby.

During the night, the four great kings who govern the first level heaven-world, lighting up the forest, went to visit the Buddha and sat like pillars of fire in four corners around him.

In the morning, Kassapa went to call the Buddha for breakfast, saying, "It is time, great monk, the meal is ready. Who were those that came to you in the night?"

The Buddha replied, "They were the Four Great Kings, Kassapa. They came to me to hear the Dharma."

Kassapa thought, "The great monk is very mighty and powerful. But he is not an arahant like me."

The next two nights, Sakka, who was the ruler of the heaven-world of the thirty-three gods, and Brahma Sahampati came to visit the Buddha.

Kassapa saw them, and again he thought, "The great monk is very mighty and powerful. But he is not an arahant like me."

Kassapa had invited many people from surrounding areas for a fire ceremony. He thought, "If the great monk shows some supernatural power or miracle to these people, he will become more famous and my fame will diminish. If only the great monk were not to come tomorrow."

The Buddha heard his thoughts and stayed away.

The next day, Kassapa invited the Buddha to come for breakfast, and asked him why he didn't come yesterday. The Buddha told him that he was aware of Kassapa's thoughts. Kassapa again thought, "The great monk is very mighty and powerful. But he is not an arahant like me."

The Buddha needed to wash a rag, and Sakka, aware of his thoughts, came and scooped out a pond for it to be washed and set down a large stone to scrub it with. A tree spirit, aware that the Buddha was wondering where to hang the rag to dry, bent a branch of the tree for him to hang the rag.

The next morning, when Kassapa announced that breakfast was ready, he saw the pond, stone and bent branch and asked the Buddha about it. The Buddha told him what had happened, and again Kassapa thought, "The great monk is very mighty and powerful. But he is not an arahant like me."

On another day when Kassapa called the Buddha for breakfast, he told Kassapa to go ahead and that he would follow. But when Kassapa arrived at the fire chamber, the Buddha was already sitting there with a rose apple fruit that he had plucked from a tree on his way. Kassapa recognized that the Buddha had some supernatural power to arrive before him, but he kept thinking that the Buddha was not an arahant like him.

One day, Kassapa's students could not split the logs they needed for their fires. They thought it was so strange that it must be due to the Buddha's supernatural power.

The Buddha asked Kassapa, "Should the logs be split, Kassapa?"

When Kassapa agreed they should be split, five hundred logs split instantly. But Kassapa persisted with the same thought.

One day, there was a huge rainstorm and flood, and the area where the Buddha was staying was all under water. Kassapa, hoping the great monk had not been carried away by the water, went by boat with some of his students to the Buddha. But the rain and water, which was pouring all around, had not touched the spot of dry ground where the Buddha was walking. The Buddha rose up into the air and floated over to the boat. Seeing this astounding miracle, Kassapa had the same thought, "The great monk is very mighty and powerful. But he is not an arahant like me."

The Buddha had shown his supernatural powers so Kassapa would see that he was fully enlightened and hear him teach the Dharma. But Kassapa stubbornly couldn't accept that someone else was better, more advanced, than he was.

Finally, the Buddha thought, "This misguided man will go on forever thinking 'But he is not an arahant like me.' Suppose I give him a shock."

So, he said, "Kassapa, you are not an arahant nor are you on the way to becoming one. You are not doing anything that leads to becoming an arahant."

Kassapa's pride and arrogance collapsed. He humbly bowed with his head at the Buddha's feet and asked to receive the ordination to become a monk.

The Buddha replied, "But Kassapa, you are the leader of five hundred ascetics. You must consult them first so they may do as they think appropriate.

When Kassapa told his students he wanted to lead the holy life under the great monk, they said,

"We have long had faith in the great monk. If you lead the holy life under him, all of us will do likewise."

They all shaved their heads and beards and went to be ordained by the Buddha. When the other two Kassapa brothers and their students found out about it, they also shaved their heads and became his student monks. So then the Buddha had more than a thousand student monks.

Questions:

1. What kind of home did Yasa live in before he met the Buddha? (a palace)
2. How did Yasa's father feel about his son becoming a monk? (happy)
3. What quality did the Buddha have in his heart that he was careful not to injure the naga? (kindness, compassion)
4. What did Kassapa think about himself compared to the Buddha when he saw the Buddha's supernatural powers? (he thought he was better than the Buddha; he thought he was an arahant and the Buddha was powerful but not an arahant)
5. Why did the Buddha show his supernatural powers to Kassapa? (so he would see that the Buddha was enlightened)
6. What made Kassapa finally accept that the Buddha was fully enlightened and he was not? (the Buddha told him he was not an arahant and wasn't doing anything to become one)

What the Buddha said:

**“Sujīvam ahirikena kākasūrena dhamṣinā,
pakkhandinā pagabbhena saṅkilitṭhena jīvitam.”**
“Easy is life for the shameless one who is as impudent as a crow, is backbiting and forward, arrogant and corrupt.”

Dhammapada 244 (18:10)

Dharma Discussion - Humility:

Before they met the Buddha, who were Yasa and his family, as seen by their community?

Yasa and his family were very wealthy, successful and admired in society. Many people like them—rich, successful and popular—feel satisfied that they have achieved their life's goal, so they have no need to seek peace and happiness by following someone's teachings or going to a spiritual teacher. Even if they did go, they wouldn't feel there is anything important to learn from him.

But Yasa and his family were different. When they heard the Buddha's wisdom, they knew that the Buddha had attained the true goal in life and they had not.

Why were they different from others?

They had open minds—open to listening and learning from others.

They were wise enough to understand the Buddha's teachings.

And they were willing to admit that there was a higher, better goal to be reached and that they had not reached it.

There are two big differences between Yasa's family and other wealthy families. One is that they had wisdom. They had enough wisdom to recognize the Buddha's wisdom.

The other is that they had humility, in other words, they were humble.

What is humility? What does it mean to be humble?

It's the opposite of arrogance.

Arrogance means showing that you are more important and better than others, in a way that is offensive or annoying to others.

What does arrogance look like? What do people do when they are arrogant?

Arrogance can include showing off, bragging, acting bossy, acting "entitled," demanding everything to be exactly as you want, expecting others to serve you and do things for you, putting others down with insults or criticism, not accepting the success of others, accusing others of cheating when they win, being inconsiderate, not caring about others, insisting on being first or getting the best without considering others, and having a "me first" attitude.

What does humility look like? What do people do when they are humble?

Humility can include appreciating what others can do, accepting that they may be better than you in some ways, recognizing the contributions, talent and success of others, unselfishly helping and encouraging others to succeed, letting others be first, letting them have the best, being aware of what others might need and helping them, and appreciating what you have without demanding more.

A truly wise person is humble, because he doesn't have an ego.

He understands the interdependence of everything.

So, he understands the importance of others, and of kindness and compassion.

Therefore, wisdom and humility go together.

A person with humility is open to learning from others, because a humble person can admit that others may know more than they do, or may have more skill or talent.

Yasa and his family were humble, open to learning from the Buddha, so they immediately heard and understood his teachings.

What about Kassapa, was he humble? No, he was arrogant.

He was proud of being an ascetic and a teacher. He thought he was great, that he knew more than the Buddha. He couldn't accept that the Buddha was better, more spiritually advanced than he was.

An arrogant person can't learn from others when he thinks he knows it all.

While the Buddha was staying with him, he had a great opportunity to hear the Buddha teach, but because of his arrogance, he missed out on that opportunity for many days, until finally he had humility, and asked to be ordained.

It's not so easy to have humility when, like Kassapa, many others admire us or when we have a great talent or skill.

Especially when we're young, we're developing many skills, and we're proud of them—we proudly show our parents, teachers and others what we've accomplished. We get attention and rewards when we do well.

We compete in sports, art, dance, or music, and we try to win or do our best.

Is that good for us? Yes! It motivates us to fully develop our talents and skills.

And it's important for developing self-confidence.

Do we have to win or be the best in the group to have self-confidence? No!

We learn to be confident even when we fail, when we lose, when others do better.

What is self-confidence? What does it mean to be confident?

It's a feeling that we are valuable and worthy of respect, regardless of what others might think. We know we have skills and abilities, and that we can learn and improve. We can accomplish difficult things even if we don't yet know how.

This helps us to respect and appreciate others, and understand how we all help each other, we learn from each other, we're all valuable, we're interdependent.

And this enables us to develop humility.

So, when we are young, we develop our self-confidence, and as we become more self-confident, we develop humility.

How does one develop humility and avoid arrogance?

When someone else is successful, we notice our feelings and how we behave.

Do we have a hard time accepting or respecting their success?

Do we have bad thoughts about the successful person?

Do we think their success was unfair?

Do we speak disrespectfully to them or say negative things about them to others?

Do we blame others for our failure or lack of success?

If so, we may need to work on developing our self-confidence.

Also, when we are successful, we notice how we feel and how we behave.

Do we feel that we are better than everyone else?

If so, we can remember that everyone has their own talents, abilities and skills,

that we all have weaknesses and room for improvement,

that everyone experiences successes and failures in life,

and that we all have good days and bad days.

Remembering who has helped us to be successful, we can be grateful to them.

We can remember that there are many things we still need to learn.

We can remember success is impermanent; everything changes, is impermanent.

We can think about how we have improved, comparing our performance over time, rather than comparing ourselves with others.

We can remember that we learn from our failures, so they are valuable too.

Activity - Attitude Test:

Circle the answer that shows the most humility. Teacher then discusses different answers, explaining why one is humble and how other answers are, or could be, arrogant/competitive/falsely humble, or neutral.

1. When I get an excellent score on a difficult test, I:
 - (a) somehow let other students know my score
 - (b) think about how I have improved my study habits
 - (c) find out what other students' scores were

2. When I get an award, I:
 - (a) think about all the people who helped me and taught me
 - (b) want to tell my friends about it
 - (c) know I deserved it

3. When I win or do well in a competition, I:
 - (a) look forward to the next competition and want to win that, too
 - (b) remember everyone has good days and bad days, we win some and lose some
 - (c) say it was no big deal

4. When I know I am good at doing something, I:
 - (a) keep practicing it so I can improve
 - (b) want to teach it to others
 - (c) am thankful to those who helped me learn and I'm willing to teach it to others

5. When others admire me and like my company, I:
 - (a) think that I am more popular than others
 - (b) try to become more popular
 - (c) know that popularity is impermanent and not as important as good character

6. When someone wins a competition that I thought I would win, I:
 - (a) think about who distracted me or made me perform poorly
 - (b) congratulate the winner and appreciate their excellent performance
 - (c) look forward to practicing more and winning the next competition

7. When someone else gets more appreciation or recognition than I get, I:
 - (a) say something funny so everyone gives me attention instead
 - (b) think they are being unfair
 - (c) think about that person's good qualities and how I can improve