

Lesson 15 – POSSESSIVENESS - Bhaddiya the Happy Monk

After the Buddha visited Kapilavatthu, many well-known princes of the Sakya clan had become Buddhist monks. But two young Sakyan princes who were brothers—Mahanama and Anuruddha—had not. Anuruddha had three palaces of his own—one for summer, one for the rainy season and one for the winter. He enjoyed the entertainment of musicians every evening for four months each year while he stayed in his rainy season palace.

One day, Mahanama was thinking, “Many well-known Sakyan princes have become monks with the Buddha as their teacher. But no one in our family has gone from the household life into homelessness as a monk. What if I become a monk, or Anuruddha?”

He went to Anuruddha and said, “Many Sakyan princes have been ordained as monks by the Buddha, but no one in our family has. What if we become monks?”

Anuruddha replied, “But I have been brought up with so many comforts and luxuries. I can’t go from the home life into homelessness. You go and become a monk.”

Mahanama said, “Okay, Anuruddha, let me tell you about household life. First, a field must be ploughed, then the seeds must be planted in it, then water must be channeled to it, and the extra water must be drained away, and then the weeds must be pulled out. Then the crop must be cut and gathered, then it must be stacked, then threshed, then the straw must be removed, then the dust removed, then it must be sifted, then it must be stored away. When that is done, it must all be done again the next year, and the year after. The work is never finished; there is no end to the work.”

Anuruddha said, “Then when will there be an end to the work? When do we have the time to relax and enjoy ourselves?”

Mahanama said, “Anuruddha, the work never finishes. There is no end to the work. Our father and our grandfather both died while their work was unfinished. So now you can experience this household life. I’m going to become a monk.”

So, Mahanama went to stay with the Buddha. Meanwhile, Anuruddha went to his mother and told her,

“Mother, I want to become a monk. Please give me your permission.”

His mother responded, “You two sons of mine are so dear and precious to me. If you were to die, I would lose you but I wouldn’t be able to do anything about it. But why should I give you my permission to go from the household life into homelessness while you’re still living?”

He asked a second and third time, and then she said, “My dear Anuruddha, if Bhaddiya the royal Sakyan becomes a monk, then you may do so too.”

She said that because she knew that Bhaddiya, who was the governor of the Sakyans and a friend of Anuruddha, would not want to become a monk.

Anuruddha went to visit Bhaddiya, and said to him, “I can only become a monk if you become a monk also.”

Bhaddiya responded, “If your choice to become a monk depends on mine, then let it no longer depend on mine. You and I will . . . well, you go become a monk when you like.”

Anuruddha pleaded, “Come, let’s both go away from the householder’s life and become monks.”

Bhaddiya stubbornly said, “I can’t. I will do anything else for you that I can, but I can’t do that. You go become a monk.”

Anuruddha told him what his mother said, and again pleaded, “Come, let’s both become monks.”

At that time, people spoke the truth and kept their word. They wouldn’t promise something and then not do it. Bhaddiya told him,

“Wait seven years. At the end of seven years both of us shall become monks.”

Anuruddha said, “Seven years is too long, I can’t wait seven years.”

Bhaddiya suggested six years, then five years, four years, three years, two years, one year, seven months, two months, one month, and then two weeks, but Anuruddha would not wait that long. Then Bhaddiya said,

“Wait seven days. At the end of seven days, both of us shall become monks. And so I can hand over the kingdom to my children and my brothers.”

Satisfied, Anuruddha replied, “Seven days is not too long; I shall wait for you.”

On the seventh day, two cousins of the Buddha named Ananda and Devadatta, two other princes, and Upāli the barber went along with Anuruddha and Bhaddiya to become monks. They traveled with an army for protection as usual, as if they were traveling to the parade ground at the park.

After traveling a little while, they told the army to go back home, and then went some distance alone. The princes then removed their golden jewelry and royal outer clothing and rolled it up in a cloak. Knowing that Upāli could sell it to get food and whatever he needed, they gave it to him, saying,

“Upāli, you had better go back. This is enough in this bundle for you to live on.”

Upāli started going back home. He thought,

“These Sakyans are fierce. Now they might even have me put me to death for helping the princes escape to become monks. So these Sakyan princes are going to become monks, but how about me?”

He opened the bundle and hung the things in it on a tree, saying. “Let him who sees these take them as a gift.”

The princes, seeing him coming back, called out, “Why have you returned?”

After explaining his fear of being killed, he said, “So, I have come back again.”

The princes agreed with Upāli, saying “You did well not to go home, Upāli, for the Sakyans are fierce. It’s true, they might even have put you to death for helping us become monks.”

The princes together with Upāli the barber went to the Buddha, and bowed to him. One of the princes said,

“We are Sakyans, proud of our wealth and status. Upāli the barber has taken care of us for a long time. Let him be ordained as a monk first so that we can bow to him, giving him respect, reverence and honor. This way our Sakyan pride will be humbled in us Sakyans.”

So, the Buddha ordained Upāli, and the princes bowed with great respect, reverence and honor to Venerable Upāli. Next, the Buddha ordained the princes.

During the rainy season, the Buddha instructed the monks in the Dharma and meditation, and they practiced intensely every day.

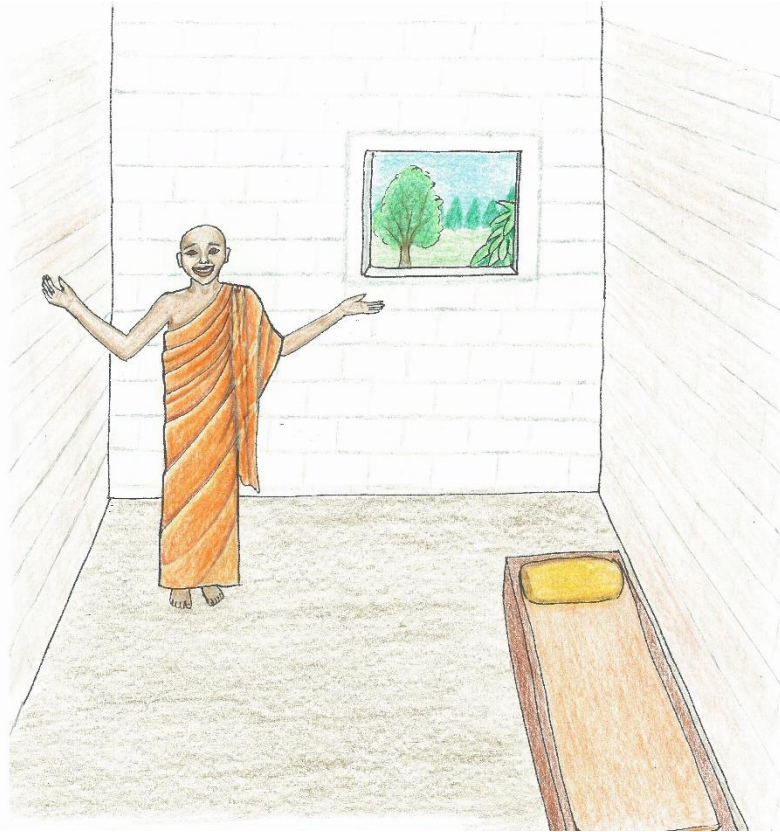
Eventually, Venerable Bhaddiya gained the three wisdoms of ability to remember his past lives, ability to see the futures of others according to their karma, and purity of the mind.

Venerable Anuruddha also got the ability to see the futures of others according to their karma.

Venerable Ananda attained the first level of enlightenment, so he would become an arahant within seven lifetimes.

And Venerable Devadatta got some supernatural powers.

But Venerable Bhaddiya started doing something very peculiar. Whenever he went into the forest, under a tree or in an empty room, he constantly exclaimed,



“Oh, happiness! Oh happiness!”

Several monks thought that behavior was so strange that they went to the Buddha and told him about it. They suggested,

“There seems no doubt, Lord, that the Venerable Bhaddiya is unsatisfied with the monk’s life. Or he is remembering his former position as a governor.”

The Buddha requested Venerable Bhaddiya to come to him, and asked whether it was true that

he kept saying, “Oh, happiness” whenever he went into a forest, went under a tree, or into an empty room.

“It is true, Lord,” Venerable Bhaddiya replied.

“But, Bhaddiya, what good do you see in doing this?” the Buddha asked.

Venerable Bhaddiya said, “Before, Lord, when I had royal status, there was a guard both inside and outside of the palace, and also both inside and outside the city, and in addition, both inside and outside the district. Even though I was so well guarded and protected, I was afraid, anxious, suspicious and worried. But now, Lord, when I go to the forest or under a tree or to an empty room, I don’t feel afraid, anxious, suspicious and worried at all! I live relaxed, in a quiet environment, just dependent on the food and things that others give us, with my mind like a wild deer. This is the good I see in doing this.”

The Buddha knew exactly what he meant and said, “Whoever has no conflict in his mind, will be fearless, blissful, free from sorrow, as glorious as any deity in the heaven-worlds.”

Sometime later, another monk behaved in a strange way. Venerable Nanda, the half-brother of the Buddha who was about to be married when he became a monk, seemed to be trying to look especially elegant. He ironed his robes and painted along the edge of his eyelids with a bit of black powder made from ashes.

And he was using a shiny, glazed bowl, which looked beautiful compared to the simple clay bowls the other monks had. He went to see the Buddha, who told him,

“Nanda, it’s not proper that you—a man of the Sakya clan who out of dedication to the Dharma has left the household life to become a monk—should put on ironed robes, paint your eyes, and take a glazed bowl. What is proper for you now is to live in the forest, eat only food that is received from begging, wear robes made of thrown-away rags. and live without attachment to desires.”

With that instruction, Venerable Nanda could no longer live in a monastery or other building, eat at people’s homes, or wear robes made from new cloth. With this new way of life, he could learn not to be attached to luxuries and other desires.

Questions:

1. Why didn’t Anuruddha want to become a monk at first? (he had so many comforts and luxuries)
2. What did Mahanama tell him that made him decide to become a monk? (Mahanama explained how the work of a householder, growing crops, never ends)
3. What was Bhaddiya’s job before he became a monk? (he was a governor)
4. Why did the Sakyan princes want Upāli to be ordained first? (they wanted to bow to him with respect to get rid of their pride in their wealth and status)
5. What negative feelings or emotions did Venerable Bhaddiya no longer have when he was a monk? (he no longer felt afraid, anxious, suspicious and worried)
6. How did the Buddha instruct Venerable Nanda to live so he could learn not to be attached to desires and luxuries? (he should live in the forest, beg for food, and wear robes made from rags, and live without attachments to desires)

What the Buddha said:

“Susukhaṃ vata jīvāma, yesaṃ no natthi kiñcanaṃ, pītibhakkhā bhavissāma devā ābhassarā yathā.”

“We who do not possess anything live so happily. We live by joy like the radiant gods.”

Dharma Discussion - Possessiveness:

When Mahanama suggested they become monks, Anuruddha didn't want to. Why? He didn't want to leave his palaces and all the beautiful things he had. When Anuruddha wanted Bhaddiya to become a monk with him, Bhaddiya didn't want to become a monk, or at least not anytime soon. Why? He wasn't ready to leave everything he had. When Venerable Nanda had left his family life to become a monk, he hadn't quite left everything behind. He still wanted elegant clothes and a beautiful bowl. Anuruddha, Bhaddiya and Nanda were wealthy, so they had a lot of belongings. They had expensive furniture, dishes, clothes, shoes, horses, carriages and games. At first, they didn't want to give all those things up to become monks—they were too attached to all their stuff and their comfortable lifestyle. All their expensive things also gave them status—showing everyone that they were important and successful.

Attachment to things, craving new things, fear of losing our things, and the feeling that things are “mine” is called possessiveness. Can you remember the feeling of really wanting to buy something special? Or the disappointment or frustration when you couldn't get something? Or the excitement when you finally got something special? Or the feeling of pride when you looked at it or showed it to your friends? Have you ever felt anxiety when someone was playing your special new toy, or borrowed something of yours, worried they may damage it? Or have you ever felt fear or panic when you lost and couldn't find something? Or worry about someone stealing your things? Or anger when someone grabbed something that belongs to you? Or sadness and grief when something of yours got broken? We all have these possessive feelings sometimes.

For some of us, possessiveness is so strong that it often makes us miserable. For the rest of us, possessiveness is an unpleasant feeling that arises sometimes but seems like a normal part of life. But we don't have to feel strong unpleasant feelings; we can reduce our possessiveness through the Dharma and be more peaceful and satisfied. Venerable Bhaddiya shows us how happy we can be when we're not possessive. And, we don't have to give up all our things and become a monk. Actually, you may already have felt the joy of not being possessive—living a simple life with only the basic things you need to survive. Can you think of a situation in which you experienced that? Camping! Why do people love camping so much, leaving their comfortable homes to live with much less comfort and convenience? They want to “get away from it all”—not have the responsibilities and worries to take care of all their things, and not worry about what others think of their things. They just want to be able to enjoy what they are seeing, hearing, smelling, and feeling moment by moment while in nature. What Buddhist practice is similar to this? Mindfulness!

The Buddha instructed Venerable Nanda to live a life of camping to get rid of his attachment to having special things. This was not punishment, but a way to learn to enjoy living mindfully without the distraction of wanting special nice things.

But after camping, we want to go home and be comfortable with all our nice stuff. So, how can we reduce our possessiveness? How can we be less attached to our things?

First, let's take a close look at what makes us feel possessive:

Many of us compare what we have with what our friends have, and feel we need to have what they have.

So we can ask ourselves, when I see a classmate or friend who has something new that I like, do I feel I must have it too?

Some of us, like the princes in the story, feel that others will think we are unimportant if we don't have new or expensive things.

So we can ask ourselves, how do I feel if I don't have new or expensive things?

Some of us feel unloved or neglected if we don't have things we want.

So we can ask ourselves, how do I feel when my parents don't give me something I want? Do I feel that they don't care enough about me?

Some of us enjoy the attention when we show others new things we have.

So we can ask ourselves, how do I feel when I show my new things to my friends?

When we answer these questions and find that we sometimes feel unimportant, unloved, neglected, unworthy, embarrassed or that we're not getting enough attention if we don't get things, then it's very important to know that:

Our identity—who we are—is not defined by the things we own.

And our importance, our worthiness, is not defined by the things we own.

Sadly, many people don't believe this and feel the stress of always trying to prove their importance by buying new things, and they may judge us by what we own. But we shouldn't let ourselves be led down into that unpleasant way of thinking.

Then what does define who we are and how important we are?

Our good character—including our kindness, honesty, compassion, helpfulness, patience, interest in Dharma—shows our goodness, which is who we really are.

We are uncovering our natural goodness by learning and practicing the Dharma. Although this natural goodness is within us, we have not yet fully uncovered it, so we are far from perfect, but it makes all of us worthy and important all the time, even if we own nothing, as Venerable Bhaddiya learned.

Next, we pay attention when our uncomfortable feelings of possessiveness arise, and try to replace them with more positive thoughts.

We notice when we want to buy something that we can't have.

We notice when we use possessive words: "that's mine," "be careful with my things," "don't use my things," and "don't touch."

We notice when we want to hide our things from others or not share with them.

We notice when we worry that our things might get damaged, lost or stolen.

When we have those kinds of thoughts and words, we can replace them with thoughts like these:

Everything is impermanent—we only use things for a while; one day they will no longer be useful.

Every new thing we own only will give us joy only for a little while.

Lasting joy comes from our own inner self, not from things we own.

I can enjoy things by seeing them without having to buy or own something.

If I share my new things with someone I trust, I can learn to overcome my worries and possessiveness.

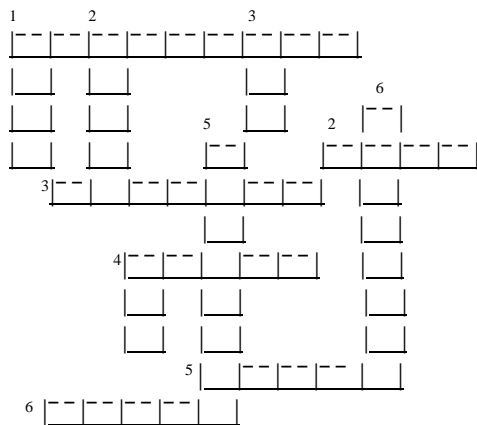
Activity - Crossword Puzzle:

Across:

1. How Baddhiya felt when he became a monk and gave up his possessions
2. Prince Siddhartha saw an old man, a _____ man, a dead man, and an ascetic.
3. How Sanjaya felt when Moggallana and Sariputta left him to go to the Buddha.
4. The Buddha became enlightened under the _____ Tree.
5. The Four _____ Truths.
6. _____ was going to get married but when the Buddha ordained him he was not happy.

Down:

1. To show our gratitude, we can _____ our parents.
2. The Sakyans had too much _____ so they didn't want to bow to the Buddha.
3. The Buddha taught how all things arise and how they come to an _____.
4. To show respect to the Buddha and to the monks, we _____ to them.
5. The first arahant was Venerable _____.
6. What Sujatha offered to Siddhartha on the day he was to become enlightened.



Word Box:

MILKRICE BODHI JEALOUS END KONDANNA NOBLE

BOW NANDA SICK HAPPINESS HELP PRIDE