

## The Story of Devadatta and the Buddhist Guide to Dealing with Assholes

Tonight, we are going to explore the story of Devadatta and his efforts at becoming powerful and prestigious. Which, of course, backfired and he suffered the consequences of his misdeeds. Then we will get the official Buddhist Guide to dealing with people we don't like, commonly called jerks, pricks, or assholes!

First, let's explore the doings of Devadatta. Devadatta was both a cousin and brother-in-law to the Buddha. So he could go up to the Buddha and say "What's up my brother?" and it would be pretty close to correct. Anyway, Devadatta joined the order of monks early on but was having difficulty attaining any higher liberation, so he focused on developing psychic powers.

At first, Devadatta was a good monk, but then he became consumed with gain and fame. It is at this point when Devadatta begins planning his plots against the Buddha. Although Devadatta became an evil monk he still had many admirers and followers. One of which was King Ajatasattu who was convinced to murder his own father, King Bimbisara at the direction of Devadatta (which Ron mentioned last week). This was a tactic intended to weaken the royal alliance with the Buddha. This attempt failed because King Ajatasattu did become loyal to the Buddha. Eventually Devadatta wanted to kill the Buddha as well, but we will get to that.

First, though, he tries to essentially become the successor of the Sangha after the Buddha passes away, but the Buddha knew this was not a wise idea so he rejected Devadatta's request. As a matter of fact, The Buddha said he would not even turn over the Sangha of monks to his chief disciples Mahamoggalana and Sariputta. Talk about rubbing it in.

This irritated Devadatta so much that he vowed revenge. This leads to his attempts to murder the Buddha. Gee, how original... not like we haven't heard that before in stories and movies.

Devadatta's first attempt at murdering the Buddha resulted in complete failure. He hired a "hit man" to kill the Buddha, hired two others to kill that hit man, and four others to kill the two hit men, and then eight others to kill the four. This plan ultimately failed when all of the hit men became Disciples of the Buddha. Fail!

Not discouraged, Devadatta attempted to kill the Buddha with the use of a large rock. While Buddha was walking on Mount Vulture's Peak, Devadatta hurled this rock down the slope but the rock collided with another rock and only a splinter hit the Buddha in the foot. The Pali Canon has a couple suttas dealing with this event, and it says that although there was much pain the Buddha endured it very well. Did you expect anything different? Fail!

In his last attempt, Devadatta released an enraged elephant named Nalagiri in an attempt to kill the Buddha. While everyone else ran like a bunch of sissies, the Buddha stood and radiated loving-kindness toward the charging elephant. Nalagiri was unable to keep his charge, stopped and became quiet. Essentially, the untamed elephant was now tamed by the Buddha's loving-kindness. Fail!

You'd think this was enough to discourage Devadatta from messing with the Buddha further. However, this is incorrect. Deceitfully, Devadatta made five rule requests he knew would not be granted and was willing to split the Sangha if denied. The idea was to make the Buddha seem like a lax teacher and that Devadatta followed a truer path. The five rules were:

1. living only in the forest and not in villages
2. eating only food collected on alms rounds and not accepting invitations to meals
3. wearing only robes made from cast-off cloth
4. living only outdoors, with no built shelter
5. eating only vegetarian food

Of course, these were all denied and Devadatta took his followers elsewhere. But Buddha felt compassion toward the 500 monks who went with Devadatta and sent Sariputta and Moggallana to retrieve the 500 monks who followed Devadatta. Devadatta was giving a talk when Sariputta and Moggallana arrived, but allowed them to talk to the 500 monks after he finished. He was in for a surprise when Sariputta and Moggallana were able to convince the group of 500 to go back to the Buddha's Sangha. This was possible because Devadatta thought the chief disciples of the Buddha were joining his Sangha. As a result, he left and went to sleep while Sariputta and Moggallana addressed the group. Devadatta was sleeping on the job! Fail!

It is worth noting that several suttas address Devadatta, and you can imagine they are not flattering. One such sutta advises that monks avoid being taken over by eight things (AN 8:7):

- 1) Material gain
- 2) Lack of material gain

- 3) Status
- 4) Lack of status
- 5) Offerings
- 6) Lack of offerings
- 7) Evil ambition
- 8) Evil Friendship

If one remains unconquered by these things then we essentially avoid becoming like Devadatta!

How does Devadatta's story end? Not well. He fell ill and desperately wanted to see the Buddha. He died along the way to seeing the Buddha, but took refuge in the Buddha before dying. And there is that rumor the earth opened up and swallowed him! Although Devadatta will be in hell for a while (duh!), he will come back to this plane and become a silent Buddha (a Buddha who does not proclaim the path to the world).

Now we get to what we have all been waiting for. The Buddhist guide to dealing with pricks, jerks, and assholes! But first, I am curious to hear how others deal with assholes before I get to the Buddha's suggestions.

Buddha's suggestions are how to remove grudges or some translations say annoyance. Make sense because this is how assholes typically make us feel. The suggestions are pretty straightforward and come from the Anguttara Nikaya (5:161).

The first suggestion is to practice loving-kindness toward the person. As you all know, loving-kindness is used to rid of ill-will toward a person, people, objects, and is often suggested to be universalized. I must say, though, that this is not the first thing I try when I am annoyed with some jerk.

Secondly, the Buddha suggests maintaining compassion toward the person. The person, after all, also suffers so we all have that in common. As a result, we should feel compassion toward their condition. Once again, I find that I don't use this tactic first either.

The third suggestion is to develop equanimity toward the person. In this situation equanimity means feeling neutral toward the person. Although this is difficult to do if someone keeps poking fun at you or literally poking you. My first choice still hasn't shown up yet by the way.

Fourth is the suggestion to forget or ignore the person giving you trouble. Now we're talking! This doesn't mean pretend they don't exist, it just means ignoring what they are doing to annoy

you. Unless of course, they are doing severe harm to you or others, then it might be appropriate to pay attention and perhaps take some kind of wise action.

The last suggestion is to acknowledge the ownership of deeds. Which means that we sort of say to ourselves “they are going to get theirs!” But we should not think this in a mean-spirited way. More like an acknowledgement of the law of cause and effect. If they continue to do unwholesome deeds or think unwholesome thoughts eventually the fruits of their kamma (karma) will catch up with them. Simple as that... I hope.

Before I conclude the talk, I wanted to ask if anyone would be willing to share an asshole story with us and then we can contemplate which, if any, of these suggestions we could use in the future in a similar situation. If not, I have one.

I suppose another suggestion would be to contemplate the three marks of existence of impermanence, stress, and non-self. The person that annoys us is, more than likely, impermanent therefore a sources of stress, and also non-self. By this I mean that the person annoying us is ever changing, much like we are. The cells in their body are dying and being created, their mind states are ever changing, and pretty much everything else that makes up a person is always changing. As a result, who is really annoying us? It is wise to reflect on these questions, because if we do then we can progress toward knowing the world as it is and not as we perceive it. This sounds easy in theory, but is extremely difficult in practice.

Questions, comments, or concerns?