

ONE CAN ONLY SHOW FORGIVENESS if there is someone to be forgiven. That is why good people welcome, as a positive gain, even the man who does them wrong.

According to tradition, the Bodhisattva was once a wild buffalo living in a remote forest. Caked in mud, his body looked like part of a dark cloud walking along. Though as an animal his mental state was so dim that it was difficult for him to recognize what was right, he was by no means idle in the pursuit of good, thanks to his sharp discernment. [1] As though bound by long service, Pity never deserted him. Either his previous actions or his own nature had some influence on his being as he was, [2] which, indeed, is why the Lord spoke of it being impossible to judge the rightness or the rewards of one's actions, since he who was the soul of pity was nevertheless born as an animal and in that state could still recognize what was right. [3] Without one's actions the continuous chain of existences would not occur. Nor can a good action have bad results. So despite his awareness of what was right he must have entered such low states because of some slight traces of previous action.¹

Now there was a wicked monkey who had noticed that the buffalo invariably displayed a natural benevolence and that he never got angry or irritated but, on the contrary, was always compassionate. Concluding that there was nothing to fear from him, the monkey made a habit of tormenting this buffalo cruelly with every sort of nasty prank. [4] Never is a rascal so utterly impudent as when dealing with the mild and gentle. He turns particularly nasty because he can see no cause to be afraid of them. But should he sense the slightest

hint of danger from someone, he grovels with false humility. Faced with such a person, he stifles his insolence. Sometimes, while the Great Being was innocently asleep or drowsily nodding his head, the monkey would suddenly jump on top of him. Another time he would climb up him, as though the buffalo were a tree, and shake him violently. Sometimes he would stand in his way when he was hungry and stop him grazing. At one time he would rub the buffalo's ears with a stick; at another he would climb up on to his head and cover his eyes with his hands just as he was longing to take a plunge into some water. Or else he would mount on his back and then, holding a stick in his hand and riding him by force, play at being Yama.² But the Bodhisattva, that Great Being, put up with all these wild pranks of the monkey, without getting upset, irritated, or angry, considering it more as a favor. [5] It is in the nature of the wicked to stray from the path of proper behavior, just as for the good to have to show patience is like receiving a favor—they are so practiced in it.

Now there was a certain sprite who could not bear to see the Great Being insulted like this. Or else he wanted to test his character. So he stood in the way of the buffalo, as the wicked monkey was riding him, and said: "Really, this must stop. Has this wicked monkey bought you? Or have you lost at dice? Or are you perhaps afraid he may do you some injury? Don't you know your own strength, that you are prepared to put up with the indignity of being ridden by him? Surely, my friend, [6] the adamant tip of your horns, if swung violently, could pierce adamant itself or, like adamant, pierce great mountains. And these hooves of yours, if you kicked out in a rage, would sink into a rockface as into mud. [7] And this body of yours, solid and compact as a rock, achieves perfect beauty by virtue of its strength. Even those who are themselves powerful testify to your strength, which would deter even a lion from approaching you. [8] So seize hold of the monkey and crush him with your hoof or tear out that insolence of his with the tip of your horn. Why put up with the pain and misery this wretch causes you, as though you had no power to stop him? [9] When is a wicked person

ever cured by goodness and kindness? Only bitter, scorching, and harsh remedies have any effect in such a case, which is like the spread of some phlegmatic disease."

The Bodhisattva turned to the sprite and spoke gently to him in a way that showed his devotion to patience: [10] "Of course I know he is troublesome, mean, and always bent on mischief. But surely I ought for that very reason to put up with him? [11] When one cannot retaliate against a person because he is stronger than oneself, patience is hardly in question. And in the case of good people, who are never anything but polite and well-behaved, what is there to forgive? [12] Therefore, one should bear with the blunders of someone weaker than oneself, though one is capable of doing otherwise. Better to suffer contempt from him than to show contempt for virtue. [13] Indeed, the best moment for displaying a good character is when one is ill-treated by a weakling. In view of this, why should a man who loves goodness resort to force in such circumstances, since it means only that he loses his patience? [14] Surely it is hard enough to get an opportunity to show patience—that virtue which is always appropriate, depending as it does on others? When someone provides such an opportunity, what reason can there be for being angry with him? [15] When someone behaves without regard to the fact that he is violating his own principles, as if expressly to give me a chance of making good my own faults—suppose I had no patience with him; could anyone be so ungrateful as that?"

"In that case," said the sprite, "you will never escape this torment. [16] Unless you give up being meek and indulgent, you will never repress this unruly scoundrel who has no respect for goodness."

[17] "If happiness is what one wants," said the Bodhisattva, "then inflicting harm on others is not the way either to be happy or to prevent oneself from becoming unhappy. The result will not be to achieve happiness. [18] I persist in patience with the very purpose of rousing his conscience. If he doesn't understand, he will come across those who will not tolerate his behavior, and they will restrain him from his evil ways.

[19] After receiving rough treatment from such people, he will no longer treat even someone like me in the same way. Once he has realized he is at fault, he will not behave like that again, and that will be a release for me.”

The sprite was overwhelmed with feelings of joy, amazement, and respect. “Excellent! excellent!” he exclaimed, rocking his head from side to side and twirling his fingers to show his approval. Then he made some more kind remarks to the Great Being: [20] “How comes it that animals can behave like this and have such an intense respect for goodness? Surely you must be an ascetic from a hermitage who has assumed this shape for some purpose.”

After commending the buffalo in this way and flinging the wicked monkey off his back, the sprite taught him a protective charm and thereupon disappeared.

So, then—one can only show forgiveness if there is someone to be forgiven. That is why good people welcome, as a positive gain, even the man who does them wrong.