



Name:..... Form:.....

See **pages 4 and 5** of Buddhist temple

Understanding the Eightfold Path

Buddhist teachers often use stories to teach the lessons of the Eightfold Path. Read the following story and answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper.

The Golden Plate

Once upon a time, there were two salesmen of pots and pans and trinkets. One day, a poor little girl saw one of them and asked her grandmother to buy her a bracelet. The grandmother replied, "How can we poor people buy bracelets?" The little girl said, "Since we don't have any money, we can give him our old black sooty plate." The old woman agreed to give it a try, so she invited the dealer inside.

The old woman asked him, "We have an old plate, can we trade it for a bracelet?" While examining the plate, the dealer scratched the bottom of it. To his surprise, he saw that underneath the black soot, it was golden! He decided to try and get the plate for next to nothing. He said, "This is not worth even one bracelet. There's no value in this. I don't want it!" He left, thinking he would return later when they would accept even less for the plate.

Later, the second salesman passed by and the woman invited him in and offered to trade the same black sooty old plate for a bracelet. When he examined it, he too saw that it was pure gold under the grime. He said to the old woman, "All my goods and all my money together are not worth as much as this golden plate!"

The woman was shocked at this discovery, but she said she would be glad to accept whatever he could trade for it. The salesman said, "I'll give you all my pots and pans and trinkets, plus all my money, if you will let me keep just eight coins." They made the trade. He went down to the river, where he paid the eight coins to the ferry man to take him across.

By then the greedy salesman had returned, already adding up huge imaginary profits in his head. When he met the little girl and her grandmother again, he said he had changed his mind and was willing to offer a few cents, but not one of his bracelets, for the useless black sooty old plate. The old woman then calmly told him of the trade she had just made with the honest salesman, and said, "Sir, you lied to us."

The greedy salesman was not ashamed of his lies, but he was saddened as he thought, "I've lost the golden plate that must be worth a hundred thousand." So he asked the woman, "Which way did he go?" She told him the direction. He left all his things right there at her door and ran down to the river, thinking, "He robbed me! He robbed me! He won't make a fool out of me!"

From the riverside he saw the honest salesman crossing over on the ferry boat. Seeing that he could do nothing, the greedy salesman exploded with rage. He jumped up and down, beating his chest. He became so filled with hatred towards the honest man, who had won the golden plate, that he yelled and screamed and no one wanted to buy from him anymore.

1. What do you think are the lessons of this story?
2. Which parts of the Eightfold Path might have helped the first salesman to be a better person and avoid being ruined?
3. Do you think the honest salesman made a good trade? Why?

Activity objectives

- ▶ To let the children read and interpret a story.
- ▶ To help the children understand some of the meaning of the Eightfold Path.
- ▶ To show how Buddhists use stories in order to teach important lessons.

Preparation and resources

Page 5 of the student book, or a list of each part of the Eightfold Path and its meaning, extra paper for longer answers.

Introducing the activity

You may want to introduce this story by telling the children that it is from a very old book called *The Jataka Stories*. These stories were used in many Buddhist countries to teach the lessons of Buddhism to children and adults. In ancient days, when most people could not read, monks and nuns would recite or read the stories to help people understand the basic principles of Buddhism and they are still used today.

You may like to read the story out loud and have the children answer the questions as a class exercise, or have the children read and discuss the story in groups. They could then present their answers to the class.

Teaching notes

The purpose of this activity is to introduce the children to some of the basic concepts of Buddhism in an easily understandable way. Stories like these are very common in Buddhism. This story is from a book called 'The Jataka Stories', which was first written more than 2,000 years ago.

The moral of the story is usually given as Greed is bad or Honesty is the best policy, but the children should be encouraged to look for other morals as well. Similarly, the parts of the

Eightfold Path that the story illustrates include: Right Attitude (do not be greedy); Right Speech (avoid lying); Right Action (do not cheat); Right Livelihood (earn your living in an honest way); and Right Effort (do your best to be a good person).

The children should be encouraged to see the ways in which the first salesman did not follow these lessons and suffered, while the second salesman did follow the lessons and became a better person.

Concluding the activity

The children could reflect on ways that the Eightfold Path could be applied to everyday life in order to make it better. Most lessons of the Eightfold Path, such as do not tell lies, are general guidelines for living a good life, and should be practised no matter what religion or belief system a person has.

Activity outcomes

- ▶ The children can read and interpret a story.
- ▶ The children can apply the lessons of the Eightfold Path to an everyday situation.

Complementary work

The children could investigate and read other Jataka stories. Most of them are appropriate for children, but some of them do contain themes of sex and death that might not be appropriate, so any stories should be read by a teacher first. You can find Jataka stories at <http://wathai.net/talon/jataka/jataka.htm> and on www.buddhanet.net/bt1_conts.htm.

Resources

Books containing Jataka stories or computer and internet access (see above).