

LESSON TWO



THE CRISIS

HEARING THE VOICES OF CREATION TEACHER'S PACK
(BACKGROUND TEXTS TO LESSON 2 — BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY)

THE MONKEY KING (BUDDHISM)

One of the most popular groups of stories in Buddhism are the *Jataka* stories. These tell of the many previous lives that Buddhists believe were lived by the one who became the Buddha. Through these many reincarnations and through his many lives of great kindness and virtue it is believed that the Buddha was able to reach the stage of Enlightenment – for Buddha means The Enlightened One.

One of the most famous such *Jataka* stories tells of when the one who would become the Buddha was the King of a troop of monkeys.

THE BUDDHA WAS BORN as the king of a mighty troop of monkeys who lived contentedly high in the Himalayas, far beyond the reach of human beings. One of their delights was to feast on the mangos which grew on a vast tree beside the river Ganges. One day, one of the mangos fell into the river and was carried downstream until it reached the great city of Varanasi. Here it was caught and taken to the king, for its scent and size were a marvel to all who beheld it. The king was overwhelmed by the fruit when he saw it, smelt it and ate it – so much so that he summoned his troops and set off up the river to find the source of the fruit.

At long last they arrived in the valley where the tree stood and as it was late in the day, they settled down ready to pick the fruit the next day. That night the monkeys arrived for their usual feast. The king awoke, saw the monkeys taking what he now saw as

his fruit and ordered his archers to surround the tree so that no monkey could escape. 'We will kill them all in the morning and feast on fruit and monkey flesh,' the excited king declared.

The Buddha Monkey King heard this and realised what danger his troop was in. Using his astonishing powers he leapt from the tree, over the heads of the archers and into the edge of the forest. There he found a long creeper and tying it around his waist he leapt back in order that the monkeys could escape along the creeper. But he had miscalculated. The creeper was not long enough and only by tremendous effort was he able to grab hold of a branch on the edge of the tree.

Realising he had little time, he urged the monkeys to run across his back and along the creeper to safety. The young and fit were soon across but the old, the infirm and the very young needed more and more time to make their way to safety. The Monkey King felt his strength ebbing away but with grim determination he held on until the very last of the monkeys has passed over to safety.

The king had the dying Monkey King brought down and asked him why he had given his life in this way. The king said 'What are they to you and you to them, Oh Great Monkey King?' To which the Buddha replied, 'I have made those I ruled happy. Follow my example, Oh King.'

And having spoken, he died.

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THE STORY OF THE TREE (CHRISTIANITY)

One of the most striking Christian poems is the seventh century Anglo-Saxon poem, *The Dream of the Rood*. The 'rood' is the tree on which Christ was crucified – and it is our narrator. It describes what it feels like to be cut down in the forest, torn from your natural setting and then slashed into the shape of a pole ready to be the stake upon which a man is to be cruelly put to death. In the section we hear today, sung as a spiritual especially created for this Celebration, the tree laments that it wanted to fall and crush the human beings who had cut it about and who then took one of their own and crucified him. But the tree also knows that it has a cosmic role to play. In this remarkable Christian work, the suffering of the tree and of Jesus himself reflect the wider pain and suffering that humanity causes to its own kind and to all Creation. This is why the song says: 'All Creation wept.'

That's What the Cross Would Say

MEN bore me
on their shoulders and set me on a hill.
Many enemies held me fast there.
I saw the Lord of All coming swiftly
and with such courage to climb upon me.
I did not dare to bend or break then
when I saw the surface
of the earth tremble,
for it was against my Lord's desire.
Tumbling I could have felled
all my enemies
but I stood firm and true.

Then the young warrior,
God Almighty Himself,

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stripped and stood firm
and without flinching.
Bravely before the multitude
He climbed upon the cross
to save the world.
I shivered when the hero clung to me,
but I dared not bend to the ground,
nor fall to the earth.
I had to stand firm.
I was a rod raised up,
I bore on high the mighty King,
The Lord of Heaven.
I dared not stoop.
They drove nails into me –
see these terrible injuries,
the open wounds of malice.
I dared not injure these enemies.
They insulted us both and I was soaked in the blood
that ran from the Man's side after He set his spirit free.
On that hill I saw and endured much.
I saw the God of Hosts stretched on the rack.
I saw darkness covering the lifeless body of the Ruler with clouds.
Against His shining radiance
shadows swept across the land,
strange powers moved under the clouds.
All Creation wept,
weeping and moaning for the death of the Kings.
For Christ was on the cross.

Translated by Martin Palmer