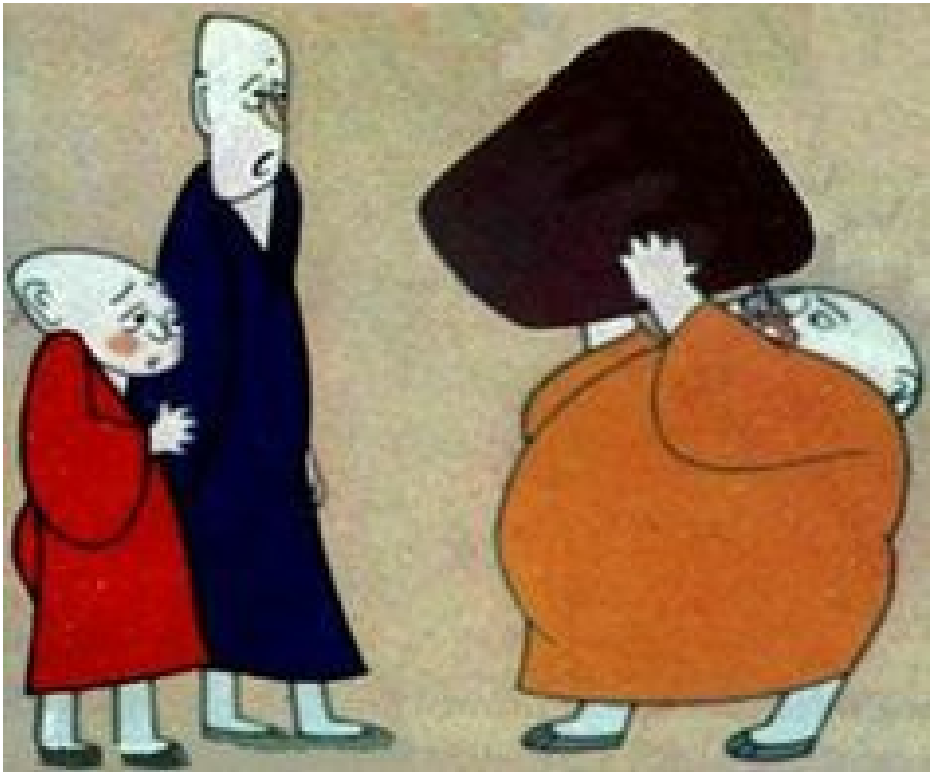


The Buddhist, The Jain, and The other one.



The Buddhist, The Jain, and the Other One

Introduction

Buddha said 'eat whatever falls into your bowl'. Buddha also said that people should not harm any living thing and should be vegetarians.

Once, a monk was out begging for food. People knew that Buddhist disciples did not eat meat so always put vegetables into their bowls. A bird flying overhead dropped some meat it was carrying and it fell into the disciple's bowl. The disciple was confused. The Buddha had told him to eat whatever fell into his bowl but also not to eat meat. He went to ask Buddha. After hearing the story, Buddha thought for a moment and said 'eat whatever falls into your bowl'.

In some countries Buddhists are vegetarians, but people who want to eat meat find a way. Buddhists are allowed to eat meat that is killed accidentally, (a goat falling from a steep hillside etc.) It is amazing how many animals seem to die accidentally in Buddhist countries! Another devilish ploy is to agree once with the cook, (wife usually), that every Wednesday cook chicken or whatever meat is desired. Never repeat the request again. Be surprised every Wednesday when meat 'falls into your bowl'.

Part One

And so we find Anand, sitting in his living room surrounded by his family. Well, actually there was his wife Sangita, and two small children, and so I suppose 'surrounded' isn't the right word. They were watching TV. Anand coughed to attract his wife's attention and said "I love Raspberry Crumble".

Sangita locked eyes with her husband just to make sure he knew what he was saying. For his part Anand nodded ever so slightly and that reassured her that she had heard correctly. You see, Raspberry Crumble was their special phrase that meant so much.

Sangita recalled their first night, their honeymoon. She was laying there surrendered to his will, but before he took her virginity he said, "There is something very important that I have to say, and you need to memorise it immediately because I will never say it again."

She sat up on her elbows, surprised by his earnestness, on this special night meant for love. Anand cleared his throat and sat by her. He put his face close to her ear and whispered, "Chicken on Wednesdays, leftovers for Thursday, lamb on Friday, leftovers for Saturday, and fish on Mondays. If I don't want it on that day, I will say Raspberry Crumble."

And so the routine was set. Anand the Buddhist had just committed a cardinal sin. The idea he had was that if she knew his preferences he could eat the meat when he had said, but would be clear from negative karma because the meat would simply 'fall onto his plate' without him having to ask for it. He would be sin-free, according to Buddha's instruction. The one time he had told her, on the night of their honeymoon, could be washed away, and time would be the healer.

Sangita mentally reorganised her shopping for the next day, Wednesday. Her normal routine was to go to the butchers on Wednesday mornings and buy chicken drumsticks, then to the market to buy spring onions and fresh coriander. He had told her that coriander was essential when he had certain food, and had raised his eyebrows as high as he could to give her the hint without mentioning meat.

So, tomorrow she would be more adventurous and toyed with the idea of aubergines, peppers and courgettes.

She did wonder, however, what the status of her karma was. After all, she was the one who bought, cooked and served the meat and fish, three times a week, for how many years now? And she had never eaten meat or fish herself, in any case. So was she committing sin after sin for him? And whilst he was trying to reach closer to nirvana, she would surely be damned for all this killing. She wasn't happy with the situation but didn't know how to raise the matter without implicating him. After all, the last thing she wanted was to break the promises made on their wedding night. He had insisted that he would never talk of the matter again.

And to make matters worse, she had been feeding meat to their two children at the same time as feeding her husband. They were entirely innocent, though, because they were small and ate whatever was given to them. And they hadn't whispered in her ear or mentioned meat at all, ever. Sangita was ill at ease; there was something not quite right about it all.

Part Two

When the doorbell rang, Anand was ready and waiting. He greeted Martin, the builder, and they both went out to look at the state of the garage. It was an old wooden affair, rotten and in need of replacement. Anand had chosen a double garage in concrete to replace the old one and dreamt of parking his BMW in the new one, with space all around to admire it. He was fed up of always having to squeeze in and out of his car. In fact, he thought it was ridiculous that garages had to be just big enough and no more.

They agreed a price and that was that. Well, it should have been. A week or so before the work was to begin; Anand and his wife watched

a film, *Escape from Tibet*. It was a good film until the monks in the film decided to extend a room. They were digging the foundations and in the process, carefully gathering up worms and grubs from the soil so as not to hurt them. They were then released some way away, safe and sound, to continue on the wheel of life. Anand began to shuffle in his seat and then suddenly stood up and said; “When is it going to end, this film? It’s too long and I have other things to do.”

Sangita knew immediately why he was uneasy and thought about how many worms were living happily in the ground outside in their garden. Martin the builder wasn’t going to collect up the worms.

Part Three

“You do know that you’re a hypocrite, don’t you?” Mahavira, the Jain was addressing Anand at lunchtime at the office. “Worms? You’re worried about worms? What about the millions of insects you’ve killed every time you drive that car of yours?”

“What?” Anand was surprised out of the next bite of his salad sandwich.

“What do you think those little splatters on your windscreen are, and all over the bumper? Insects, that’s what; millions of them, every day, day after day.”

“But everyone does that, don’t they?”

“Not me.” Mahavira was famous for being the only one at work who didn’t drive. But then again, he lived close enough to walk to work. “And anyway, just because everyone does something, it doesn’t make it acceptable, does it?”

“Which rules do you break then?”

“Well you have to do what you can, and admit that you can’t do everything. In India, we Jains keep our mouths covered and sweep in front of us as we walk so that we don’t inadvertently step on even the smallest insects. Now, you can’t do that here, can you? It would be ridiculous. But I do keep the eating rules; we can’t eat after sunset. Now that is easier in India because it’s nearer the equator and the length of days is roughly the same. But here, there are seventeen hours of darkness in winter.”

“And you stick to that in winter?” Anand was surprised again.