

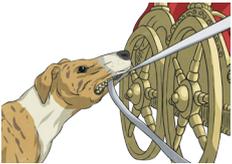
The Dog King Silver

A Buddhist Story about Justice.



Once, the King of Benares had a fancy decorated chariot, which he loved mostly because of the rich hand-worked leather belts and straps.

On this occasion the chariot was left outside in the compound all night, instead of being locked up properly.



During the night the pampered palace dogs smelled the delicious leather scent, came down into the compound and chewed off the soft, wet chariot straps.

They returned unseen to their places in the palace.

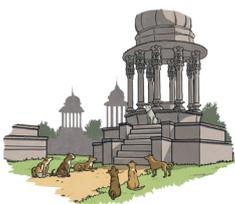


When the King woke up and came down, he saw that the leather had been chewed off and eaten by dogs. He called the servants and demanded to know how this happened. Since they were supposed to watch the palace dogs, the servants were afraid to blame them. Instead, they made up a story that stray dogs, the mutts and mongrels of the city, had come into the grounds and eaten the fancy leather.

The King flew into a terrible rage and decreed that whenever anyone in the city saw a dog, he was to kill him or her at once! The people began killing dogs. The dogs could not understand why suddenly they were being killed. Later that day, they learned of the King's decree.

They became very frightened and retreated to the cemetery just outside the city. This was where their leader lived, the Dog King Silver.

Silver was King not because he was the biggest, or strongest, or toughest. He was average in size, with sleek silver fur, sparkling black eyes and alert pointed ears. He walked with great dignity, that brought admiration and respect from men as well as dogs. In his long life he had learned much, and was able to concentrate his mind on what is most important. So he became the wisest of all the dogs, as well as the one who cared most for the others. Those were the reasons he was King of Dogs.



In the cemetery, the dogs were in a panic and the Dog King Silver asked them why this was. They told him all about the chariot straps and the King's decree, and the people killing them whenever they saw them. King Silver knew there was no way to get into the well-guarded palace grounds. So he understood that the leather must have been eaten by the dogs living inside the palace.

He comforted them by saying, "Do not be afraid. I will save you all. Stay here in the cemetery and don't go into the city. I will tell the King of Benares who are the thieves and who are the innocent. The truth will save us all."



Then, the Dog King Silver began walking slowly through the streets of Benares. His mind was focused, he had no fear. Because of his long life of goodness, he walked with a calm dignity that demanded respect. And, because of the warm glow of loving-kindness that all the people sensed, no one felt the rising of anger or any intention to harm him. Instead, they marvelled as the Great Being passed, and wondered how it could be so!

It was as if the whole city were entranced. With no obstruction, the Dog King Silver walked right past the palace guards, into the royal hall of justice, and sat down calmly underneath the King's throne itself! The King of Benares was impressed by such courage and dignity. So when servants came to remove the dog, he ordered them to let him remain.

Then, the Dog King Silver came out from under the throne and faced the mighty King of Benares. He bowed respectfully and asked, "Your majesty, was it you who ordered that all the dogs of the city should be killed?"

"It was I," replied the King.

"What crime did the dogs commit?" asked the Dog King.

"Dogs ate my rich beautiful chariot leather and straps."

"Do you know which dogs did this?" asked King Silver.

"No one knows," said the King of Benares.



"My Lord," said the dog, "for a King such as you, who wishes to be righteous, is it right to have all dogs killed in the place of the few guilty ones? Does this do justice to the innocent ones?" The King replied, as if it made perfect sense to him, "Since I do not know which dogs destroyed my leather, only by ordering the killing of all dogs can I be sure of punishing the guilty. The King must have justice!"

The Dog King Silver paused for a moment, before challenging the King with the crucial question - "My Lord King, is it a fact that you have ordered all dogs to be killed, or are there some who are not to be killed?" The King suddenly became a little uneasy as he was forced to admit, before his whole court, "It is true that most dogs are to be killed, but not all. The fine pure-breeds of my palace are to be spared."

Then the Dog King said, "My Lord, before you said that all dogs were to be killed, in order to insure that the guilty would be punished. Now you say that your own palace dogs are to be spared. This shows that you have gone wrong in the way of prejudice. For a King who wishes to be righteous, it is wrong to favour some over others. The King's justice must be unbiased, like an honest scale. Although you have decreed an impartial death to all dogs, in fact this is only the slaughter of poor dogs. Your rich palace dogs are unjustly saved, while the poor are wrongly killed!"

Recognising the truth of the Dog King's words, the King of Benares asked, "Are you wise enough to know which dogs ate my leather straps and belts?"

"Yes my Lord, I do know," said he, "it could only be your own favorite palace dogs, and I can prove it."

"Do so," said the King.



The Dog King asked to have the palace pets brought into the hall of justice. He asked for a mixture of buttermilk and grass, and for the dogs to be made to eat it. Lo and behold, when this was done they vomited up partly digested pieces of the King's leather straps!

Then the Dog King Silver said, "My Lord, no poor dogs from the city can enter the well-guarded palace compound. You were blinded by prejudice. It is your dogs who are the guilty ones. Nevertheless, to kill any living being is an unwholesome thing to do. This is because of what we dogs know, but men do not seem to know - that somehow all life is related, so all living beings deserve the same respect as relatives."



The whole court was amazed by what had just taken place. The King of Benares was suddenly overcome by a rare feeling of humility. He bowed before the Dog King and said, "Oh great King of Dogs, I have never seen anyone such as you, one who combines perfect wisdom with great compassion. Truly, your justice is supreme. I offer my throne and the Kingdom of Benares to you!"

The Enlightened Being replied, "Arise my Lord, I have no desire for a human crown. If you wish to show your respect for me, you should be a just and merciful ruler.

The King ruled with great respect for all living beings. He ordered that whenever he ate, all dogs, those of the palace and those of the city, were to be fed as well.