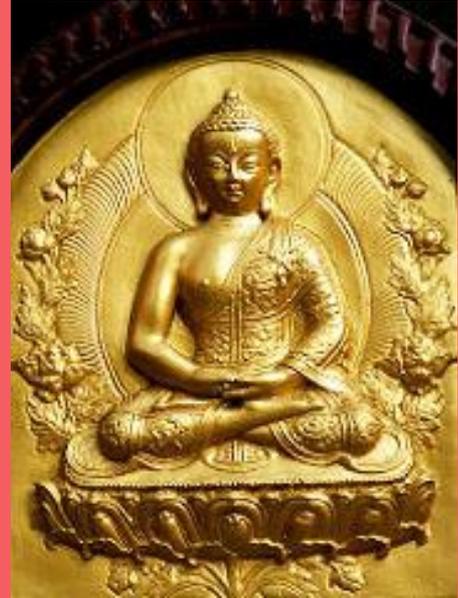


Stories of the Buddha



by FGS Buddha Memorial Center



The Mother of Demons

Once there was a woman named Hariti who would eat children. Though she loved her own children dearly, she would steal other people's children and feast upon them. All the parents who heard of her worried that they would lose their children someday.

Eventually, the Buddha heard of this woman and her monstrous appetite. The Buddha realized that she was not a human woman, but was an evil spirit who was the mother of five hundred demons. The Buddha instructed a monk to kidnap Hariti's youngest demon child and bring him to the monastery. Once Hariti realized her little boy was missing, she would not stop crying and refused to eat.

The Buddha called on Hariti and asked why she was distraught. She wipe her tears and told the Buddha that her beloved youngest son was missing.

The Buddha asked her when she had lost her son. She was shocked – she had lost him while she was stealing someone else’s child. She realized that this was due to her own cruelty and wrongdoing. In profound remorse she bowed before the Buddha and begged for his help.

“Do you love your child?” the Buddha asked.

“Yes,” Hariti replied, “I loved my youngest son the most. He never left my sight – I can’t live without him!”

The Buddha saw this as an opportunity to teach her, “Now that you understand the unbearable pain and sorrow of losing a child and the suffering that you have caused others, do you still hope to find your child?”

“I will do anything as long as I can have my son back.”

“I can help you find your child. Do you truly regret stealing other’s children?”

“Yes! Please teach me, and I will always follow your teachings.”

The Buddha then taught her the five precepts, “From now on, do not kill, do not steal, do not engage in sexual misconduct, do not lie, and do not consume intoxicants. Most of all, take care of all the children in the world with your compassionate maternal nature.”

Hariti agreed, but asked the Buddha what she would do for food since she would no longer eat children.

“From now on,” the Buddha said, “I will ask my monk to make an offering before they eat their alms food.” At this Hariti accepted the Buddha’s teaching and became a protector of all the children in the world. Even today, monastics always make an offering before their meal, in order to offer the meal to Hariti just as the Buddha taught.

-- *Footprints in the Ganges: The Buddha's Stories on Cultivation and Compassion* (By Venerable Master Hsing Yun)

(Source: [FGS Buddha Memorial Center](#))