

The Vessantara Jataka

Outline the main story behind the Vessantara Jataka and its morals. Explain how these are a reflection of the key ideas of Buddhism. (Think about a few parts of the Eightfold Path.)

- Main character(?), Maddi, has a dream about some weird dude maiming and killing her
 - Decides to go to Vessantara (her husband) to interpret the dream
 - Vessantara realizes that he will lose Maddi's kids when she goes to work to a brahmin who asks for the kids
- He spots a brahmin who he offers his hermitage to for lodging
- The brahmin asks for the kids and Vessantara gives them
- The kids run away and hide in a pool and put lotuses over their heads so Jujaka (the bad guy) doesn't see them
- Vessantara finds out they're in the pool and convinces them to go with Jujaka, saying they can buy their freedom
- The children are beaten by Jujaka and walk off with him

This portion of the Vessantara Jataka emphasizes effort and intention. Even though the kids escape from Jujaka twice and come back to Vessantara begging for him to take them back, Vessantara perseveres in his sacrifice of his own children to the brahmin to attain perfection. Sacrifice is a huge part of Buddhism.

To what extent does the idealism of Buddhism and its stories make the religion more or less tangible, communicable, and real?

The idealism of Buddhism causes the religion to become much more communicable to the ordinary population; most members of the population would not think of sacrificing their own children (and later their spouse) in order to attain perfection, causing them to view Buddhism as a religion which places too much penalty on the follower to be worth following.

To what extent is this something you expected from a Buddhist text and how does it color the idea that, *"Among all the world religions, Buddhism enjoys a particularly positive reputation..."*?

■

Buddhism has a positive reputation, but at a huge cost -- it causes Buddhists to sacrifice everything in order to maintain peace and therefore achieve perfection. This would work in an ideal world, but never in the real world, where every person or group has their vices.