

Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom For Children and Parents

By Sarah Conover

Skinner House Books, 2001. 164 pages

Illustrated by Valerie Wahl

As the name implies, *Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents*, is a wonderful treasure of a book. From the front cover, which is a painting of two men having a conversation, one of whom is comfortably perched up in a beautiful tree, we are interested in looking further into this book. There is this bit of magic to begin with, and the magic continues to unfold and infuse the book with a creative, engaging spirit.

Sarah Conover has created a structure and format that allows each story in the treasury to stand alone. Each story is accompanied by a complementary saying of the Buddha or Buddhist teacher. Most stories also showcase a full-color illustration from Valerie Wahl, which are thematic, interesting and fun. For example, I imagine child and adult, child alone or even a whole family together, enjoying the “The Quarrelsome Quails: A Jataka Tale,” which is introduced with the verse, “We must all face death; those who really know it, put aside their quarrels”. On the next page is a wonderful drawing of a lively group of quails who look like they are engaged in quite a conversation! The story is adapted by Ms. Conover in a style which generates movement, humor (“It was just an accident, I promise!” stammered the clumsy bird. “Sure!” rebuked the first quail, “Don’t you have two eyes?”) and anticipation. We are taken in and along. Children’s eyes will likely shine!

While each story stands alone, the quality of the collection encourages the reader to continue on, looking to the next, and then the next interesting piece. For example there is one satisfying short tale with the title, “The Mice who Taught the Monk to Smile”. It is a story about a monk’s journey from misery to joy through examples of what the Buddha

taught about happiness. “Around eight hundred years ago in Tibet lived a cranky, ancient monk. He was a peaceful man but not a happy man.” The Buddha is the storyteller in another piece, “The Monkey King: A Jataka Tale,” a story which cleverly interweaves a variety of themes, including envy, greed and the troubles which arise with gossip and

discontent. The satisfactory ending of this piece is that some wisdom is learned and a new recognition of happiness is enjoyed by the king monkey’s troupe.

Sarah Conover has carefully and lovingly constructed an educational component to *Kindness*, with a foreword “To the Young Reader” and a Preface for adults which both provides background and historical information about Buddhist literature and the development and spread of Buddhism around the world. Near the end of the book

is an interesting arrangement of “Sources of Quotes and Sayings,” with specific notes for each story, and finally at the very end is a section on “Story Sources,” which includes commentary and thoughtful considerations, enriching the entire work.

It has been my pleasure to share *Kindness* (and Conover’s other books of this same genre) with each of my grandchildren at different childhood ages. We all enjoy entering and exploring the treasury!



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