

A Classic Buddhist Story – Mutual Resentment and Harm

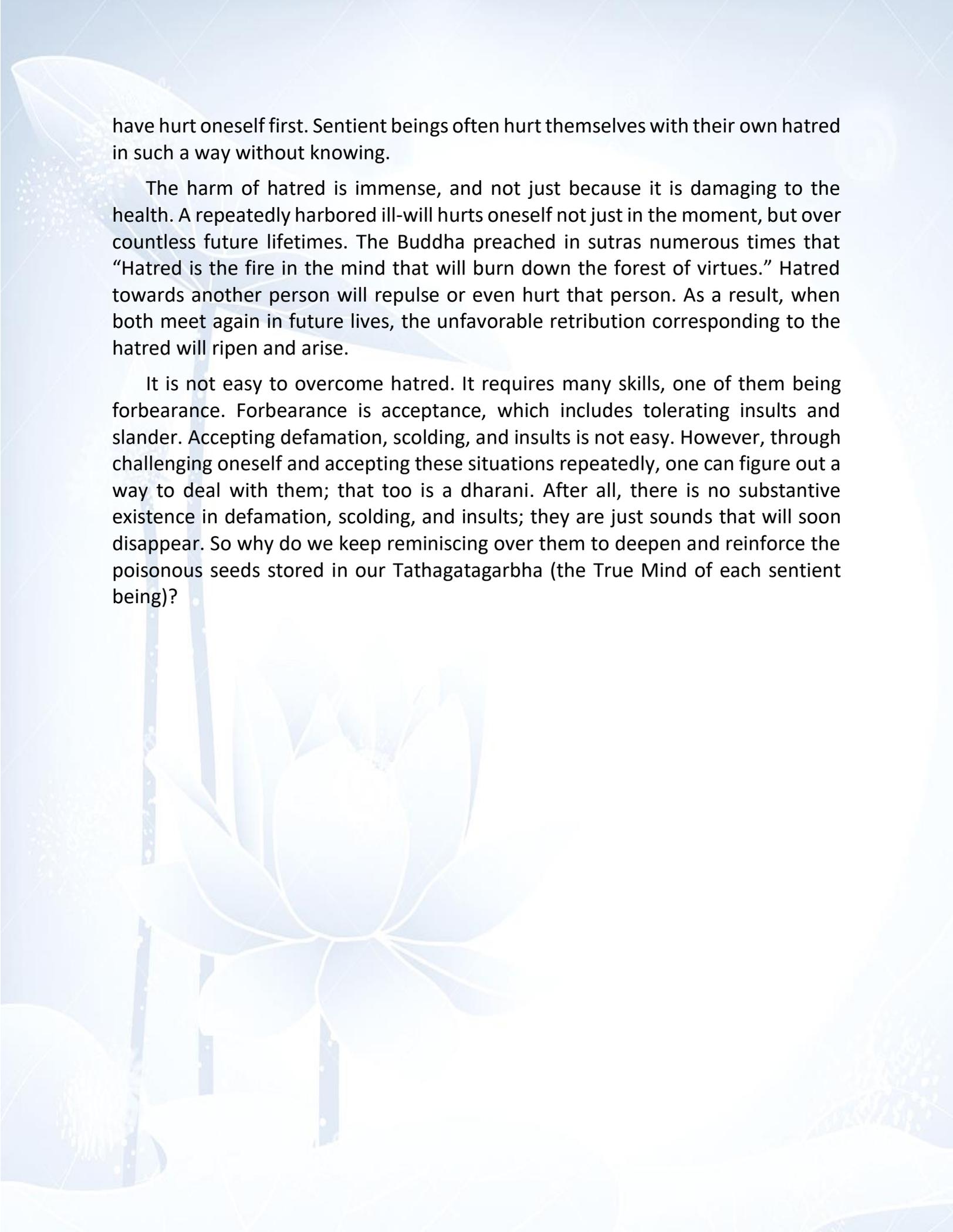
This is a short story from Hundred Similes Sutra explaining the doctrines of Buddhism through analogy.

Once upon a time, there was a person who had some conflicts with his friend and they disliked each other as a result. The feeling of dislike made this person gloomy and unhappy. “Why do you look so depressed and haggard today?” another person asked him. He answered, “Someone slandered me and I don’t have any way to retaliate. That is why I am feeling gloomy.” That person then told him, “I know there is such a dharani (mantra) that can cause harm to the person who made the slandering comments about you, but this mantra would also hurt you first before hurting the other party.” Upon learning about this mantra, the man was very happy and said, “Please teach me! Although this method will hurt me, I don’t mind paying the price of hurting myself first as long as it hurts the other party.”

One might feel astounded beyond comprehension after hearing this story and ponder how anyone can have such a mentality. However, you will be surprised to learn that each one of us has this kind of mentality!

Dharani is a Sanskrit term derived etymologically from the Sanskrit root meaning “to hold for total retention—sum up all dharmas and encapsulate the full meaning of lengthier texts and prolix doctrines.” It is the basis and essence of the dharmas. If one masters the crux of a teaching, one can then master all its corresponding dharmas, words, or meanings. In other words, with the help of simple concepts or methods, one can manage the complicated. Dharani is an expedient that helps sentient beings learn various practice methods. There are a variety of dharanis. For instance, devising a mnemonic method to memorize after listening to the Buddhist teaching is a dharani. Memorizing the key point as a way of learning Buddhist teaching is another type of dharani. A dharani can also be a systematic overview of the stages of practice and the targeted achievement of each stage in Buddhism. These dharanis act similarly to the formula of the times table in arithmetic.

The dharani in this story is analogous to our mindset of hatred and anger. Under the indulgence of habitual tendency, when one’s anger is not rechanneled after it has arisen, the subsequent mentality will revolve around the thought of revenge. Not letting go of the vengeful mind is the same as holding or retaining a dharani. Before one has the chance to retaliate against the other party, the ill feeling will



have hurt oneself first. Sentient beings often hurt themselves with their own hatred in such a way without knowing.

The harm of hatred is immense, and not just because it is damaging to the health. A repeatedly harbored ill-will hurts oneself not just in the moment, but over countless future lifetimes. The Buddha preached in sutras numerous times that “Hatred is the fire in the mind that will burn down the forest of virtues.” Hatred towards another person will repulse or even hurt that person. As a result, when both meet again in future lives, the unfavorable retribution corresponding to the hatred will ripen and arise.

It is not easy to overcome hatred. It requires many skills, one of them being forbearance. Forbearance is acceptance, which includes tolerating insults and slander. Accepting defamation, scolding, and insults is not easy. However, through challenging oneself and accepting these situations repeatedly, one can figure out a way to deal with them; that too is a dharani. After all, there is no substantive existence in defamation, scolding, and insults; they are just sounds that will soon disappear. So why do we keep reminiscing over them to deepen and reinforce the poisonous seeds stored in our Tathagatagarbha (the True Mind of each sentient being)?