



1. Assembly: Self-Sacrifice.

Begin by telling ...

The Story of The Monkey King:

Once upon a time, a long time ago, a long way away, in Northern India lived a troop of monkeys. They happily spent their days frolicking in the jungle under the protection of their king, the Monkey King.

One day some of the little monkeys discovered a tree by the side of the river and hanging from the tree were delicious looking golden fruit. They took the delicious fruit to their king to ask him about it. ‘I’ve no idea what it is,’ he said, ‘but I’ll try it and see!’ Upon eating it he declared, ‘It is delicious. Let’s go find more of them.’

The whole troop decamped to the tree and happily played and dined on the mangoes. One day however, a fruit fell into the river and floated down stream. Eventually, the fruit came to rest next to the rotund belly of the human king of the area. Upon picking it up he past it to one of his men, ‘Eat this. I need to know if it is safe’ he said. The soldier nervously nibbled the fruit and, having not died, declared it delicious. ‘Let’s find this tree that produces this delicious fruit.’ said the human king.

The king headed up stream with his men until, as darkness began to fall, they discovered the tree and hiding in it, the monkeys. ‘Excellent,’ said the king, ‘now we can have monkey and mango for breakfast! Set up camp around the tree. Don’t let any monkeys climb down and escape!’ The soldiers bedded in and the Monkey King had to think how he’d save his people.

He noticed a nearby tree, one he could reach but the little monkeys might not. He made his mind up and gave himself some jumping room. He leapt through the air stretching forward with his arm and stretching backwards with his tail until he found himself suspended between the trees. ‘Quickly,’ he hissed, ‘everyone use me as the bridge, into the other tree’. One by one the monkeys used their king as a bridge climbing to safety.

Through the night all the monkeys climbed to safety until just the last few remained. As the sun came up and the last monkeys crossed the soldiers spotted their escape. ‘Alarm! Alarm!’ they called and rushed to grab their bows. ‘Shoot him down!’ they called to each other and took aim. Just before the fatal arrow was launched the king rose form his bed. ‘HALT!’ he called. He looked up at the Monkey King and spoke to him. ‘I have been watching you for most of the night my friend,’ he said. ‘I have never seen such bravery. As a reward you may climb down and re-join your people’.

The Monkey King smiled sadly. ‘Alas king, I cannot,’ he said. ‘The weight of my people crossing me all night has broken my back. I couldn’t move even if I wanted to, but at least my people are safe’. The human king was heartbroken and climbed up to cradle the Monkey King for his last moments alive. After his death, he wept and he carried him home. He buried him and had a huge monument built, near Lumbini, as an example of how to truly be an example to others.

This story comes from a book called *The Jataka Tales*, which has stories of the past lives lived by the man who became the Buddha. In it there are many stories with messages for Buddhists, and anyone else, to learn from and this story is one of the most famous.

It has a variety of lessons in it but perhaps the most important theme in it is that of self-sacrifice.

Self-sacrifice and the First World War:

Self-sacrifice is a word that is often used in relation to WWI, and rightly so. We are told of a generation who sacrificed themselves for us. Certainly, we can view that sacrifice in terms of numbers:

- There were 37 million casualties
- 20 million were injured
- 17 million were killed
- 10 million dead of the dead were military personnel
- 888,266 of the dead were British soldiers, sailors and airmen.

Now, when we are thinking about numbers like that, it can get a little difficult to keep that concept of self-sacrifice in perspective. In the face of such huge numbers it can become difficult to remember what that self-sacrifice really means.

St John Battersby who signed up at 14, was an officer in charge of 30- and 40-year-olds by 16 and ultimately sacrificed his left leg when it was blown off on the Somme.

Private Thomas Bullman, of the Coldstream Guards, was conscripted at 33-years-old. He sacrificed his chance to see his daughters ever again. He was dead within months of being at the front.

Mrs Seabrook of Sydney, Australia lost all three of her sons in one day at the Battle of Passchendaele. In one day, she sacrificed being a mother.

Private Aby Bevistein, of the Middlesex Regiment, signed up aged 16 (three years underage). Just a boy faced with the horror of war he suffered shellshock – what we now call post-traumatic stress disorder. Aby sacrificed his mental health, then his life when he was shot for desertion.

Vera Brittain, a volunteer nurse sacrificed her fiancée, brother and two friends as well as ‘her youth’ as she put it *A Testament to Youth* (1933), having seen the horrors of war.

Remembrance:

So, again let's think about that word self-sacrifice. Yes, think of the numbers, think of the scale because if/when you see the cemeteries the sheer numbers will be unimaginable.

But, also think about the individuals, individuals as willing to sacrifice something of themselves, nearly 900,000 Monkey Kings for us.

Self-sacrifice wasn't a new idea to them either! They were very aware of what they were doing and what the situations they found themselves in might mean. These were different times.

More than a quarter of the British population went to church every Sunday. Less than 1% of the population called themselves atheists. Virtually everybody had a decent working knowledge of the Bible, officers and the 'well-educated' would have had an excellent understanding of it.

That knowledge would include a good understanding of the story of Jesus. Christianity teaches that he was an individual who offered his own life as a sacrifice to repair a rift in a relationship between man and God, who offered his own life so that other people's futures might be better.

How that echoes the sacrifices that the individuals I have spoken of today. They made their own sacrifices so that other people's futures, your and mine, might be better. Each of them lived, loved, suffered and sacrificed something *very* real, and *very* personal for you, and me, to live the lives we have today.

In their time, events were documented through art and through poetry rather than film and social media. So it seems fitting that we end on a poem from one of those people who made the self-sacrifices we have been discussing. Vera Brittain's poem *Perhaps* sums up perfectly the sacrifices I would like you to remember, for the things we take for granted, cost them a *very personal* price.

Read *Perhaps* from [*Hear my Cry*](#) Page 47.