

## CHAPTER 1 – TREASURER CATFOOT MAKES A TINY DONATION

One day in the town of Savatthi in India around 2,600 years ago, a big group of people made an offering of lunch to the Buddha and his monks. Later, thinking about the good deeds of the people offering the meal, the Buddha gave a Dharma talk in which he said,

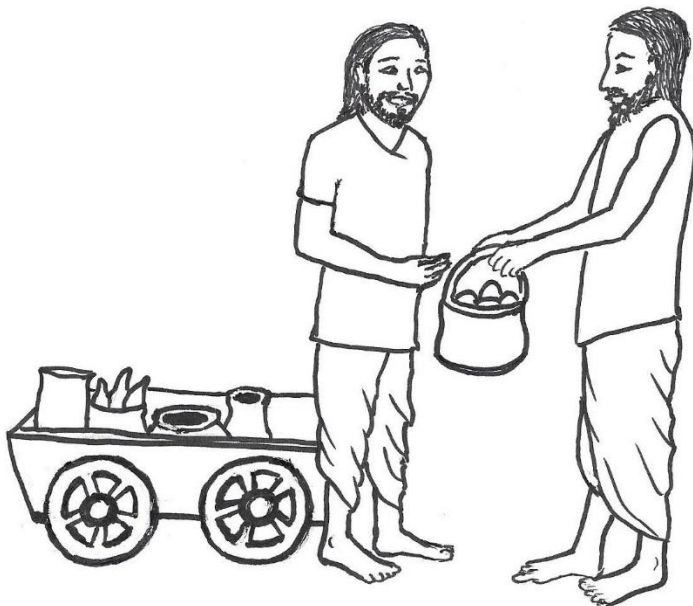
“When a man is generous, giving to others, but does not encourage others to be generous, in his future lives he will be wealthy but not popular. When a man is not generous himself but he encourages others to be generous, in his future lives he will be popular but not wealthy. When a man is neither generous nor encourages others to be generous, in his future lives he will be neither wealthy nor popular. When a man is generous and he also encourages others to be generous, he receives the merit to be both wealthy and popular in future lives.”

Listening to the Buddha, the people were inspired to follow his teaching. One of the men thought to himself, “This is indeed a wonderful thing! Right away I am going to practice what he is teaching and make merit leading to wealth and popularity.”

As the Buddha was getting up to leave, the man went up to him and invited him to come to his house for lunch the next day, saying, “Lord, accept our offering of food tomorrow.”

The Buddha asked him, “How many monks do you need?”

“All the monks you have, Lord,” was the man’s reply. Feeling very generous, he wanted to serve as many monks as possible.



The Buddha accepted his invitation and agreed to come to his house for lunch.

The man went through the town, walking up to each house, and announced, “Ladies and gentlemen, I have invited the Buddha and his monks for tomorrow’s meal. Please donate rice and whatever else is needed for making rice-porridge and other kinds of food. Contribute what you wish, and provide for as many monks as you wish. Let’s do all the cooking in one place and make our offerings together.”

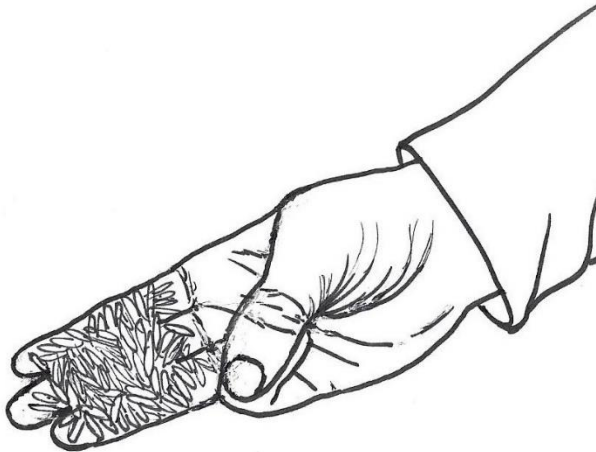
Many people happily donated bags of rice, bowls of vegetables, baskets of fruits, and pots of milk, butter and spices.

A rich man who was a treasurer, in charge of the town's money, was watching the man going from house to house receiving containers of food, and wondered what he was doing. The man eventually came to the treasurer's door, and when the treasurer opened the door, the man announced the meal planned for the monks and invited him to make donations of food.

The treasurer felt angry, thinking the man was taking other people's offerings so he could act proudly as if he made all the offerings to the monks himself. So, the treasurer strongly disliked the man and disapproved of what he was doing.

The treasurer responded, "Bring the bowl you have."

As the man went to bring a bowl, the treasurer murmured to himself in an irritated tone, "This wretched man! Why didn't he just invite as many monks as he himself can provide for? Instead, he is going around urging the entire town to give offerings!"



The treasurer then brought some grains of rice from his house, held them on three of his fingers and offered them into the man's bowl. He also brought some beans and placed them on three of his fingers and put them in the bowl. Because of the way he made the offering—using only three fingers, making his hand small like a cat's paw—he later was referred to as Treasurer Catfoot. He brought some melted butter from a little pot and dribbled just a little, drop by drop, into the

bowl. He brought some sweet syrup and dribbled just a little bit, drop by drop, into the bowl.

The man placed the treasurer's offerings apart from the offerings from other people. The treasurer saw him do this, and wondered, "Why does he place the offerings I gave him apart from the other offerings? Will he try to embarrass me by pointing out that such a rich man as me donated so little?"

So, he sent a servant boy to find out, saying, "Follow that man and tell me what he does with my offerings."

The man took the grains of the treasurer's rice and bits of the treasurer's beans, butter and sweet syrup, and sprinkled all of them into the pots and bowls of rice and other foods that had been donated. As he did so, he said,

"May the treasurer receive a great reward."

By putting bits of the treasurer's offerings into all the pots and bowls of food, the treasurer's donations were a part of all the foods, which made his offerings seem greater.

The servant boy went back to the treasurer and reported what he had seen.

The treasurer, still suspicious that the man was up to no good, thought, “If that man humiliates me in the middle of all those people, I will kill him the moment he mentions my name!”

The next day, the treasurer hid a knife under his clothes and went to the place where the food was going to be offered to the Buddha and his monks.

The man who had gathered all the offerings led the Buddha and monks in to where the people were waiting to serve the food, and then said,

“Lord, this food is an offering from everyone. Whether a person has given much or a little doesn’t matter. Each of us has given with faith and generosity. May all of us receive great merit.”

When he heard those words, the treasurer was shocked. He thought,

“I came here with the intention of killing this man in case he would humiliate me. But instead, he included everyone in his request for a blessing of merit, both those who donated big pots of food and those who offered only a few pinches of food. If I don’t admit my mistake and ask the man for forgiveness, then I will suffer the results of my negative karma.”

The treasurer said to the man, “My friend, I have done you a great wrong by thinking badly about you. Please forgive me.”

The man asked, “What do you mean?”

The treasurer told him the whole story, admitting, “I thought you put aside my offerings in order to embarrass me in front of everyone, and I wanted to kill you if you did so.”



The Buddha, hearing what the treasurer said and knowing everything that had occurred, said,

“One should never think of a good deed as not important, however small it may be. Small good deeds will become big if you do them again and again, as a habit. Wise people who do good deeds will become filled with merit, like a jar that gets filled with water drop by drop.”

*Questions:*

1. When a person is generous and also encourages others to be generous, what result does he receive in future lives? (wealth and popularity)
2. Why did the man invite all the monks rather than just some of the monks? (he felt generous and wanted others to join him in making offerings)
3. How did the treasurer feel when the man invited him to make a donation of food? (angry; he didn't like what the man was doing)
4. What did the treasurer think the man was going to pretend with all the people's offerings? (that he himself made all the offerings)
5. What did the treasurer think the man might say to humiliate him? (that he was a rich man who made such a small offering)
6. What did the Buddha teach that we should make a habit of doing, to make a lot of merit? (good deeds)

*What the Buddha said:*

“Māvamaññētha puññassa, na maṃ taṃ āgamissatī, udabindu nipātēna, udakumbhō pi pūrati, pūrati dhīrō puññassa, thōkathōkam pi āchinam.”

“Do not think lightly of merit, that ‘good results will not come to me,’ for by the falling of water drops a water jar is filled. Even doing acts of virtue little by little, the wise man fills himself with merit.”

- Dhammapada 122 (9:7)

*Dharma discussion – Merit and Generosity:*

What does the word “merit” mean?

The good result that comes from doing a good deed, a virtuous action, or a good karma.

What are “good deeds,” “virtuous actions” and “good karmas”?

They are acts of kindness, being generous, and helping someone. Good karma also includes spiritual practices like learning the Dharma, chanting, prayer, or meditation.

They all mean doing something that's not for your own enjoyment, but is for the good of someone else or others, or for the good of all beings, including yourself.

There are so many good deeds we can do. Can you think of some examples?

Helping your parents at home, helping your teacher arrange the classroom, being kind to a new student so they feel welcome, offering to help carry something, rescuing a living being such as an earthworm, helping someone with homework, doing something good for the environment, offering food to someone else rather than just eating it yourself.

Those actions, and all of our good karmas, are the causes of merit, good results. What do we mean by “good result”? It’s something like good luck, giving us happiness and positive things in our lives such as good health, a nice home, helpful people around us, kind friends, being safe and protected, having what we need, and finding a job that we enjoy doing.

What did the Buddha say about good deeds, even small good deeds? They are important; even the little kind things we do will give good results if we do them again and again. Like small drops of water add up to fill a jar, little good deeds add up to a lot of merit. Imagine a jar under a dripping faucet—the drops of water seem so tiny that they would never fill the jar, but if we leave it under the faucet for a while, the jar becomes full of water. Doing good deeds at home, at school and wherever we are—and even when our friends, sisters and brothers are not doing them—develops into a habit of being kind and helpful, which automatically creates a lot of merit.

Do you think the man in the story who collected food offerings knew that even small offerings were important? Yes. He took the treasurer’s small offerings and treated them very specially, putting bits of them in every bowl and pot of food. Instead of being critical, he was kind and compassionate, wanting the treasurer to receive great merit for his offerings, hoping the offerings would help the treasurer.

Why did he ask other people in the town to give food? He wanted to practice what the Buddha had taught about encouraging others to give. Why is it important to encourage others to be generous, to invite others to join us in doing kind deeds? The Buddha said that if you encourage others to give, then you will be popular in the future. There are other reasons to encourage others to be generous, to join us in doing good deeds. Can you think of any? So they can make merit too, and have a happy life. And to show that we care about them, so we’re not just thinking about ourselves.

When the treasurer was making his offerings, do you think he was thinking about merit? Probably not. Although he knew about karma, he was focused on his negative, critical thoughts about the man who came to his door. Why would the treasurer have such negative thoughts about the man? Some people don’t like seeing another person doing good deeds. They don’t like to think that he is better than they are; they always want to be the best. So, they believe that such a person actually is selfish but is pretending to be good to get attention or some other reward. People who are selfish tend to see others as being selfish and don’t believe that others can be unselfish.

Another reason he probably wasn’t thinking about merit is that he was more concerned about having to give something away. Although he was rich and had plenty of food, how did he feel about giving some away? He didn’t like it. He was stingy, the opposite of generous.

Stingy people think they would be happier keeping everything for themselves than being generous.

Then, after the treasurer made his little donation, he had more negative thoughts. What were they? The fear and anger that the man would humiliate him. And cruel thoughts—he packed a knife and was ready to kill the man. People who are cruel often assume that others are cruel too. So, he assumed that the man would be cruel and embarrass him.

What did the treasurer learn about the man? That he wasn't cruel and wasn't selfish, but was indeed kind, and appreciated his small donation, and generously wanted to share merit with everyone.

The man's small act of kindness—inviting the treasurer to donate some food—led to the treasurer giving a small donation, which led to his good fortune of meeting the Buddha and hearing the Dharma, which changed his life for the better.

Even such small acts of kindness can have such wonderful life-changing results!