

Lesson 17 – GENEROSITY – Anathapindika and the New Monastery

The Buddha and his student monks had left their families, so they had no homes, no buildings to live in. They just slept in the woods under trees, in caves, under overhanging large rocks, on heaps of straw, or even at burial grounds. As they arose in the early morning each day, they left those places with no expectation of returning. In this way, by learning not to be attached to a comfortable home or place to live, they practiced non-attachment.

When they were staying in a forest called Bamboo Grove, near the town of Rajagaha, a wealthy man who traded goods—a merchant—saw the monks walking slowly and gracefully, looking only a little distance ahead, with very peaceful expressions on their faces. The merchant had a feeling of trust and admiration in his heart toward the monks.

One day he asked some of them, “Lords, if I had some buildings constructed for you to live in, would you live in them?”

One of the monks answered, “The Blessed One has not allowed buildings for us.”

The merchant said, “Then, Lords, ask the Blessed One and tell me what he says.”

The monks told the Buddha about their conversation with the merchant. The Buddha gave his permission for buildings to be constructed, and the monks told the merchant.

In one day, the merchant had sixty small houses built for the monks. Then he invited the Buddha and his monks for the next day’s lunch, during which he would formally offer the sixty buildings to the Buddha and his monks.

The merchant, excitedly planning for the next day’s lunch, gave directions to his cooks. He told them to get up early and start cooking rice, curries, sauces, and sweet desserts for the large group of monks who would be coming the next day. While he was busy directing them, his brother-in-law, Anathapindika, arrived at his house to discuss some business, after having traveled there from the town of Sāvatti.

Anathapindika stood watching the merchant, wondering why he was so intent on talking to the cooks about preparing food, as if it was the only thing that was important. Every other time he visited, the merchant immediately dropped everything and welcomed him. Why was the merchant ignoring him?

When the merchant finally finished directing the cooks, he went to Anathapindika and welcomed him. When they sat down, Anathapindika said,

“You seem so busy. What’s all the excitement about? Are you preparing for a wedding? Or are you making some great religious offering? Or have you invited the king and his ministers for tomorrow?”

The merchant replied, “There is no marriage. Nor have the king and his ministers been invited for tomorrow. But I have a great religious offering. I have invited for tomorrow the Sangha of monks headed by the Buddha, the Enlightened One.”

Anathapindika couldn’t believe what the merchant just said. He asked,

“Did you say ‘the Buddha?’”

The merchant replied, “I did say ‘the Buddha.’”

Anathapindika, still not believing it, asked again, “Did you say ‘the *Buddha*’?”

The merchant repeated, “I did say ‘the Buddha.’”

Anathapindika, still in shock, asked, “Did you say ‘*the Buddha*?’”

The merchant replied again, “Yes, I did say ‘the Buddha.’”

Anathapindika said, “This news, the Buddha, the Buddha coming here, this is a very rare opportunity! Is it possible to see this Blessed One, the Fully Enlightened One, right *now*?”

The merchant said, “This is not the time to go and see him. You can see him early tomorrow.”

Anathapindika was overwhelmed, thinking “Early tomorrow I shall be able to see the Blessed One, the fully enlightened Buddha!”

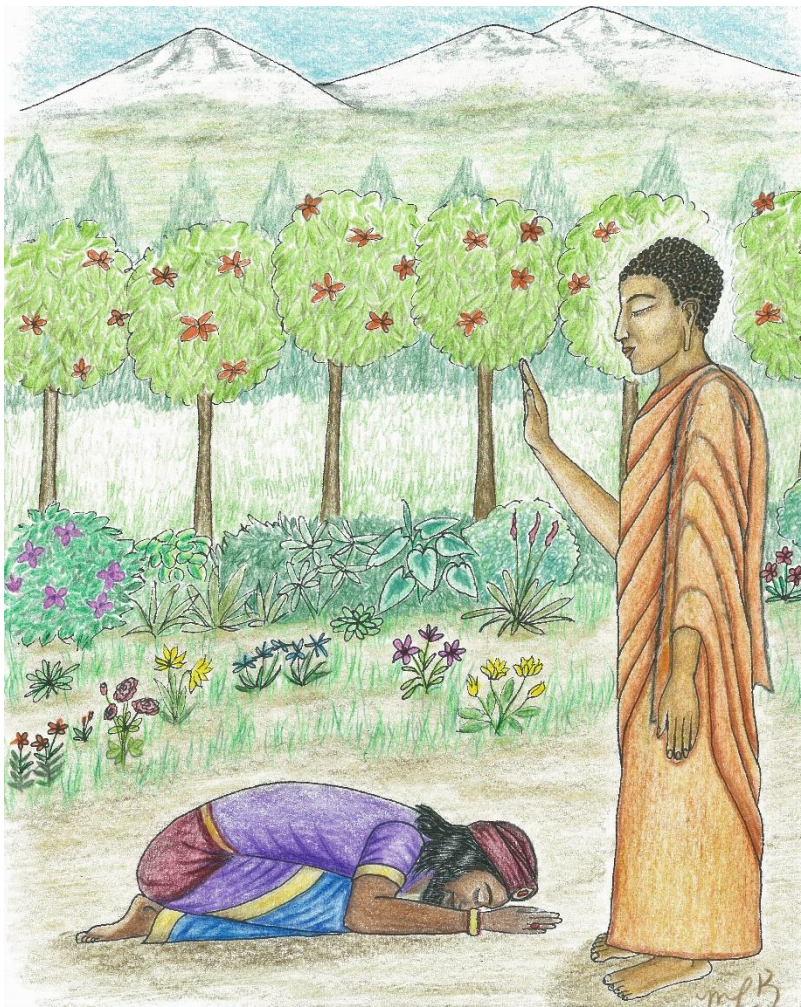
That night when he went to bed at the merchant’s house, he was so excited that he couldn’t sleep. He got up three times, thinking it was dawn. Finally, he walked out of the house when it was still dark. Heavenly beings opened the gate for him. The glow of fire lamps from houses in the city provided a bit of light at first, but as he walked away from the city, it became very dark, so then he became afraid and thought of going back.

An invisible spirit called Sivaka encouraged him to continue, saying, “A hundred elephants, a hundred horses, a hundred chariots, a hundred thousand ladies with beautiful gems and earrings, all these are not even worth a part of one step forward now. Go forward! Better go forward than turn back.”

The spirit repeated it three times, and by that time, Anathapindika was no longer walking in total darkness. The sun started to rise as he was walking, and his fear disappeared. He was near the Cool Grove where the Buddha was staying. The Buddha was awake, walking around, and saw Anathapindika coming. He then sat down and said to Anathapindika,

“Come, Sudatta.”

Happy and hopeful, Anathapindika thought, “He is calling me by my real name! He knows my real name although we have never met before!”



Bowing to the Buddha, he said, “I hope that the Blessed One has slept well.”

The Buddha said, “A true holy man always sleeps well, who has attained full Nirvana, who has rejected all attachments. There is no conflict in his heart. He who is at peace, who has peace established in the mind, sleeps in bliss.”

The Buddha continued instructing Anathapindika in the Dharma. While Anathapindika sat there listening, he had a deep understanding—profound wisdom—that everything appears and then later disappears. He said,

“Magnificent Lord, beginning from today, allow me to be your follower. I take refuge in you for as long as I live. Lord, please accept tomorrow’s lunch from me.”

The Buddha silently agreed, accepting the invitation.

He and his students then came for the meal provided by the merchant, who offered the sixty buildings to the Buddha and Sangha.

The merchant heard about the invitation made by his brother-in-law for the next day, but Anathapindika was not at his own home in Sāvatti to offer his food to the monks. He was staying in Rajagaha with the merchant. So how would Anathapindika make an offering tomorrow? The merchant, with kind and generous thoughts, said to him,

“The Buddha and his monks have been invited by you for tomorrow. But you are a guest here. I will give you money to provide the food for the Buddha and the monks.”

Anathapindika replied, “There is no need. I have money to provide food for the Buddha and the monks.”

A man from the town heard about the invitation and he too generously offered money to Anathapindika to provide the food. Anathapindika told him there was no need. King Bimbisara also heard about the invitation, and offered money for the food, but Anathapindika replied there was no need, he had enough money.

Anathapindika bought food for the lunch, and early the next morning directed the cooks to prepare it. When it was ready, he sent a messenger to the Buddha to let him know the meal was ready.

When the Buddha and his students arrived at the merchant’s house with their bowls and were seated, Anathapindika served the Buddha and the monks all the different kinds of good food. After the meal, Anathapindika sat near the Buddha and said:

“Lord, please accept my invitation to come with your monks and stay with me for the rainy season.”

The Buddha responded, “Buddhas are happy to stay in rooms that are empty.”

Anathapindika said softly, “I know, Blessed One, I know.”

The Buddha then gave a Dharma talk to everyone at the merchant’s house.

Anathapindika was popular in the town of Rajagaha, and many friends and acquaintances welcomed him to visit them at their homes. When he finished his business meetings in Rajagaha, he went back to his home town.

On the way, he told people, “Sirs, make gardens, build places for a big group of monks to stay, and prepare gifts of food. A Buddha has appeared in the world. He has been invited by me. He will come by this road.”

The people were curious and excited to see a real Buddha, so they started making preparations as Anathapindika directed.

When Anathapindika arrived in his home town of Sāvatti, he looked around for a large and peaceful property for the Buddha and the monks to stay. He saw Prince Jeta's park, a very beautiful and peaceful area—the perfect place. He went to Prince Jeta and after greeting him, said,

“Sir, give me your park to use.”

Prince Jeta loved his park. He was so attached to his park that he didn't want to let it be used by others. He certainly wouldn't give it away and he didn't want to sell his beautiful park, so he set an enormously high price for it. He said,

“The park cannot be given unless a hundred thousand gold coins are spread over it.”

That was an extreme amount of money, and it seemed absurd to have to spread the money over the land. But Anathapindika was determined to give a gift of the beautiful park to the Buddha. He agreed to the price by saying,

“The park is taken, sir.”

Prince Jeta couldn't believe it. He said, “The park is not taken.”

The two men disagreed on whether the prince actually had sold the park to Anathapindika, so they went to some judges to ask whether the deal had been made. The judges said that as soon as Anathapindika agreed to the offer, the sale was made.

Anathapindika ordered his wealth to be brought in gold coins loaded into carts, and then to be placed neatly on the ground, spaced evenly in the park, according to the condition set by Prince Jeta to purchase the land. After they finished setting all the hundred thousand gold coins on the ground, there was a small portion of the park land that was not yet covered with gold coins. There weren't enough coins to cover the portion near the gate. Anathapindika asked people to bring additional coins to cover that space.

Prince Jeta, observing what was going on and hearing Anathapindika asking for more coins, thought to himself, “This can be no ordinary matter since Anathapindika is spending so much gold on this land.” He knew the land would be offered to the Buddha, but he didn't know much about the Buddha. He said,

“Enough, don't cover that space. Leave that space for me to offer. It shall be my gift.”

Anathapindika thought, “This Prince Jeta is a powerful and well-known person. It would be very good if such well-known people become confident in the Dharma.” So he left the portion of land for Prince Jeta to offer. The prince had a gate-house, like a security booth, constructed on the land as an extra gift.

Anathapindika then ordered and paid for construction of buildings on the park land. Soon there were buildings for the Buddha and the monks to live in, meditation and meeting halls, terraces, fire rooms for cooking, bathhouses, bathrooms, storage buildings, walkways, and ponds constructed in the park, all in preparation for the Buddha and his students.

This became the famous monastery called Jetavana in the city of Sāvatti.

Following Anathapindika’s suggestion, the people on the road to Sāvatti eagerly worked on constructing buildings for the Buddha and his large group of monks to stay overnight on their journey. The Buddha sent a few monks to help direct the villagers to construct the buildings. The people provided robes, food, medicine and places to stay for the monks while they were helping on the construction projects.

A poor tailor saw the people making buildings for the monks. He thought, “This is extraordinary, all these people eagerly constructing buildings, and the monks overseeing the work being given all these robes, food, and medicines. I should make a building too!”

The tailor got some clay and made some bricks and then set up a scaffold to climb while he laid the bricks to build into walls. But he had never constructed a building before. His wall wasn’t straight enough, so it collapsed. He tried again a second time, and again it fell. He tried a third time, and when it fell again, he was very frustrated and annoyed. He complained,

“The monks, the sons of the Sakyans, advise and instruct the people who give them robes, food, medicine, and places to stay. But I am poor. No one instructs and advises me or oversees my building.”

The monks heard about his complaint, and wondered what to do, so they told the Buddha about it. The Buddha then discussed it with them, saying,

“Monks, I allow building work to be formally organized among the people. A monk who oversees such building work shall make sure it is completed quickly and efficiently, and shall make sure that whatever is damaged or broken is repaired.”

This would ensure that monks would organize building construction so everyone would be treated fairly and would have an equal opportunity to work on constructing buildings for monks, whether they were skilled or not.

Questions:

1. Where did the monks spend the night before the merchant built the sixty houses? (under trees, in caves, on heaps of straw, or at burial grounds)
2. What did the monks learn and practice by sleeping outdoors in different places? (non-attachment, not to be attached to a comfortable home or particular place to live)
3. What type of room did the Buddha say he is happy with? (an empty room)
4. What payment did Prince Jeta request from Anathapindika? (100,000 gold coins placed over the land)
5. What did Prince Jeta do when Anathapindika's coins were not enough to cover all the land? (he gave the remaining land to the Buddha and monks as his gift, and built a gate-house on that land)
6. Did the Buddha want to allow poor people to be generous, helping to construct buildings? (yes)

What the Buddha said:

“Sukhā matteyyatā loke, atho petteyyatā sukhā, sukhā sāmāññatā loke, atho brahmaññatā sukhā.”

“In this world, serving one's mother brings happiness, serving one's father brings happiness, serving the monks brings happiness, and serving the holy ones brings happiness.”

Dhammapada 332 (23:13)

Dharma discussion - Generosity:

We often talk about generosity in Buddhism. Why is it so important?

It is a way to make merit, good karma.

It also helps us to let go of something, to get rid of something.

What does it help us get rid of? Our greed, selfishness, attachments.

We all are attached to many good things—for example, our family, friends, pets, toys, clothes, home, and favorite activities.

But what happens when we are too attached to too many things?

We get upset each time we lose them or can't have them, so then we are often miserable.

The Buddha's monks were trained not to be attached to anything, not even to home, clothing, hairstyle, or belongings, because they all wear robes, have shaved heads, have very few belongings, and stay wherever they can.

By not being so attached to things, they could live very peacefully.

We are not monks, but we can learn to be more peaceful too, by letting go of some unnecessary attachments.
How? By practicing generosity—sharing what we have with others.
For example, suppose we are very attached to chocolate cake.
When we see chocolate cake being served, we hope to get a big piece.
If we're given a very small piece, or we're served last, we might feel disappointed.
Instead of being so attached to a piece of cake, how can we practice generosity?
We can offer pieces of cake to others first, take the last piece, and make sure everyone got a piece of cake. We can share our slice of cake with someone else.

Would you feel happier eating the biggest piece of cake, or would you feel happier serving the cake and making sure everyone got a piece?
Do you think the merchant and Anathapindika were happier keeping their food and money for themselves, or making offerings to the Buddha and his monks?
Being generous can give us a lot of joy! Sharing joy gives us more joy!

Even if we don't have much to give, like the tailor, we can find ways to be generous.
Instead of trying to build houses himself, how could the tailor have been generous? By offering his time and effort to help others construct houses.
Similarly, we can help others—offering our time and effort.
We all have time and energy we can offer.
Can you think of some examples of how you can be generous, offering your time and energy at home?
You can help your parents carry the groceries, you can set the table for meals, clear the dishes from the table, wash dishes, or help with laundry.
You can look around and see what needs to be cleaned up or put away.
When your parents are busy, you can help with little brothers or sisters.

We can use our skills to make a gift for someone.
Can you think of some examples? Making a birthday card, a craft or art project.
And we can be generous in sharing our toys.

Generosity means we are giving willingly, because we want to give.
If someone is bullying or manipulating you, or pressuring you to give them something they don't really need, then you aren't giving because you want to.
When we give because we feel forced to give, is that generosity? No.
And if we give in to manipulation or bullying, then we are encouraging them to do it again to us or to others.

Also, generosity doesn't mean trading—giving so we get something in return.
For example, if we help someone so they will give us money or a reward, or if we give to a friend so they will do something for us, is that generosity? No.

What is the opposite of generous? Stingy, or greedy, or selfish, or too attached to things.

Stinginess means we want to keep things for ourselves, we don't want to share, we don't want to give our free time to help someone else. Sometimes we may have good reason not to give, not to share. For all of us, including adults, sometimes it's not easy to decide whether to share or give something. To determine whether we are being stingy or being reasonable, we can pay attention to our thoughts when deciding whether or not to share. For example, when thinking about sharing a toy with someone, are you worried that they may break it? Of course it's reasonable not to share something fragile with someone who might be likely to break it, like a very young child. Or are you concerned that if you gave away a gift, the person who gave it to you would be disappointed that you gave it away? This is a reasonable concern. Or, if you give something away that's very useful, are you worried you might need it in the future? We have to balance what we really need with what others might really need. It's not always easy to make those decisions.

If you often have a hard time sharing or giving to others, think about this: Not having what we need is the result of having kept too much for ourselves—having been too stingy—in previous lives. Our actions, our good and bad karmas, result in our good and bad luck. So, the way to have what you need, to avoid being poor, is to be generous. That might not seem to make sense. It doesn't make sense to most people in the world, who think that saving and keeping as much money as they can, or investing it so they can earn and keep even more money, is the best way to become rich. Of course, it's good to save money and not waste it on unnecessary things. But when we have what we need and we are generous to those who are needy, we are making merit, creating the causes for good luck. Because, generosity makes merit—it's a good action that is the cause for good luck.

Activity:

Each student writes the quotation of Buddha (above) on paper, and then underneath writes about 10 or more numbered lines to write a list. On the lines, students list things they can do as selfless service to their parents. If not all the lines are filled, students can ask their parents to suggest some ways they could help at home. The list can be hung up at home to remind students to practice generosity at home.