

## CHAPTER 4 – FOUR HUNGRY LITTLE MONKS

There was once an elderly, wealthy couple who were of the highest—or elite—level of society, called brahmins in India. Before the sun rose, the woman prepared delicious food that she wanted to offer to four monks, as a way to make merit, to ensure her family's good future. However, she didn't want just any monks to come. She wanted to serve very special, elite monks who had come from the brahmin level of society before becoming monks. Very early in the morning, she told her husband,

“Go to the monastery and have the manager pick out four old brahmins, and bring them here.”

Her husband went to the monastery where the Buddha's monks were staying, and said to the person who appeared to be in charge of receiving guests, “Have four brahmins picked out for me and bring them to me.”

The person in charge went inside the monastery and soon came back to the woman's husband, along with four young little monks, only seven years old. But, these monks were extremely special; they were arahants, fully enlightened.

The husband led the four little monks to his spacious, lovely house. His wife was waiting, looking forward to serving her carefully prepared food to the best, wise old monks. She had bought four very expensive chairs for the monks to sit comfortably, and had everything beautifully set up for her guests.

As soon as she saw these little monks walk into her house, she was so shocked and disappointed that her smile turned into a scowl. How could her husband fail to comply with her very simple request for old brahmins? After all the work she had done to prepare for wise, highly respected guests, he comes home with some little kids! It seemed like a cruel joke! Filled with rage, she pulled her husband aside and sputtered,

“You have gone to the monastery and brought back with you four youngsters not old enough to be your grandsons!”

There was no way she was going to let these little kids mess up her nice new chairs. She spread some cushions on the floor for them to sit on and said to them,

“Sit here!”

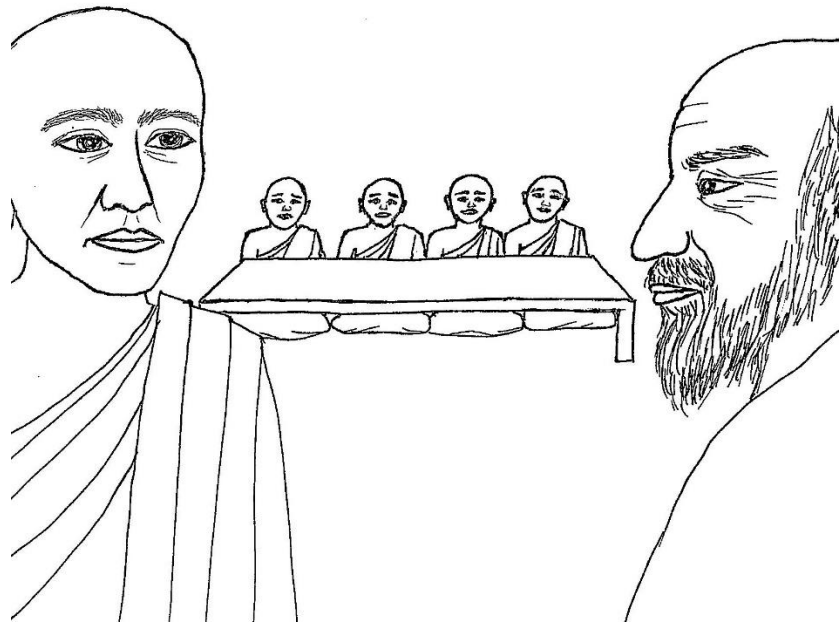
She was determined to serve her carefully prepared food to some noble old monks. She said to her husband,

“Brahmin, go and look out for some old brahmins and bring them here.”

Her husband quickly went back to the monastery and noticed an older monk standing nearby. It was Venerable Sariputta, one of the two greatest, most advanced and famous students of the Buddha. The husband invited him for lunch, saying,

“Come, let’s go to our house.”

Venerable Sariputta agreed, and the husband took his bowl, according to the custom, and led him to his home.



When they arrived, Venerable Sariputta saw the four young monks sitting quietly. He asked,

“Have these brahmins received food?”

The husband admitted, “No, they have received no food.”

Venerable Sariputta knew that food had been prepared only for four guests, so it wasn’t appropriate for him to join the little monks for lunch.

He said, “These brahmins sitting here ought to receive food. Bring me my bowl.”

Taking his bowl back from the husband, he left.

The wife wondered what happened, asking her husband, “What did he say?”

The husband told her what Venerable Sariputta said and that he simply left. The wife seemed not to notice or care that Venerable Sariputta identified the little monks as brahmins. She said,

“It must be that he didn’t wish to eat. Go quickly, look out for another brahmin and bring him here.”

The husband went back to the monastery and saw Venerable Moggallana, the other of the two greatest, most advanced and famous students of the Buddha. The husband invited him for lunch and brought him to his house. When Venerable Moggallana saw the four little monks, he also knew that food had been prepared for four guests. He said the same thing as Venerable Sariputta had said, and, taking his bowl, went immediately back to the monastery.

The wife said to her husband, “Well, these elder monks don’t wish to eat. Go around the brahmin neighborhood park and bring back with you a single, old brahmin.”

The little monks had not yet eaten anything that day. And they had eaten nothing since noontime the day before, because monks don’t eat anything after noon. Lunch was their only meal of the day. They were famished with hunger.

Because the little monks, being arahants, had such great merit and purity, a signal automatically was received by Sakka, the king of the Heaven of the 33 Gods, when he felt his seat suddenly become hot. Wondering what caused it, he saw that the young monks had were at the elderly couple’s house since early morning with nothing to eat, and that they were weak and exhausted.

Sakka thought, “It’s my duty to go there,” so he disguised himself as a very elderly brahmin, worn out by old age. He went to the brahmin neighborhood park and sat down in the most conspicuous seat, so he would be easily noticed.

When the husband saw him, he thought to himself, “Now my wife will be delighted.” He said to the old brahmin, “Come, let’s go to my home for a meal,” and led him to his house.

When the wife saw the old brahmin, she was delighted and spread several rugs and mats over one of the chairs to make him very comfortable, saying, “Noble sir, sit here.”

But when Sakka, disguised as the old brahmin, entered the house, he respectfully bowed to the four little monks and found a place to sit at the edge of the cushions where the little monks were sitting, and sat cross-legged on the floor.



The wife, noticing his behavior, thought his mind must be confused—maybe senile—from old age. She was furious that nothing was going according to her plan to serve food to honorable, wise brahmins, and that she now had a bunch of unworthy people in her house, expecting food from her.

She said to her husband, “For sure, you have brought a brahmin, but you have brought back with you one old enough to be your

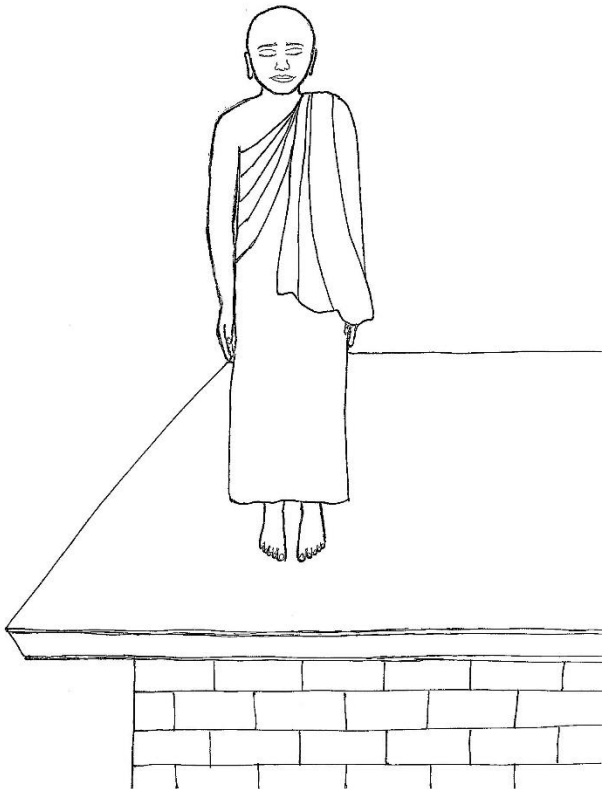
father. He is going around bowing to child monks young enough to be his grandsons. What use have we for him? Put him out!”

The husband grabbed the old brahmin first by the shoulder, and then by the arm, and finally by the waist, and tried his best to drag him out. But the old man refused to budge from where he sat. The wife said to her husband,

“Come, you take hold of one arm and I will take hold of the other.”

So they each took hold of one of the old man’s arms, grabbed him around his back, and dragged him through the door out of the house. They walked back inside. But to their horror, the old man was sitting next to the young monks in the place he had been sitting before, waving his hands back and forth!

It seemed like some kind of magic, so they screamed in terror. At that moment, the old man let them know who he really was—Sakka, the king of heaven. The husband and wife were silent with shock and embarrassment and quickly served the food to this wondrous being from another world, along with the four young monks.



They ate the food and then quickly left. Three of the little monks left through the roof, one breaking through the front part of the roof, the other through the back part of the roof, and the other through the circular top of the roof. The fourth monk plunged into the earth to escape the house. Sakka used another way to escape. Because the young monks were arahants and Sakka was a powerful heavenly being, they all had supernatural power to move through solid surfaces. People in the town later heard about the monks’ spectacular exit, and from that time on, although the house was not damaged, it was known as the “House with the Five Openings.”

The young monks walked back to the monastery, and when they arrived, the other monks asked, “Friends, what was it like?”

The young monks replied at first, “Please, don’t ask.” But then they explained, “The wife fumed with rage the moment she saw us. She refused to allow us to sit on the seats she had prepared and said to her husband to quickly bring an old brahmin. Our teacher, Venerable Sariputta, came and seeing us, said, ‘These brahmins sitting here ought to receive food.’ So he ordered his bowl to be brought back to him and then left. Then the wife said to bring another old brahmin, and the husband brought Venerable Moggallana. When he saw us, he said the same thing as Venerable Sariputta said and left. Then the wife said to her husband that these venerable

monks don't want to eat, so go to the brahmin neighborhood park and bring a single old brahmin. The husband went there and brought back Sakka, who came in the disguise of a brahmin. When Sakka arrived, the husband and wife gave us food."

The other monks said, "But weren't you angry with them for what they did?"

The young monks replied, "No, we weren't angry."

When the other monks heard their reply, they couldn't believe the monks weren't angry in that situation. They didn't know the young monks were arahants. So, they went to the Buddha, saying,

"Lord, when these monks say, 'We were not angry,' they are not telling the truth. They are being dishonest."

The Buddha said, "Monks, those who have gotten rid of the poisons of the mind have no ill will toward those who are hostile to them. He who is friendly among those who are hostile, who is peaceful among those who are violent, who is detached among those who are attached, that person I call a brahmin."

The Buddha was pointing out that those who should be most respected and called brahmins are not those who are in wealthy or elite families, but those who have great qualities.

#### *Questions:*

1. What was the wife overly attached to, that motivated her to neglect the little monks and drag the old man out of her house? (her high-class status as a brahmin, and her desire to serve only brahmins)
2. What was special about the four little monks? (they were arahants, enlightened)
3. Why did Venerable Sariputta and Venerable Moggallana leave without eating? (they knew that the wife had prepared food for only four guests)
4. How did Sakka, in a heaven-world, become aware of the hungry little monks? (he felt his seat become hot)
5. What was unusual about Sakka's behavior, that made the wife upset? (he bowed to the young monks and sat on the floor rather than in the chair she offered)
6. What did the other monks not believe about the young monks? (that they didn't get angry)

*What the Buddha said:*

“Aviruddham viruddhēsu, attadaṇḍēsu nibbutam, sādānēsu anādānam, tam aham brūmi brāhmaṇam.”

“He who is friendly among the hostile, who is peaceful among the violent, who is unattached among the attached, that person I call a brahmana.”

Dhammapada 406 (26:24)

*Dharma discussion – When others are hostile:*

What do you think of the couple’s behavior toward Sakka?

It was rude, disrespectful, hostile, and abusive!

They invited an old man for a meal at their house and then refused to give him food and dragged him out of the house only because he bowed to young monks and sat on the floor! By the way, Sakka did that because kings, even kings in heaven-worlds, bow to monks and show their humility to them, because the Buddha and his monks, who represent the Buddha and are on the path to enlightenment, are more worthy of respect than kings.

And how did the wife behave toward the young monks? Neglectful, uncaring, impolite.

Are you sometimes around people who are very rude, disrespectful, hostile or abusive?

Especially nowadays, there are many people like that everywhere – in schools, in families, in all kinds of places, all over the world.

Why? It’s mostly because many more people have become extremely self-centered—selfish, egoistic—and don’t care about good values like compassion, humility, tolerance, patience, self-control and so on.

If someone is very rude to us, we don’t have supernatural powers like Sakka and the young monks to escape them or shock them into respecting us.

But we do have the power of the Dharma, like the young monks, to protect us from trouble.

How did the young monks use the power of the Dharma?

They stayed calm, and didn’t get angry or impatient at the couple for being rude and neglectful.

They remember they are following the Dharma and don’t get involved in people’s craziness.

But isn’t it a sign of weakness to just be quiet, not to stand up for oneself, not to point out to others when they are doing wrong?

In some situations—such as to prevent you or someone from getting harmed or abused, or when there is a significant injustice—it’s important to point out a person’s wrongdoing, to protect yourself and others.

We should try to be careful not to shame or insult the person, as that may just make them enraged and vengeful.

However, we don’t want them to get away with their bad behavior by saying nothing, because that could encourage them to do it again.

When we are hostile and quarrel, bicker or even fight or get violent over things that are unimportant, then we create negative karma that ends up harming us. Even if we don't naturally behave that way, when others around us—friends, classmates, neighbors, even family members—often get angry over petty things, then it seems normal and then we might start behaving a bit more like that, too. The more we see anger, hostility, and aggressive behavior, the more it seems to be normal. The more others insist on getting whatever they want, the more normal it seems for us to insist on getting whatever we want.

The Buddha teaches us to watch out for that. He warns us that the people all around us may be hostile, violent, or too attached to things. But we shouldn't get caught up in that behavior, thinking it's okay because it's normal. Remember, there are many people all around the world who follow the Dharma and stay strong with good values of compassion, lovingkindness, patience, tolerance, and so on. The Dharma is what keeps us out of trouble, keeps us from falling into bad karmas—negative actions, words and thoughts. We may feel anger, we may be upset when someone is unfair, we might feel disgust seeing someone misbehave, we may feel frustrated when they don't get punished. But we don't let ourselves go down to their level of speaking and acting. We can avoid behaving like they do by remembering the little monks—although we can't fly through a roof, we have that same super power of the Dharma to keep us out of trouble.

How do we do that? How do we keep our mind out of trouble when we can't escape people who are disrespectful, hostile, or abusive, when we have to be near them, for example, in class? We may hate seeing, hearing or being around them and wish they would be punished. We may even feel they are horrible people, and hate them. But we should try to remember not to hate the person, just hate the behavior. Also, notice, how do you feel when you have angry or hateful thoughts? Stressed, upset, irritable, or depressed. So, these thoughts harm us; we don't want them. And, think about how people who are disrespectful, hostile, or abusive must feel. Although they may laugh, smile, and act confident, they're not really happy and peaceful. If we really knew what they experienced at home or in their past, we might see that their behavior is a result of abuse, neglect, violence or other bad behavior of their parents. They may be imitating their parents' aggressive way of speaking and behaving, maybe as a way to get approval and love from the parents.

So, we can try to have compassion, because we don't know what their life is like at home, or what happened in their past—the causes and conditions that make them misbehave. Remember, they will have to suffer the results of their bad karmas, their negative actions. They weren't as fortunate as we are to learn the Dharma. We can wish that they be happy and peaceful and learn the Dharma soon. This helps keep us calm, positive, strong and out of trouble even in a negative environment. Also, we can be friendly with them, for example, we can kindly tell them that we hope they enjoy the rest of their day, or say something funny (but not insulting) to distract from negativity.