

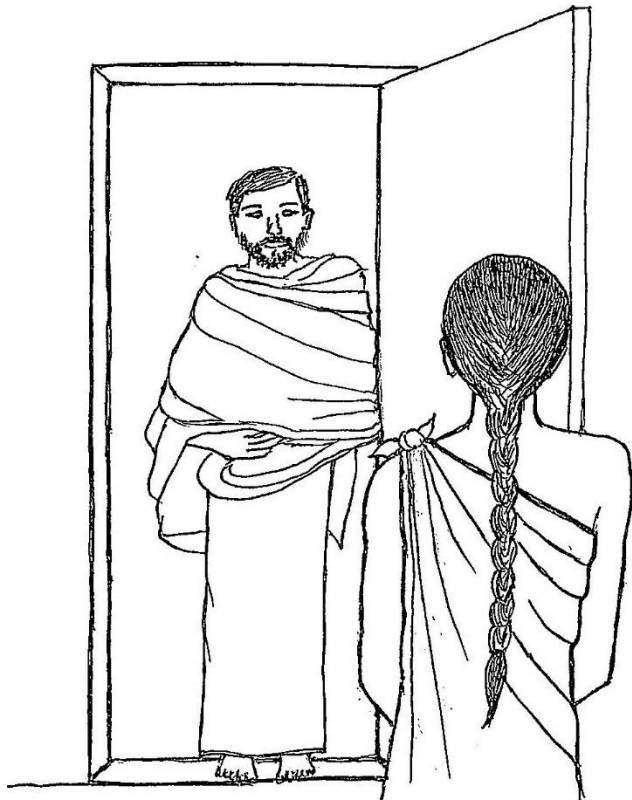
CHAPTER 2 – LITTLE ONE-ROBE

A very poor man called Little One-Robe lived with his wife in the town of Savatthi. He was called Little One-Robe because he was a short, slender man who owned only one thick cloth to wear over his upper body. He was so poor that he had only one thin cloth to wear over his lower body, and his wife had only one cloth to cover her body. They had no money to buy any other clothing. When either the husband or wife wanted to go outside, they had only the one thick cloth to cover their arms and shoulders like a jacket to protect them from the blazing sun or the cool wind. So, only one of them could go out at a time and the other stayed inside at home.

One day, a messenger went around the town announcing that the Buddha would be giving a Dharma talk at the monastery the next day. Hearing the announcement, Little One-Robe said to his wife,

“Dear, an announcement was made that there will be a Dharma talk at the monastery in the afternoon and evening tomorrow. Do you want to go and hear the Dharma in the daytime or in the evening? We don’t have enough outer clothing between us to go together.”

The wife replied, “Okay dear, I’ll go in the daytime.”



The next day, she put on the thick cloth and went to the monastery. Little One-Robe waited at home and when his wife returned in the evening, she gave him the thick cloth to wear. As he stood in the doorway to say goodbye to her, he noticed how joyful she looked. How could she be so happy when they were so poor? He walked to the monastery wondering what made her so happy.

When he arrived, he seated himself right in front of the Buddha and listened to the Dharma. As he listened, he felt extreme joy arising in him. He felt so full of joy that he wanted to do something to show his deep appreciation to the Buddha. He wanted to offer him a gift in gratitude for the wonderful teaching. But what should he give? The most precious thing that he owned was the thick cloth he was wearing.

“That’s it,” he thought, “I’ll offer him this thick cloth.”

But the next moment, he thought, "If I give this cloth to the Buddha, there will be no warm clothes left for my wife or me."

"But I want to make an offering," he thought.

Then he argued within his mind, "If I give this one cloth away, how will I be able to buy another cloth? I don't have enough money. What if it's cold outside, and I have nothing to keep me warm? What if I become ill? What if I have to spend the whole day outside in the sun with nothing to protect me? Maybe the Buddha doesn't need this cloth. Maybe it will just be given away to someone else. Also, what will my wife think if I give it away? Maybe she will be upset."

So many thoughts discouraged him from giving away his thick cloth.

But a feeling of generosity arose in his heart, and he thought, "I will offer this cloth! It's what I want to do!"

And then the doubts arose again, as he thought, "Am I crazy? I can't offer the one piece of warm clothing I have. I'm not wealthy like all these people who come here with many offerings. There are so many people giving gifts, mine will be so unimportant compared to all the lavish offerings from everyone else."

His mind was at war with itself, thinking, "I will give it!" and then, "No, I will not give it!"

Hours passed as the Buddha continued teaching. Finally, the evening program was about to end and Little One-Robe still had not made up his mind. He thought,



"While I have been fighting with thoughts of generosity and thoughts of myself, hours have passed. If these powerful thoughts of myself increase, they will not let me escape suffering and I will have future lives of suffering. I will therefore give my gift."

So, Little One-Robe finally overcame a thousand doubting thoughts and followed his thought of generosity. Taking the thick cloth, he laid it at the Buddha's feet and called out with a loud voice,

"I have conquered! I have conquered! I have conquered!"

King Pasenadi, the king of Kosala, happened to be there, listening to the Dharma. When he heard Little One-Robe's loud voice, he was very curious, and said to his assistants,

"Ask him what he has conquered."

The king's men went to Little One-Robe and asked him, "What or who is it that you have conquered?"

Little One-Robe explained his situation, his difficult decision to offer the cloth, and the conflicting thoughts that arose in his mind before he conquered his selfish thoughts and decided to give the gift.

When the men reported the explanation to the king, he said, "It was a hard thing to do what that man did. I will do him a kindness."

So, the king ordered a new set of clothes—a cloth for the upper body and a cloth for the lower body—to be given to Little One-Robe.

When presented with the new set of clothes from the king, Little One-Robe gave them immediately to the Buddha, thinking, "Ah! Now I have something new and beautiful to offer to the Buddha to show my gratitude for his wonderful teaching!"

Then the king, thinking that Little One-Robe must keep something for himself, doubled his gift, giving Little One-Robe two pairs of cloth.

Little One-Robe was thrilled to offer these also to the Buddha.

The king had thought that he would at least keep one set of clothes even if he offered the other to the Buddha. So, he doubled his gift again, and gave Little One-Robe four sets of cloth.

When he again offered all of them to the Buddha, the king doubled his gift again, giving eight sets. When the same thing happened, he gave sixteen sets. Again, Little One-Robe offered all of them to the Buddha.

Finally, the king gave 32 sets of cloths to Little One-Robe, but to avoid someone saying, "The man has not kept a single pair for himself, but has given away every pair he received," the king said to Little One-Robe,

"Keep one pair for yourself and give another pair to your wife."

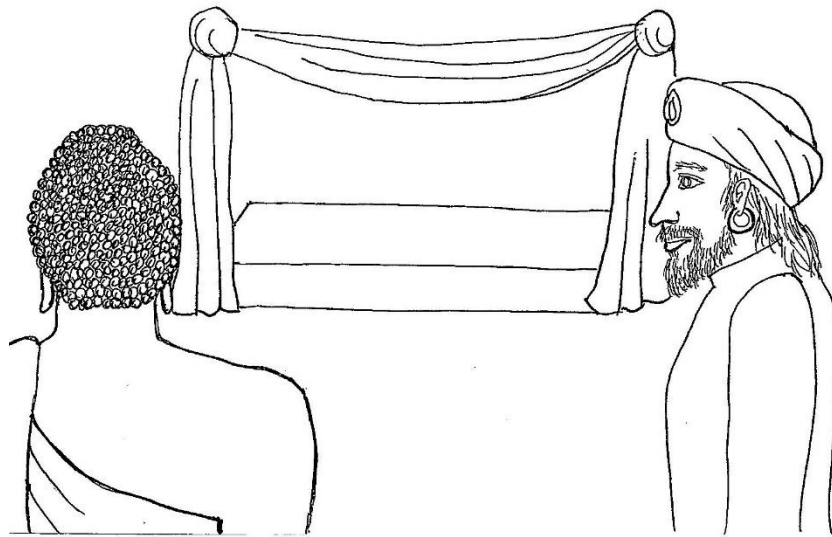
With this instruction, Little One-Robe kept two pairs for himself and his wife and gave the remaining thirty pairs of cloth to the Buddha. The king thought that even if Little One-Robe had given it all away a hundred times, the king would have matched what was given to the Buddha with equal gifts to Little One-Robe.

The king told his men, "It was indeed a hard thing to do what that man did. Bring my two blankets here."

The men brought them, and then the king presented Little One-Robe with the two luxurious blankets, which were worth a thousand pieces of money.

Little One-Robe thought to himself, "I am not worthy to cover my body with these blankets. These are suitable only for the Buddha and his Sangha."

So he hung one of the blankets like a canopy over the bed in the Buddha's cottage, the small house in the monastery where the Buddha stayed. He hung the other blanket like a canopy in his own house over the spot where a visiting monk would sit to have a meal in his home.



The next evening, the king went to visit the Buddha in his cottage. The king recognized the blanket hanging over the bed and asked,

"Lord, who was it that honored you with the gift of this blanket?"

The Buddha replied, "Little One-Robe."

The king thought, "Even as

I believe in the Dharma, and rejoice in my belief, this man believes in the Dharma and rejoices in his belief."

The king was so impressed by Little One-Robe's generosity that he gifted him with four elephants, four horses, four thousand pieces of money, four servants, and four excellent villages. These were later called the "gift of fours."

When the monks heard about the gifts the king gave to Little One-Robe, they started a discussion privately among themselves, saying, "Oh how wonderful was the deed of Little One-Robe! As soon as he did it, he received all those presents of four! As soon as he did a good deed, right away the result of his good deed was given to him!"

The Buddha approached and asked them, "Monks, what are you sitting here now talking about?"

When they told him, he said, “Monks, if Little One-Robe had been able to give me his gift in the first part of the evening, he would have received the ‘gift of sixteens.’ If he had been able to do so in the second part of the evening, he would have received the ‘gift of eights.’ Because it was not until late in the evening that he gave me his gift, he only received the ‘gift of fours.’”

The Buddha continued, “When one thinks of doing a good deed, one should do it right away. One should not ignore the impulse to do good that arises in him. A good deed done late gets rewarded, but the reward is smaller or comes slowly. Also, if one waits to do a good deed, one may not be able to do it at all, because one’s mind tends to get distracted by negative thoughts. Therefore, a person should perform a good deed the instant the impulse to do good arises within him.”

Questions:

1. How did Little One-Robe feel when he heard the Buddha teaching? (full of joy)
2. What did he want to do when he heard the Buddha teaching? (offer him his thick cloth)
3. Why didn’t he offer the cloth right away? (he had many thoughts of why he shouldn’t offer the cloth)
4. What did he conquer when he said “I have conquered”? (thoughts about himself, selfish thoughts)
5. What did Little One-Robe do when the king gave him new sets of clothes? (he offered them to the Buddha)
6. According to the Buddha, if Little One-Robe had offered the cloth earlier, would he have been given more gifts from the king? (yes)

What the Buddha Said:

“Abhittharetha kalyāne, pāpā cittaṃ nivāraye, dandhaṃ hi karoto puññaṃ, pāpasmiraṃ ramati mano.”

“Hurry to do good, and restrain the mind from negative thoughts. If one is slow in making merit, his mind takes delight in wrong thoughts.”

Dharma discussion – When to make merit:

Little One-Robe felt thankful and generous, so he wanted to give a gift although he was so poor. When you don't have much to give, it's much more difficult to give than if you're wealthy and you have many things you can give away and still have plenty for yourself. As the king mentioned, it must have been very hard for Little One-Robe to donate the only warm clothes he had.

Giving away something that we really like, or that we're very attached to, is a very virtuous act; it makes more merit than if we give away something we didn't really care about.

Why? Because when we give it away, we are giving up our attachment to it, letting it go, which helps us let go of our selfishness.

Also, giving to the Buddha or to Buddhist monks—the Sangha—makes a lot of merit.

Why? Because it supports the Buddha or his monks to travel, build temples and monasteries, and ordain more monks, so they can teach the Dharma to more people, and they all can practice the Dharma, be more happy and peaceful, and help make the world a better place. So, Little One-Robe's gift was a very virtuous act, and therefore, he received the result of his merit right away—when the king gave gifts to him.

We can make merit by giving things—money, a gift, something beautiful that we made, or other objects—to others, but what else can we give to make merit?

Our time and energy—to help others, to teach someone how to do something, to speak kind words, or to do any other act of kindness.

Also, spiritual practices such as prayers, chanting, meditation, reading Dharma books, going to a temple are other great ways to make merit.

When did the Buddha say we should we make merit? Right away!

He said that when we get the impulse or the idea to do good, don't ignore it, don't wait!

Do it as soon as you have a thought of doing something to help, doing something kind, or doing any good deed.

Can you think of some examples of thoughts you might have when you see an opportunity to do something good?

"Maybe she could use some help," or "This needs to be cleaned up," or "This needs to be put away" or "No one is helping, maybe I should help," or "He's the only one doing all the work, I could help" or "She looks lonely, maybe I can talk to her," or "She didn't get any, I could give her mine," or "No one chose him for a partner, I can choose him," or "It looks like he doesn't know how to do this, maybe I should show him how" or "I could meditate and do prayers with them."

It might only take a few moments of our time, but it can mean so much to someone, and it builds up our good karma, our merit, our good luck.

Of course, if there is a dangerous situation where someone needs help, we might need to get an adult to help.

But generally, when we see an opportunity to do something kind, we should do it right away.

Otherwise, like Little One-Robe, if we wait and think about whether we really should do it, then what might happen?

We get distracted by other thoughts. Or we get lazy, or we do something that we think is more entertaining, for example, on our smartphone, videogames or watching television.

Can you think of some typical thoughts we might have, discouraging us from doing good deeds?

“Someone else can do it,” or “They don’t really need my help,” or “Why should I help when no other kids are helping,” or “No one is asking for help,” or “I’m too tired,” or “I don’t have time,” or “I’m doing something that’s more fun,” or “I don’t feel like helping” or “I helped yesterday,” or “I want to stay with my friend,” or “What will my friend think if I go and help?”

These kinds of thoughts often overpower or kill our good thoughts, and then we lose our chance to do something good and we get into a habit of ignoring opportunities to help.

When you notice these kinds of thoughts, remember Little One-Robe saying, “I have conquered! I have conquered! I have conquered!” and do the kind act anyway.

If you’re concerned about what your friends might think, it’s good to show them that you are a leader, taking the initiative to volunteer to help, and you don’t just follow what they do.

When you make merit—in other words, a good karma—you definitely will get a good result at some point in time.

There is another very easy way to make merit that’s so simple and only takes a moment.

It’s called rejoicing in the good deeds of others.

Remember what the monks were doing near the end of the story?

They were talking about Little One-Robe’s good deed, admiring the wonderful good act he did.

They were rejoicing in the merit of Little One-Robe. They were making merit by doing that.

What does “rejoicing in the good deed” mean?

It means that they were happily thinking about it, glad to see someone do a really good deed.

At some temples, people rejoice in the chanting of prayers and rejoice in other people’s offering (flowers, food, etc.) to the Buddha shrine by saying “Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu” which means “Excellent, excellent, excellent” or touch the offering before it is offered at the shrine.

Why can we make merit by admiring someone else’s good deed?

Because rejoicing takes away our negative thoughts and replaces them with kind thoughts.

Sometimes we might have negative thoughts when we see a person doing a good deed, such as criticizing how he is doing it, or thinking he’s just doing it for attention or to get a reward, or that he’s showing off. Or we may feel jealous that he has so much wealth or time to give to others.

But when we rejoice in the person’s good deed, we instead think that by doing a good deed the person is spreading kindness, making the world a better place for all of us.

And we wish or pray that the person feel happiness by doing good deeds.

Those thoughts make our negative thoughts disappear.

And our kind thoughts—not only our kind words and deeds—make merit.

It’s like joining in with the person’s good deed, and joining in with his happiness.

Merit is not just for our own good luck, but should be shared by wishing that others, or all beings, have peace and happiness and be free from suffering.

Sharing the merit multiplies it so we have enough to give to others as well as have for ourselves.