

CHAPTER 7 – BRIBED TO HEAR THE DHARMA

Anāthapindika was a wealthy and very generous merchant who often helped the poor and needy. A devoted and famous supporter of the Buddha, he spent all his wealth to buy Prince Jeta's park and build a monastery for the Buddha and his monks in that park, near the town of Savatthi. It was called Jetavana monastery, and became the most well-known of the Buddha's monasteries, where the Buddha stayed most often.

Anāthapindika had a son named Kala who was not at all interested in the Buddha or in hearing the Dharma. He had no desire to see the Buddha when he visited Anāthapindika's house and had no desire to offer any help or service for the Buddha or his monks. Kala would just stay out of sight whenever the Buddha or his monks came to the house.

In addition, whenever Anāthapindika said to him, "Dear son, don't do this," Kala paid no attention to what his father said.

Anāthapindika was very worried about his son. He thought, "If this son of mine continues with such an attitude, he will end up in a hell-world. But it wouldn't look good for me if my son goes to a hell-world right in front of my eyes. There is no living being here in the world who can't be trained by gifts. I will therefore train him with gifts."

So, he said to his son, "Dear son, take the Eight Precepts for the full-moon day, go to the monastery, listen to the Dharma, and then return home. If you will do so, I will give you a hundred pieces of money."

Kala, eager to receive the money but wondering whether his father was being serious, responded, "Will you really give me this, father?"

"I will, dear son," Anāthapindika replied.

A hundred pieces of money was quite a lot. To make sure he really meant it, Kala asked, "Will you really give me a hundred pieces of money if I do this?"

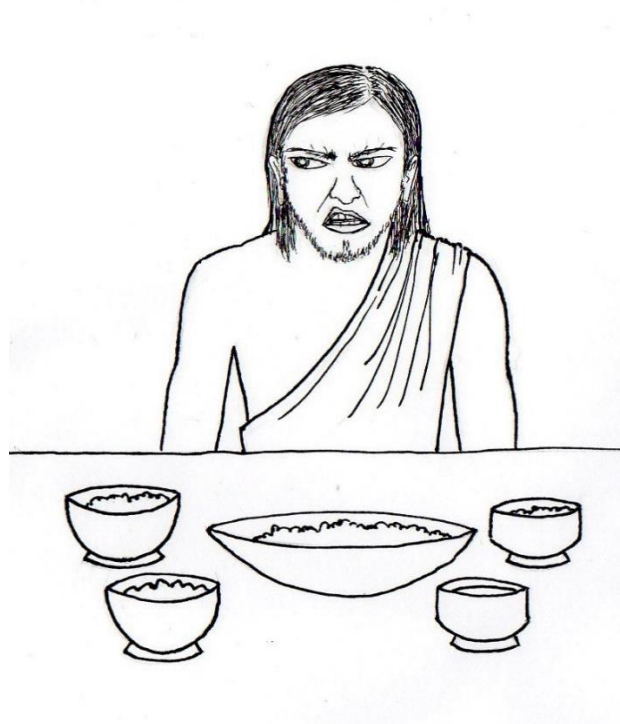
Anāthapindika confirmed, "Yes, dear son."

Kala wanted to make absolutely sure it was a promise, so he asked yet again, "You will really give me the money if I go and do this?"

Anāthapindika confirmed again that he would. It was a promise. Kala then took the Eight Precepts—he vowed for that day that he would refrain from killing any living being, refrain from taking anything that is not given to him, refrain from having any sexual activity, refrain from lying or dishonesty, refrain from intoxicants that cause carelessness, refrain from eating between noontime and sunrise, refrain from entertainment such as participating in dancing,

music, or shows, or wearing flowers, make-up, perfume, jewelry or any other decorations, and refrain from using luxurious seats or beds.

He went to the Jetavana monastery where the Buddha was staying. But he wasn't interested in hearing the Dharma. So, he found a pleasant place to lay down away from other people, and went to sleep. He returned home early in the morning.



As he arrived home, his father said to the servants, "My son has taken the Eight Precepts. Bring him rice-porridge and other food right away."

With the food placed in front of him, Kala said, "Unless I receive the money, I will not eat."

Kala stubbornly refused to even touch the food. His father didn't want to force him to eat, so he ordered a servant to bring a hundred pieces of money and give it to Kala. When the money was brought, Kala took it in his hands and then he ate the food.

The next day, Anāthapindika said to Kala, "Dear son, I will give you a thousand pieces of money if you will stand in front of the Buddha, learn a single verse of the Dharma, and then return to me."

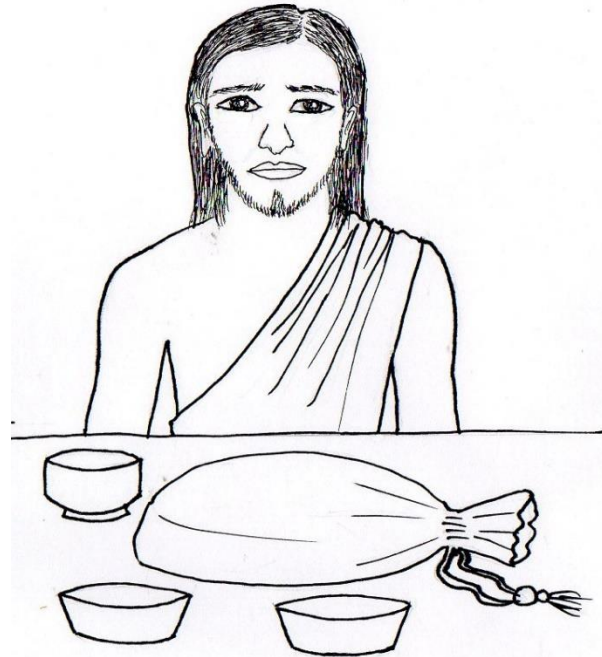
Kala then went to the monastery and stood in front of the Buddha, who was teaching the Dharma. He memorized one of the verses the Buddha spoke, and then he wanted to leave immediately, having done what his father told him to do. But then he thought about what would happen when he got home—his father would ask him what the verse meant. He didn't know what it meant, so he said to himself, "I will learn the next verse." So, he decided to stay longer to hear and then memorize a verse that might be easier for him to understand.

The Buddha knew that Kala was only interested in getting money from his father and wasn't really interested in learning the Dharma. So, he had caused Kala to feel confused so he wouldn't understand the meaning of the verse and then stay longer to hear more of the Dharma. People who listen to the Dharma with a firm intention to learn will listen carefully, and if they do, it is possible to reach the first level of enlightenment or even higher levels.

Kala listened to the Dharma with a firm intention to learn. But the Buddha caused Kala to misunderstand the true meaning of the next verse. So, again, Kala thought, "I will learn the next verse," and he continued listening carefully to the Buddha teaching the Dharma.

Suddenly, Kala deeply understood what the Buddha was teaching and reached the first level of enlightenment. He was full of a great joy, peace and contentment that he had never felt before. No amount of money could have made him feel so happy.

The next day, Kala went with the Buddha and his monks to the town of Savatthi. Anāthapindika saw him with the monks and thought, "Today the attitude of my son pleases me."



Kala thought, "I hope my father won't give me the money today in front of the Buddha. I hope he will keep it secret that I took the Eight Precepts for money." Kala didn't want the Buddha to know, but of course, the Buddha knew it anyway.

Anāthapindika offered rice porridge to the Buddha and his monks, and also offered rice porridge to his son. Kala sat down silently, drank the porridge, and ate the rice and other food that was offered.

When the Buddha finished his meal, Anāthapindika placed a bag containing a thousand pieces of money in front of his son and said,

"Dear son, remember that I persuaded you to take the Eight Precepts and to go to the monastery by promising to give you a thousand pieces of money. Here are your thousand pieces of money."

With the thousand pieces of money presented to him in the presence of the Buddha, Kala was extremely embarrassed and said, "I don't want the money."

Anāthapindika insisted, "Take the money, dear son."

But Kala refused to touch it.

Anāthapindika bowed to the Buddha and said, "Lord, today the attitude of my son pleases me."

The Buddha replied, "How is that, great wealthy one?"

Anāthapindika explained, "The day before yesterday, I sent him to the monastery, saying to him, 'I will give you a hundred pieces of money.' Yesterday he refused to eat because I didn't give him the money, but today, when I give him the money, he refuses to touch it."

The Buddha said, “It is so, great wealthy one. Today, in attaining the first level of enlightenment, your son has attained that which is better than the attainment of a world emperor, the attainment of the heaven-world of the gods, or the attainment of the heaven-world of brahmas.”

Then he said, “Better than being the only king over the Earth, better than going to heaven, better than lordship over all worlds, is the attainment of the first level of enlightenment.”

Questions:

1. What did Kala do when the Buddha or his monks visited his house? (he stayed out of sight and didn't offer to help)
2. How did Kala's father convince him to visit the Buddha at the monastery? (he offered Kala money)
3. What did Kala do when he arrived at the monastery for the first time? (he slept)
4. How did Kala's father convince him to learn the Dharma? (he offered Kala a thousand pieces of money if he would visit the monastery and learn one verse of the Dharma)
5. What happened when Kala listened carefully to the Dharma? (he deeply understood the Dharma teaching and reached the first level of enlightenment)
6. How did Kala feel when his father gave him the thousand pieces of money in front of the Buddha? (extremely embarrassed)

What the Buddha said:

“Pathavyā eka rajjena, saggassa gamanena vā, sabba lokādhi paccena, sotāpattipahalaṃ varam.”
“Better than having absolute power over the earth, better than going to heaven, better than lordship over all worlds, is the fruit of entering the stream of enlightenment.”

Dhammapada 178 (8:11)

Dharma discussion – Happiness and Faith:

Kala was like many young people today, uninterested in the religious activities of his parents. He didn't want to learn the Dharma or receive blessings of the Buddha or his monks. Like many young people, he may have wanted to make his own decisions, he was stubborn, and he thought he knew what would make him happy.

What did he think would make him happy? Money.

Does money make us happy? In what ways does it help make us happy?

Money enables us to live a comfortable life—have a nice home, good food, get the things we need and the things we like.

Also, many people feel more important and respected when they have more money.

But, are we always fully satisfied and happy if we have a lot of money?

No, we still experience suffering no matter how much money we have.

All the richest people in the world may seem happy, but like everyone else, they cannot stay happy for long.

They want something else, something more, something better, to make them feel happy again.

That is because the human mind that is not yet enlightened cannot stay happy all the time.

Can you think of a time when you felt extremely happy? How long did the happiness last?

Whenever we experience joy, we feel it for a while, but sooner or later we feel some kind of unpleasantness—for example, we feel annoyed, bored, tired, disappointed, frustrated, worried, embarrassed, angry, or jealous.

The thrill of getting what we want, getting something new, or achieving something great wears off—the happiness fades away—and we have to face the problems, difficulties, and uncomfortable situations of our daily lives.

Our pleasant feelings and unpleasant feelings come and go, over and over, every day.

The wealthiest, most successful, most powerful, most attractive, and most famous people might not have to face all of the same difficulties that others must face, but they get used to living the way they are—and then just like everyone else, they feel negative emotions—frustrated, annoyed, jealous, embarrassed, angry and so on—when things don't go their way, when they don't get what they want, when they are blamed, rejected, or unsuccessful, and when they face things they don't like.

This is the way the human mind is.

The Buddha knew this, that the human mind experiences pleasant and unpleasant feelings, satisfaction and dissatisfaction—over and over, every day. The unpleasantness or dissatisfaction, whether just a little or extreme, is called suffering in Buddhism.

Even during the times that we experience the happiest moments, or the thrill of our lifetime, we know it can't last forever, and although we want to hold onto that feeling, we know we can't. So we're slightly dissatisfied, suffering just a bit, even during those times.

The Buddha found the way to end all suffering—the way to true, lasting, ultimate happiness—and he wanted to share it.

The problem is, most people, like Kala, don't believe it. Why don't they believe it?

In the time of the Buddha, there were many holy men who preached ways to find peace and happiness, but none of them resulted in the end of all suffering, which is full enlightenment.

And today, there are countless people, organizations and companies that claim to have some method or product that will make us feel tranquil and happy, but they don't end our suffering or result in pure, ongoing happiness.

So why should anyone believe that the Buddha is any different?

A few wise people, when they saw the Buddha or one of his advanced monks, could see just from the extremely serene, glowing look on their face that they had found a way to true peace and happiness.

And a few other people saw the Buddha or one of his advanced monks do some miraculous act—such as when the Buddha showed water and fire coming from his body at the same time—which showed he was enlightened.

But most people who saw the Buddha had to listen carefully to his teachings before they believed that the teachings were the way to true happiness.

And many of them, like Kala, reached the first level of enlightenment just by hearing the Buddha teach the Dharma on one occasion.

How was that possible, when Kala had been so disrespectful to his father, refusing to do what his father asked him to do, and when Kala had been totally uninterested in Buddhism?

Ordinary people today don't reach any level of enlightenment just hearing a bit of the Buddha's teachings.

There are two main reasons for Kala being able to reach the first stage of enlightenment:

First, a person can only reach a level of enlightenment if they have enough merit (in other words good karma) and enough wisdom built up in many past lives.

Second, being in the presence of the Buddha. The Buddha had such wisdom and power that for many people, just being near him relaxed and opened their minds so they could easily understand the deep meaning of his teaching, even if it was just a few words.

So, Kala must have had enough merit and wisdom gained from past lives to deeply understand the Dharma when he listened to the Buddha teaching.

What about now, around 2600 years later, when we can't see the Buddha in person, how can we trust that his teachings really will bring us peace and happiness?

The Buddha taught us to test his teachings by applying and practicing them in our daily life, and see for ourselves how they help us.

We can see for ourselves how the teachings make us more peaceful, patient, tolerant, kind, and better able to handle challenges and difficult situations.

Also, maybe we can observe people we know who sincerely practice the Dharma—do they seem more peaceful than ordinary people who don't do any Dharma practice?

And, there are some Buddhist practices that have now become popular all over the world, because they help people become more peaceful and happy.

Can you guess what those practices are? Mindfulness and meditation.

Have you ever wondered whether there are people living in modern times, or even living now, who have reached the first level of enlightenment, or even higher levels?

There are such people, but usually they don't let others know about it, because they don't want to attract crowds of curious people who aren't really interested in practicing the Dharma.