

Lesson 16 - GENEROSITY

Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.

Question to think about before the story: What did you give to your parents lately?

Story: Generosity of Anathapindika

The Buddha and his bhikkshus were staying at the Bamboo Grove, Veluvana, but they had no building to live in. The bhikkshus slept under trees, in caves, or at burial grounds. A wealthy merchant (salesman) saw the monks staying outside, and one day he asked some of them, “Bhante, if I built some buildings for you to live, would you live in them?” A bhikkshu answered, “The Blessed One has not allowed us to live in buildings.” The merchant said, “Then, Bhante, ask the Buddha and tell me what he says.” When the monks told the Buddha, he gave his permission for buildings to be built, and they told the merchant. In one day, the merchant had 60 small houses built for the monks, and he invited the Buddha and his bhikkshus for a meal at which he would present his gift of 60 buildings.

The merchant’s brother-in-law Anathapindika came to the merchant’s house for some business, and heard the merchant directing his servants to get up early and prepare food. Anathapindika thought it was strange that the merchant did not immediately drop everything and welcome him as he usually did, and thought that the merchant must be preparing for a wedding or a king’s visit. When the merchant finally welcomed Anathapindika, the merchant said he was preparing a meal for the Buddha and his Sangha of bhikkshus. Anathapindika asked, “Did you say the *Buddha*?” The merchant said yes. Anathapindika could not believe it, and said it is a very rare opportunity, and asked, “Is it possible to see the Buddha now?” The merchant said no, that he should come tomorrow and see the Buddha in the morning.

Anathapindika was very excited, thinking “Tomorrow morning I will be able to see the fully enlightened Buddha!” He went to bed, but could not sleep, he was so excited. He got up three times, thinking it was dawn, and finally walked out of his house when it was still dark. Celestial beings opened the gate for him, and he walked out into the darkness. There were no lights, so he became afraid and thought of going back home. But a celestial being called Sivaka said, “100 elephants, 100 horses, 100 chariots, a hundred thousand ladies with beautiful gems and earrings, all these are not worth one part of one step forward now. Go forward!” The fear went away and Anathapindika went to the Buddha, who saw him and called him by name. Anathapindika bowed to him, and the Buddha taught him some Dharma. Anathapindika then got the deep understanding that everything that arises must end. He was so happy, and said “That is wonderful! Please receive me as your follower; I take refuge in the Buddha as long as I live. Lord, please accept my invitation to you and the Sangha of bhikkshus for tomorrow’s meal.” The Buddha was silent, which meant that he accepted the

invitation. Anathapindika bowed and left, and the next morning, he prepared the meal at the merchant's house.

The next morning, the Buddha and his bhikkshus came to the merchant's house, where Anathapindika served them the meal. When they finished eating, Anathapindika asked the Buddha, "Bhante, will you and your Sangha of bhikkshus spend the rainy season with me at Savatthi?" The Buddha answered, "We are happy with rooms that are empty." Anathapindika said, "I know, Bhante." The Buddha gave a Dharma talk, and then left.

Anathapindika went back to his home town, Savatthi, and on the way he told people to make gardens and other places for monks to stay, and prepare food, because a Buddha has appeared in the world and will be coming on this road. Anathapindika looked all around Sāvattthi for a peaceful place for the Buddha and the bhikkshus to stay. He saw Prince Jeta's park, a large, beautiful and peaceful forest, the perfect place. He went to Prince Jeta and asked if he could use the park. Prince Jeta said, "The park cannot be given unless 100 thousand gold coins are spread over it." That was an enormous amount of money, almost all that Anathapindika had. But he was determined to give a great gift to the Buddha and Sangha. So, he got 100 thousand gold coins and had them loaded in carts and taken to Prince Jeta's park. He covered most of the park with the gold coins, but there was a small part near the gate that was not covered. He ordered people to get some more gold to cover the space. Prince Jeta came out to the park to see what was happening, and thought, "This is no ordinary man, to spend this much money." He said to Anathapindika, "That's enough, don't cover that space. Leave that for me to give as my gift." Anathapindika thought that it is good if such a famous person learns the Dharma from the Buddha, so he agreed to leave the space for Prince Jeta to give as a gift.

Anathapindika had buildings, terraces, gates, halls, walks, bathrooms, and ponds built in Jeta's Park. This became the famous monastery called Jetavana in the city of Savatthi.

The Buddha started his journey to Savatthi. As Anathapindika had told them, the people on the road to Sāvattthi eagerly had buildings made for the monks to stay overnight, and provided robes, food and medicine to the monks who helped instruct them how to make proper buildings for the Sangha. A poor tailor saw the people making buildings for the bhikkshus, and he wanted to make a building for them, too. So, he got some clay and made some bricks by himself, and started to build. Because he was not skilled in constructing buildings, the wall of his building was crooked and it fell down. He tried to fix it twice, and again it fell down twice. He was disappointed, and thought, "The bhikkshus are advising and instructing those wealthy people who give them buildings, robes and food. But I am poor, so no one helps me." The bhikkshus heard about the poor tailor, and told the Buddha, who instructed them to allow and supervise people to make buildings, and to make sure that any damaged or broken buildings are repaired, so no one is treated unfairly. They continued their journey to Savatthi.

Questions after the story:

1. Where did the monks spend the night before the merchant built the 60 houses?
2. How did the merchant and Anathapindika feel about serving the Buddha?
3. Why was Anathapindika afraid when he left the house?
4. What type of rooms did the Buddha say he and the bhikkshus are happy with? Why?
5. What payment did Prince Jeta demand from Anathapindika?
6. Why was Anathapindika's payment not enough?
7. What was the name of the monastery built at Prince Jeta's park?
8. What happened when the poor tailor tried to build a building for the Buddha and Sangha?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

“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)

Application of the moral(s) in the story to our daily lives:

Young people are usually not like Anathapindika and the merchant because we don't have money like they have. We are more like the poor tailor, who didn't have much money or professional skills to make great expensive gifts. But, we can share what we do have and use our skills to make simple gifts. Who do we share and give gifts to? Our friends? We give birthday gifts, we share toys, and we give them our time - we spend time with them. It is fun to spend time with friends and we want friends to like us, do things for us and invite us. So we like to give to them. But, that type of giving usually has some selfishness in it - we give because we want something in return: our friend's attention and to enjoy fun times with our friends.

What type of giving is unselfish - or selfless? In an earlier lesson, we talked about giving as a way of showing our gratitude - we are thankful for what we have been given, or for what we have, like the Buddha was thankful to the Bodhi Tree and Mucalinda the royal naga for giving him shelter. Selfless giving also means giving without trying to get something in return.

Young people have time and a lot of energy. They can give their time and energy to help someone without thinking about getting attention, money, or rewards of any kind. This is called “selfless service.”

How can you do selfless service? At home, for your parents! You can give your time and energy to help your parents even when they don't ask for it. You may be

able to find some things that your parents would like you to do at home. As the Buddha said, serving our mother and father brings happiness. How does it bring happiness? First, our parents will be happy seeing us doing things to help them without being asked. When they are happy, don't we become happier, too? Second, when we know that we are doing good actions, we know that we are doing the right thing, so we become confident. If we are often lazy and not helpful, will others be pleased with us? Probably not. Third, we are showing our gratitude by selfless service to our parents for all the good they have done for us. Fourth, good actions, punyakarma, have good results in the future, as we know from the Law of Karma. So, selfless service may not be as much fun as being with our friends, but it gives us happiness now and in the future. Anathapindika and the merchant could have spent their money on things that could have been more fun, but they spent it instead on the holy ones - the Buddha and the Sangha.

How do we know what to do to help? We can look around and see what needs to be cleaned up, put away, prepared, or set up the way our parents like it to be done. We should first offer to do it, by saying "Would you like me to . . ." to make sure they approve of what we plan to do. We can see when they are working on something, if there is something we could do to help, we can offer to help. But remember, to be selfless service we are not hoping to get any money, privileges or other treats or rewards in return.

We also can give our time and energy to do selfless service for relatives, needy people, and at the temple. We can ask our parents how we can help.

We may find out that our service is more difficult than we thought, like Anathapindika when he found that the 100,000 gold coins were not enough to cover the land. Like Anathapindika, we should keep a good giving heart and not stop just because we have some obstacle or difficulty. If needed, we can ask our parents for guidance on how to complete the job. Or we could ask someone else to help us. It is good to encourage others to do selfless service, too.

Activity to reinforce the lesson: Each student writes the quotation for today on a paper, and then underneath writes about 10 or 20 numbered lines to write a list. On the lines, students list things they can do as selfless service to their parents. If students cannot fill all the lines, then when they get home, they can ask their parents to suggest some things they would like their child to do to help. Then each student hangs the list in a conspicuous place at home, such as in the kitchen, to remember what they can give to their parents.

Closing chant: Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā! May all beings have happy minds!