

Question 20:

I have a question about merit. It is mentioned on the website that giving to monks accrues more merit than giving to other kinds of people. I hate to sound cynical, but it seems to me that by telling people that it is better to give to monks than others, people will be more inclined to offer their gifts to monks. *From Michael Moshenrose*

Answer: The Buddha teaches in Majjhima Nikaya, Sutta 142 that by giving a gift to an animal, the gift may be expected to repay a hundredfold, that a gift to an immoral ordinary person may be expected to repay a thousandfold, a gift to an ordinary person may be expected to repay ten thousandfold, and a gift to a virtuous person may be expected to repay a hundred-thousandfold. A gift to a person who has entered the way to Enlightenment, or a gift to the community of Buddhist monks and/or nuns, may be expected to repay incalculably, immeasurably. Also in the Sutta, the Buddha teaches that a gift is purified, or yields merit to the giver, when either the giver or receiver of the gift is virtuous, of good character. This Sutta encourages generosity even to animals and immoral persons, and certainly encourages gifts to needy ordinary people. However, generosity to virtuous persons, and to monks and nuns, yields more merit because the gifts provide for the needs of those people who are leading others to virtue, peace and happiness, and making the world a better place for many others. This does not mean that extravagant gifts, or gifts which are not useful or appropriate for the recipient, should be given. Because monks and nuns are renunciants, gifts merely for their basic needs are appropriate. Such gifts are important because, if their basic needs are not met, then they may feel compelled to withdraw from the Sangha and abandon much of their spiritual study and practice, and other people who would be interested in becoming a monk or nun may be deterred from becoming ordained, which ultimately would lead to a decline in people capable of teaching the Dharma.