

## **SHARING WITH OTHERS**

*Question before the story:* Have you ever thought to yourself, “I really should share, but I don’t want to”?

### **THE MISER WHO WANTED CAKE**

Once during the time when the Buddha was living on the Earth, there was a treasurer of a kingdom who was a millionaire. He had so much money but he never spent it. He wouldn’t spend money on others, or on his family; he wouldn’t even spend money on himself. He just wanted to keep it for himself.

One day when the treasurer went to visit the king, he saw a poor skinny man eating cake. The treasurer felt very hungry, and wanted cake too. He thought to himself, “If I get some cake, then a whole bunch of other people will want to have some cake too, and then I will have to buy a lot of ingredients, flour, butter and sugar, to make enough cake to give to all of them. So, I won’t say anything.” He was really, really hungry and he was craving some cake. But, he did not want to spend his money for cake. He wanted to keep his money safe, and get more and more money. But he was so hungry and miserable from craving cake that he just went to bed.

His wife noticed him laying in bed, looking sick and miserable. She said, “What is the matter?” He replied, “Nothing.” She said, “Is the king angry?” “No.” “Do you want something?” she asked. The treasurer was afraid of wasting his money, so he said nothing. His wife insisted, “Tell me, what is wrong? What do you want?” The treasurer couldn’t keep it a secret anymore. He said, “I do want one thing. I want a cake.” His wife exclaimed, “Why didn’t you say that before? You are wealthy enough to have cake! I’ll cook enough cake for the whole town.” The treasurer quickly said, “Why worry about them? They should work for their own meal.” The wife then suggested, “Well, we would make enough cake for the people who live on our street.” The treasurer said, “No, that is too extravagant.” The wife then suggested, “OK, then we can make cakes just for the family here at home.” The treasurer snapped, “And share with all of THEM?” The wife quickly said, “OK, then just for us and the kids.” The treasurer responded, “Why worry about feeding them cake?” The wife sighed, “OK, then how about just for you and me.” The treasurer looked at her and said, “Why do you have to be in on it?” The wife, almost in tears, said, “OK then, cake just for you.” The treasurer grinned, saying, “Do it quietly. There are a lot of people watching our cooking. Take the pots and ingredients for the cake to the seventh floor of our house, and bake it there. I will sit alone to eat.”

The wife obeyed. She sent the servants away so they would not know what is happening. Then she sent a messenger to bring the treasurer. The treasurer climbed up the seven story staircase, and bolted the door at each stairwell. Then when the treasurer was with her, she started baking the cakes.

Meanwhile, the Buddha called one of his best students, Venerable Moggallana, and told him, “The treasurer wants to eat cakes all by himself, and he is so afraid of others finding out. Go there and teach him not to be so selfish.” So, Ven. Moggallana went to the treasurer’s house, and in his monk’s robe, rose up into the air and stood in mid-air just outside the window of the 7<sup>th</sup> story of the treasurer’s house. The treasurer saw him, and got very angry that the monk discovered his secret plan. He yelled, “What will you get, monk, by standing in mid-air? You can walk up and down in the air but you will get nothing from me.” Ven. Moggallana then sat down in mid-air. The treasurer, even more angry that the monk would not leave, shouted, “What will you get, monk, meditating in the air? You will get nothing from me.” Ven. Moggallana sat in lotus position in mid-air. The treasurer shouted, “What will you get from me? You can stand on the windowsill, and you will get nothing from me.” So Ven. Moggallana stood on the windowsill.” The treasurer, even more enraged, yelled, “What will you get from me? You can belch smoke and you will get nothing!” So Ven. Moggallana blew smoke into the window, filling the treasurer’s house with smoke.

The treasurer’s eyes stung from the smoke, and swelled up. He decided not to suggest to the monk that he could set the house on fire, and would get nothing from him. He thought, “This monk will not go away empty-handed, so I better give him a cake.” He said, “My dear, will you please bake one little cake and give it to that monk so we can get rid of him.” So the wife mixed a little bit of dough and put it in a pan. But the dough filled up the pan and flowed over it. The miser snapped, “That’s too much – just make a tiny cake.” So he grabbed a spoon and just put a spoonful of dough in the pan. But the dough swelled up and filled the cake pan again. Then the treasurer said to his wife, “Why don’t you just give him one of the cakes.” When the wife picked up a cake, all of the other cakes stuck to it. She was shocked. She and the treasurer tried to separate the cakes, but they stuck together like glue. After pulling at the cakes and not getting even one to come loose, the treasurer noticed that he didn’t want the cakes anymore. His craving was gone. He said, “I really don’t want the cakes anymore. Give them all to that monk.”

So the wife gave Ven. Moggallana a basket of cakes all stuck together. Ven. Moggallana accepted the cakes, and then talked to the treasurer and his wife about the virtue of sharing. He explained to them the good results that come from being generous, and how doing good deeds makes you happy. The treasurer listened very carefully and thought very deeply about what the monk was saying. He was very moved, and said in an emotional trembling voice, “Please venerable sir, please sit down here and eat these cakes.” Ven. Moggallana said, “Dear treasurer, the Buddha and his 500 monks are all sitting at the monastery, waiting for a meal of cakes. If you would like, you can bring your wife and the cakes and go with me to the monastery.”

So they went to the monastery, and the treasurer and his wife served the Buddha and the monks all of the cakes, putting one cake in each monk’s bowl. The treasurer and his wife sat and ate a cake also. They noticed that even after they served everyone, there were so many cakes left. The treasurer finally understood his mistake, that his miserliness was making him miserable. He

understood that generosity made him happy. He gave up all of his miserly habits and became a generous man for the rest of his life.

*Questions:*

1. What kind of person was the treasurer?
2. Why did he want to keep it a secret that his wife was baking him some cakes?
3. Why did Ven. Moggallana stand in mid-air outside the window?
4. What did the treasurer ask his wife to do after Ven. Moggallana showed the treasurer that he could blow smoke into the window?
5. What happened when his wife tried to make a cake for the monk?
6. How did the treasurer feel when they served the cakes to all the monks at the monastery?

*What the Buddha said:*

“From attachment comes grief, from attachment comes fear. For him who is free from attachment, there is no grief, no fear. . . . Overcome the miser by generosity.”

Dhammapada 214, 223.

*Discussion about sharing with others:*

How did the treasurer feel when he was trying to keep secret his craving for cake? He felt sick and miserable. How do you think he felt when he was secretly having his wife bake cakes for him? He was worried, fearful that someone might find out, so he locked the doors and had to climb up seen flights of steps. Even though he was looking forward to enjoying the cakes, he was still not very happy. When he felt threatened by Ven. Moggallana looking in his window, how did he feel? Angry, very unhappy. When did he finally feel happy? When he served the cakes to the monks. So what did he learn? He learned that only having nice things for himself did not bring him happiness. Instead, it bought him grief, fear, problems and even anger.

Wanting to have things only for ourselves is called possessiveness. Wanting to save things and keep them only for ourselves is called miserliness. A person who wants things all to himself is possessive, and a person who saves up valuable things such as money without sharing is called a miser. Was the treasurer a possessive person? Or was he a miser? He was both. He was a miser because he wanted to save his money and not spend any of it on other people, not even his wife and kids. And he was possessive because he wanted the cakes all to himself without sharing.

Have you ever felt uncomfortable when someone might waste or lose your money? It is natural to feel that way. But when we get very anxious about it, and do unusual things to protect it, and won't spend or share any of it, then it is miserly. The treasurer in the story did very unusual

things to protect his money – he would not even tell his wife what he wanted for fear that his precious money would be spent on others.

Have you ever felt uncomfortable when someone touches something that belongs to you? Have you ever worried that someone might take it away or ruin it? That may be okay in some situations, when you need to protect something in a situation where it is likely to be stolen or broken. But when we worry often about our things, protecting them or hiding them from others, then we are too possessive. When we often say “That’s mine” or “don’t touch my things,” we are too possessive.

What makes us possessive or miserly? Why do we try so hard to keep and protect our things from other people? Because we like our things so much. We love what we have and we don’t want to lose it. That is called “attachment.” We are very attached to our favorite things. When we are attached to something, we are afraid of losing it. We feel grief, very upset, if it gets broken, damaged or lost. We are even upset if we *think* it might be broken, damaged or lost.

The best way to overcome our attachment, miserliness or possessiveness is to share with others, to give to others, or to be generous. To share the things that are valuable to us, not just things that we don’t want anymore. For example, giving someone your old outgrown toys or a piece of cake that you don’t like may be thoughtful, but not very generous. Sharing your favorite things or giving someone your slice of your favorite cake is generous. The more often we are generous, the sooner we get rid of our possessive and miserly feelings. And each time, we feel the joy of knowing that we made someone happy *and* that we are getting rid of our selfishness and developing a good habit of being generous.

*Activity:*

Make a list of ten of your favorite things that you own, starting with the thing that you love the most. Then next to each item on the list, write the name of someone you know who does not already have that item and might like it. Then, for each item on the list, imagine yourself giving the item to that person listed next to the item. Notice how you feel, and what thoughts come to your mind as you imagine it. Do you have thoughts that the person might not appreciate it, might not deserve it, might break it, or might not give you something in return? Are you having thoughts like “It’s mine, I don’t want to give it away,” “I deserve to have it,” or “I want to keep it”? Being aware of our possessive thoughts is the first step toward getting rid of our selfishness. We don’t actually need to give our favorite things away but we should learn to notice when we are being too possessive or miserly and to share with others when it is appropriate.