

Giving with a Pure Heart

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Tuesday, 05 July 2016 11:44



[[Master's Teachings](#)]

The Buddha teaches us that we must not cultivate only to benefit ourselves but also to help others. To benefit others, we have to practice the paramita of giving, which is to go amongst people to help those in need and relieve their suffering. In doing this, we aim to give with a pure heart without any kind of desire or asking for anything in return. There is such a story in the sutra.

During the time of the Buddha, in the City of Rajagriha, wealthy people lived in wealthy areas and poor people lived in poor neighborhoods. There was a community called the Village of Billions. Everyone who lived in that village was very wealthy and had assets in the billions. There was a merchant who was very envious of the people living there. He thought, "The people of that village are so rich. Although I have a stable income as a merchant, and I never have to worry about my finances, I want to live there too. People will think I'm very rich." Therefore, he set his goal of living in that village.

For a long period of time, the merchant worked day and night. Despite his booming business, he saved money on all the everyday necessities, and his family lived as if they were poor, just so he could fulfill his dream. This merchant kept up a frugal lifestyle for several decades. Eventually he grew old and ill; on his deathbed, he said to his wife, "My only regret is that I'm only steps away from my goal." He said to his wife and son to fulfill his wish, "Even if I pass away, you have to make my dream come true."

The son agreed. He, however, had always pitied his father for the way he lived his life. He felt that his father worked really hard but was too stingy, and that their life was not so different from people living in poverty.

While the merchant was still alive, the Buddha had expounded the Dharma in the City of Rajagriha. Many people who attended the Buddha's talks gained spiritual mind and got rid of their afflictions. Even the poor benefited from the teaching and led a happy life. The son often wondered, "Why can't my family believe in Buddhism, listen to the Dharma, and be close to the Buddha and his monastics?" He felt rather conflicted and was searching for a teaching that would give him a direction in life.

After the merchant passed away, his son attended the Buddha's talks, learned his teachings, and practiced them. He felt that the Buddha's heart was vast and free and noticed that his teachings made him feel very broad-hearted, at peace, and at ease. He was very happy and enjoyed a spiritual life. It was something that money could not buy nor could it be attained by living in luxury.

Upon receiving the family's assets, the son decided to give his inheritance away. He supported Buddhism by making offerings to the Buddha and the Sangha. He also started to help the poor.

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When the weather was cold, he gave them warm clothing; when they were hungry, he provided them hot, nutritious meals. Every time he saw people's life improved, he felt very pleased and contented. Being able to provide for others gave him a sense of satisfaction. Within a few years, he gave away all his inheritance. Then, he suddenly got ill and passed away in just a few days. His mother was devastated, and cried every day, continually asking herself why he had died so young.

At around this time, there was an elder who lived in the Village of Billions. He was the most affluent person in that area. This elder's wife had recently borne a son; the baby was very adorable and well-liked by all. This was a joyous event, but the baby would never stop crying. Even when he was in his mother's arms or drinking milk, he cried. His parents thought, "We finally have been granted a child at such an old age, and everyone adores him, but why won't he stop crying?"

After some thought, the elder said to his wife, "Why don't we have someone to take care of our son?"

They sent out word for a nanny. Several people came and tried to take care of the baby, but none of them worked out. At last, the merchant's wife heard of this. Since she needed a livelihood, she went to see if she could be hired. Upon picking up the baby, he smiled. The elder was overjoyed, and felt confident to ask the merchant's wife to be his son's nanny. "Please come live in our house;" he added, "we will treat you like family as long as you take good care of our baby and ensure his happiness and health."

The wealthy elder kept his word and treated the merchant's wife like a family member. Yet, she could not help but feel a sense of sorrow, as her husband had worked so hard for the sole purpose of living in the Village of Billions, and her son had given all their fortune away right before he passed away. Neither her husband nor her son had the blessing to lead a good life, and there she was, living luxuriously with the wealthiest family in town.

Meanwhile, the baby was learning to talk. One day, the baby looked at the merchant's wife, "Mother!" he called out, "don't you recognize me?"

Frightened, she asked, "You're only a baby, and just beginning to learn how to talk, how can you speak so clearly?"

The child replied, "In my past life, I was your son! The practice of giving has allowed me to move you into this house! The merit of giving is truly beyond comprehension; now your wish has come true, we are living in the Village of Billions. Not only that, we are living in the house of the wealthiest man of this village! Look at the incredible merit of giving."

And so, the child grew up in this family. When he had grown and his parents had passed away, he once again inherited a grand fortune, became the wealthiest man of the village, and continued to practice the virtue of giving.

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The spirit of giving lies in the generosity of the heart. In not seeking for anything in return, what the merchant's son actually gained was spiritual joy. It takes time to accumulate material wealth, but spiritual joy can be obtained instantly in the moment we let go of greed and help people in need. This generosity purifies our heart, which makes us feel at peace and at ease. Having a generous heart makes us spiritually rich.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks
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