

STORY #11

The Lord secretly nourishes the sun and the moon with light. He secretly fills the earth with food. He secretly fills the clouds with water. Yes, we can clearly see the sun, the moon, the light, the earth, the food, the clouds, and the water, but our eyes can't see the Lord, or any part of His body, or even His shadow. The Creator of the world is so great that He works in silence. Since we are His children, shouldn't our nature contain a bit of His charity?

The charity loved by the Lord has two wings: Give secretly, and, Give and forget. That is, as much as possible we should give without others knowing. Pure charity is only that which we give with compassion and religious feeling. When a devotee offers pure charity with faith to God and Guru, God and Guru feel tremendously content and merge with the devotee, making him or her Their own.

IN THE NAME OF LORD BUDDHA, I HAVE RECEIVED THE ALMS

ONCE UPON A TIME, as the sun rose in the east, a town gatekeeper opened the magnificent doors of a city. A Buddhist monk stood outside with a begging bowl in his hand. Walking softly, with eyes lowered humbly to the ground, the monk entered the city.

Lord Buddha was a prominent master during this period, and his life had a profound influence on the people in this area. The entire city was practicing the teachings of Lord Buddha. Whenever people heard His name, they bowed their head in reverence.

As the rising sun spread its light in all directions, the townsfolk bustled about their morning routines. The monk, meanwhile, walked down the streets, pleading in a humble voice,

“In the name of Lord Buddha, please give me alms.”

No one could understand, however, why the monk said, “In the name of Lord Buddha.” To them the words, “Please give me alms,” would have been enough.

But this was not an ordinary monk. His very presence revealed his extraordinary nature. His steady gaze was focused on the ground, for he sought only alms, not wealthy people, so he looked only at the hands of his donors, not at their faces.

Everyone loved his voice. When he called, "In the name of Lord Buddha," it was full of sweet compassion. The people in the neighborhoods all returned to their homes to find a proper offering for him. When they found something suitable, they ran quickly outside to give it to the humble monk.

But whenever someone in the town offered the monk alms, he drew his begging bowl back and walked on. It was as if he had come to look at alms only, but not to receive them.

People all over the city stood in their courtyards ready to offer alms. Yet the monk walked past each person with no more than a glance at what they offered.

Finally everyone thought that the monk had come seeking some special alms. Yet no one could figure out what the alms might be, since the monk seemed disinterested in the food, clothing, money, and jewels offered to him.

As the daylight faded and the monk continued to accept no alms, the people were worried. Their elation at having his holy feet bless their city and turn it into a place of pilgrimage, now was fading, as they didn't know how best to serve him, and they were afraid the humble monk would leave. By nightfall, the whole town knew the story:

"A great monk is walking our streets begging alms, but he won't accept anyone's offering."

The entire town was concerned. People in every home on every street searched for something they could offer the monk that he might accept.

"Surely, the monk will accept this!" They thought.

But then.....the humble monk would walk past their home. Eventually, he walked past every home on every street in the entire town and didn't accept a single thing from anyone. "In the name of Lord Buddha," he continued to ask in his sweet voice, "Please give me alms."

Finally his gentle, pleasing voice became dry and hoarse. Not once did he sit down to rest. Not once did he put a single morsel of food, or a single drop of water, into his mouth. As the sun set in the west, his feet were tired from constant walking and his begging bowl was still empty.

At last the monk approached the city gate again, the same one he had entered at sunrise, and left the city with a heavy heart. He entered the forest surrounding the city and continued repeating the same plea,

“In the name of Lord Buddha, please give me alms.”

His voice had lost its strength and was only a sweet whisper.

But then?

His eyes lit like lightening flashes. His ears became alert. His tired legs filled with new strength. He thought he heard someone calling him. Yes, it was the voice of a woman.

“Monk,” she said. “Please come this way.”

He walked quickly toward the voice. But why am I hurrying, he thought? He had no answer to this question. He was simply listening to his heart, and his heart was saying,

“Monk, walk swiftly to receive special alms. These alms are only for fortunate souls. Donors of such alms rarely take birth in this world.”

The monk walked up to a huge old tree and stopped. From inside the hollow of the tree, he heard gentle words, “Reverend monk, you have showered abundant grace upon me by coming here. Please accept my alms.”

From within the hole came an emaciated hand holding a torn, ragged cloth.

Extending his begging bowl, the monk accepted her offering. Tears rolled from his eyes, as he uttered three times,

“In the name of Lord Buddha, I have received the alms. In the name of Lord Buddha, I have received the alms. In the name of Lord Buddha, I have received the alms.”

Yes, these alms were as unique as the name of the blessed Lord Buddha. And who was the woman offering alms? She was a Buddhist monk who lived deep in the forest and never ventured into the city. Eating only forest fruits and roots and drinking

only river water, she followed the path of yoga prescribed by Lord Buddha. She didn't own even a pot for water. Her only possession was the ragged cloth she wrapped around her body, and today she had offered even that last possession. She was uniquely charitable in giving of her own Atman.

We're deluded if we think hoarding brings happiness. But it's our nature to hoard, so we can't immediately give up everything and jump out of the hoarding stage. We must gradually give things up and take medium-sized steps in that direction.