



The Sutra on the Original Vows of the Attainment of Merits of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva

Chapter Ten

The Comparison of Merits for Alms-giving

At that time, the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, under the super-natural power of Sakyamuni Buddha, rose from his seat and knelt down with clasped hands, saying to Him, “Honored of the World, I can see that the comparison of merits for alms-giving differ from each other in small or great ways. Some receive their reward for only one life, some receive their reward for ten lives, and some even receive great bliss for hundreds of thousands of lives. I do not know the reason why it differs in such a great way and hope that you will graciously explain it to me.”

The Sakyamuni Buddha replied, “Now, I shall give you the comparison of merits, whether great or small. As rewards for the sentient beings who practice alms-giving in the Jampud-vipa, I tell all who are assembled here at the thirty-three Heavens and I hope you will listen to me carefully.” Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva said to Sakyamuni Buddha, “I’m quite doubtful about this and I would like to hear the com-parison of merits for almsgiving.”

The Sakyamuni Buddha said, “If kings, nobles, honorable elders, Maha Ksatriyas, Great Brahmans in Jampudvipa (the Continent situated at the South of Mount Sumeru, comprising of the world we live in), come across people who suffer great poverty, or unreformed beings, if such people as those mentioned give alms to them through great compassion, love and kindness, smilingly, and give gifts to those poor beings with their own hands or through their representatives and talk to them in consoling tones, such donors of gifts gain merit as great as the total number of grains of sands in the Ganges River. It is because these donors of gifts are practicing Infinite Love and Kindness even to the poorest and the lowest births and unreformed beings, that is why for hundreds of thousands of lives they receive their well earned good merits of the seven jewels of riches. They are well provided for in good food and clothing in those lives yet to come.

Again if kings, nobles and Brahmans come across Buddhist images of Buddhas, temples or pagodas, Bodhisattvas, Arahats, and all Pac-ceka Buddhas in the lives to come, if they prepare alms-givings and offerings, offering them personally, such generous donors will be reborn as kings of the thirty-three Heavens receiving great bliss for three kalpas. If these donors transfer their merit to the beings of the ten quarters of space these donors will become Mahabrahma devarajas, kings or the eighteen Bramalokas, for ten kalpas continuously.

Again, if in the future, kings, prime ministers, nobles, honorable elders, Maha Ksatriyas and Brahmans come across Buddhist pagodas and temples or Buddhist Sutras and images which are in bad condition and with determination for their repair, or rebuild them, such generous donors, whether they practice almsgiving themselves or persuade others to do alms-giving or charitable acts, whether they persuade one person or many hundreds of thousands of people to practice the same charitable acts, these charitable donors will be reborn as Chakravarti for hundreds of thousands of lives. Those who have been encouraged and persuaded by the above donors to practice alms-giving will be reborn as kings of small countries for hundreds of thousands of lives. If, moreover, they transfer their merit to others in the presence of the Buddhas, pagodas or temples, such great donors of gifts will all attain Buddhahood. The reward for practicing such great merit is beyond all description.

If, in the future, kings, prime ministers, nobles, when they see aged ones suffering from disease, women giving birth, if they have but one momentary thought of sympathy, to give them aid, medicines, food and drink, or bathings, so as to assure them some measure of peace and happiness, such merits are inconceivable and donors of these things will always be reborn as a Suddhasodeva for one hundred kalpas. After this period, they will be always reborn in the Six Deva Lakas (i. e. The Heavens of Desire) for two hundred kalpas. Finally, they will attain Buddhahood, but prior to that for hundreds and thousands of births, they will never be reborn as dwellers in evil realms or hear any voice of suffering. If kings of countries or Brahmans in the future can practice such meritorious deeds, they will receive boundless blessings. If they transfer their merits to others, whether great or small merit, they will be reborn as Cakravatis and finally attain Buddhahood.

That is why, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, you should do your utmost to encourage sentient beings to practice meritorious deeds by following these examples. If virtuous people in the future will practice meritorious deeds even as small as a hair, or a grain of sand, or a dust mote, they will receive blessings and benefits which cannot be expressed by examples, as they will be so great.

If virtuous people of future times meet with images of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Pratyeka Buddhas or Cakravartis and make offerings to them, they will also receive numerous blessings and benefits, and will always be reborn either as humans or devas, enjoying great bliss. If such people will transfer their merits to the beings of the ten quarters of space, such donors will get great benefits and blessings beyond all statement by examples.

If virtuous persons of future times come across Sutras or hear only one stanza or even one sentence of the Sutras and have a feeling of deep respect for that utterance, or if they sincerely praise the Sutras, or make offerings piously, they will receive innumerable merits. If they will transfer their merits to the beings of the ten quarters of space, their blessings are beyond all words.

If virtuous persons of future times come to new Buddhist pagodas, new temples, new Sutras, and make offerings, paying homage with reverent attitudes of deepest respect, and if they come across old or destroyed ones, and make a vow to repair or restore these structures or shall encourage others to do this meritorious work with them, such virtuous people who respond to this encouragement shall be born as kings of countries for thirty lives and the encourager himself will always be reborn as a Cakravarti and will preach Buddhadharma to the kings of countries.

If virtuous people of future times will practice good deeds according to the Buddha's Teachings, or make offerings for repairing Buddhist pagodas or temples or mending Buddhist Sutras, their merit, small as a hair though it be, or a dust mote or a grain of sand or a drop of water, if they will transfer such merits to beings of the ten realms of space, such meritorious persons will receive inconceivably great bliss for hundreds of thousands of lives. If they will transfer their merits to their family and relatives, their relatives will receive happiness for three lives. To give one benefit is to receive hundreds of thousands in return. That is why, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, the merit of alms-giving is of such magnitude."

~Translated by Ms. Pitt Chin Hui

