

Karmic Retribution of Longevity - The Story of a Novice Monk Saving the Lives of a Group of Ants

This is a story about the karmic retribution of extending one's life by saving the lives of other sentient beings, taught by the Buddha in the Sutra of Miscellaneous Precious Deposits (Saṃyukta-ratna-piṭaka-sūtra), Volume 4.

Once upon a time, there was an arhat who possessed supernatural powers and knew that his disciple, a novice monk, had only seven days to live. Therefore, the arhat granted the novice monk a leave so that he could go home and visit his parents and relatives. Before the novice monk departed, the arhat reminded him to return to the monastery in the morning of the seventh day. The novice monk bore that in mind and took off.

On the way home, the novice monk saw a group of ants drifting and fighting for their lives in a stream of flowing water. Out of compassion, he took off his robe, filled it with soil nearby; emptied it over the stream to stop the water from flowing; moved the ants to a higher ground and saved their lives.

In the morning of the seventh day, the novice monk returned to the monastery, and continued to stay alive after the seventh day. The arhat was surprised to see his disciple still alive. He entered into samadhi (meditative absorption) to find out with his divine eye what had happened. He saw the novice monk, who was originally left with no more merits and virtuous to live, had managed to extend his lifespan beyond the seven days through his compassionate act of saving those ants' lives, thereby receiving longevity through the karmic retribution. This story tells us that lifespan of a person can

be extended through the act of saving others' lives.

There are two ways of saving sentient beings. One way is saving the lives of sentient beings, which can protect sentient beings from fear and death. Thus, the first precept set up by the Buddha is the precept against killing because sentient beings treasure their lives most and no one wants to be killed by others. The other way is saving sentient beings from being misled by false mentors, and that is saving the wisdom-life of the dharmakāya (dharma-body) of sentient beings. False mentors are those who mislead sentient beings and cause them to plunge into the three evil paths to endless suffering, and these mentors are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges in this current world of endurance.

Once sentient beings have managed to stay away from erroneous views, they will be able to remain untainted by false views for endless future transmigrations and await the chance of encountering the right mentor when the conditions are ripe. As the result of warding off erroneous views aided by the merits from helping others, sentient beings will begin the journey towards the path to liberation or even path towards attaining Buddhahood when the thought of transcending the three realms arises.

However, saving the lives of sentient beings can benefit them for only a single lifetime. Saving the wisdom-life of the dharmakāya (dharma-body) of sentient beings, on the other hand, can affect them for countless future lifetimes because those sentient beings whose lives are saved will take on diligent cultivation for countless eons to eventually attain the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment. After they have achieved Buddhahood, they can further help immeasurable number of sentient beings onto the path to liberation and path towards Buddhahood. Hence, saving the wisdom-life of the dharmakāya of sentient beings is incalculably superior to saving the life of sentient beings.