



## 28 Attachment to Rewards of Merit

**"Subhuti, if one Bodhisattva bestows in charity sufficient of the seven treasures to fill as many worlds as there be sand-grains in the river Ganges, and another, realising that all things are selfless, attains perfection through patient application, the merit of the latter will far exceed that of the former. Why is this Subhuti? It is because all Bodhisattvas are indifferent as to the rewards of merit."**

**Then Subhuti said to Buddha: "O World-honoured One, why do you say that Bodhisattvas are indifferent to the rewards of merit?"**

**And Buddha answered: "Subhuti, Bodhisattvas should not be attached to desire for rewards. So I say that they never think of receiving rewards."**

In the first section, we saw Buddha performing the everyday activities of a simple monk. In this calm and mindful life there is no attachment to merit or fame, no disdain for others and respect for all forms of life. True merit, Buddha is saying, comes to those who seek no reward or recognition.

*There was once a monastery which was self-sufficient in food. The garden where all the food was grown was presided over by a monk who was also the head gardener. One day the Abbott approached him and said: "You grow many vegetables, fruits and flowers here, but please be sure that you grow no roots." The gardener was confused, and replied to the Abbott: "How can I grow plants that have no roots? How could anyone eat the food from such plants?" The Abbott said: "You have a mouth don't you?"*

The Abbott was really telling the gardener to work without attachment or self-importance, these are the roots that he advised the gardener monk not to put down. Of course he grew food and it was eaten by all, but if he considered himself clever or virtuous for doing so, there could be no true merit and his work would be in vain.

Sometimes our needs may be met in surprising ways and it is as if our wishes come true. We may put this down to the workings of Karma and should not become attached to it or consider it miraculous – we might thereby inflate the ego-notion and delude ourselves and others, claiming skills that we may or may not possess. Better to allow things to unfold and to observe without attachment.

Being indifferent to all reward implies the Paramita of patience and a certain passivity. It should be borne in mind that patience is not docile acceptance of all that takes place; it doesn't mean that the would-be Bodhisattva is never assertive. That may be described as ignorant patience. Those less attached to the illusion of self are more able to put issues calmly and without fear, and this is called wise patience or unborn patience, where we don't see gain or loss.

