Dhamma Lesson - Evening Story

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 4:06

Many years ago, I was a nun in Thailand for a year, a Buddhist nun, a long time ago. This is a little story about some things I learned about generosity and humility from being with some of the other nuns.

At one point during my time as a nun, I went up to stay in a monastery in the north, in the forest. You have to understand, there aren't very many Western nuns, and many nuns in Thailand don't really practice that much. They're just living, cooking, taking care of themselves. But this was a place that had practiced nuns, which is why I went there.

When we arrived, there were monks and kutis on one side of the river, and nuns on the other—just a few, maybe six little huts on that side. When I arrived, there was a head nun who was pretty young, probably early thirties. Rungduan was her name, Mechi Rungduan. She came to meet us, and she was clearly in a state of deep samadhi. She was a very committed practitioner, which I didn't know at the time. She takes me to my kuti. She was very steady, practiced, committed—doing a lot of concentration practice in a Mahasi-style approach.

The way it works in Thailand, in nunneries and monasteries, is that pretty much anyone can just show up. You don't call and make a reservation, at least not then. This was way out in the country, but really on any given day, all of a sudden five new monks could show up, ten new nuns could show up. It didn't happen often, but it could. So if ten new nuns show up and there are only five or six kutis, where are they going to go?

This is where I really learned about letting go and generosity. I had come from being on staff at IMS for a long time at that point, and it's sort of how we think of things here. The longer you were on staff, we had this thing called the room game—who got what room. The longer you're on staff, the more senior you got, so you got the better room. That's just how it seemed to work. And it seems like that in a lot of places, right? The head people, the higher people—they get the better room, the better office, the better everything.

So when ten nuns show up, I'm thinking, they better not put someone in with me. And they didn't, because I was the farang, the foreigner. They treated me very kindly, with great generosity and respect. Everyone else doubled up, tripled up. And the first person to move out of her kuti was Rungduan.

The first one. Not like, "Okay, I guess I have to after I've jammed nuns into everywhere else." She was the first one who would leave and go stay up in this cave filled with bat guano at the top of the hill. And not a murmur—just like, of course, that's what you do.

The act of generosity, the humility of the practitioner who is really practicing. It so touched me. Not enough to give up my kuti—but I was never asked to. I saw that over and over. It wasn't a one-time thing. And some of that really stuck with me as a way of understanding: oh, that's what practice is really about. That's really what the manifestation of practice is. This is immediate practice—sharing generosity, not holding on to status, not holding on to sense of self in that way.

So that was just one little moment, one little day, but it was inspiring to me—this sense of what a life of practice can be about.

Just a little act of generosity. Sharing the merit is an act of generosity. It's a great movement of wisdom, a movement that comes from our steadiness of awareness. Generosity naturally arises. And it's a happy, joyful state of mind and heart.

May you rest well.

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