

## The Thieves (a parable)

[This parable reminds us to speak up compassionately and at the right time when we need to. Furthermore, if we listen carefully to what others have to say, even in a seemingly harsh or rude way, we often have something valuable to learn.]

Once thieves broke into a rich man's house in the night. They stealthily moved around the house looking for valuables while the rich man and his family slept soundly. An old neighbour saw the thieves and shouted loudly, waking up the rich man and his family.

The thieves ran away in time, and were not seen. The rich man, angry at being woken up in the middle of the night scolded the old man, calling him senile and rude, to see thieves in such a safe house with high walls and guards.

A few weeks passed, and then again, the same thieves came into the rich man's house. The old neighbour saw the thieves from his house. But warned against raising any alarm and troubling the rich man, he remained silent.

The thieves then stole the rich man's valuables, including his solid golden Buddha image that was handed down through generations. When the rich man and his family woke up the next morning, they discovered their losses, and could only lament. This time the rich scolded the old neighbour, blaming him for their losses, because he did not raise the alarm.

Recalling that the rich man had much more wealth hidden away in his house, and the neighbour's silence, the thieves were emboldened. Months later, they broke into the house again. This time, the rich man was woken by a noise made by a careless thief.

The head thief killed the rich man and tied up the rest of the family and their guards. This time they took all the riches they could find. They moved their loot through the front door into their waiting vehicles and drove off. The old neighbour was silent – he had died, too. And the rich man's family, fortunate enough to be spared their lives, had to sell their house and lived in poverty for a long time to come.

The rich man's foolishness and selfishness cost him his life and troubled his family. The thieves became wealthy and respectable, since it was easy to be respectable because of wealth. The wealthy man's family became so poor that they had to start from scratch, working very hard.

Our past foolishness may affect our present life. We can change what is present before us with only with wisdom and diligence. The right and good that we do now will help those whom come after us – including ourselves, because we will return to our unfinished businesses.

In this parable, the old neighbour is the Buddha or his disciple – or any Dharma practitioner. The wealthy man is a Buddhist leader and the family are his followers – or Buddhists in general. The thieves (*cora*) are the bad monastics and priests who

appear learned, respectable and compassionate, but do not keep to the monastic rules.

On the warnings in the suttas about monastics who are “thieves,” see **the Arahatta Susīma Sutta** (S 12.70,58-63) [SD 16.8](#). On types of alms-eaters, see also [SD 45.18](#) (2.3.3.2). On monastics who do not keep to the rules, see [SD 49.2](#) (1.1.3).

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