

A One Rupee Karmic Lesson
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THIS incident happened about two and a half decades back, but, even the long passage of time, has not diminished its value.

A friend of mine had advised me to visit the temple of Srinivasamangapuram, while returning from Tirupathi. He promised me that it was pure bliss to visit that temple which nestled in a sleepy village, under the foothills of the Tirumala Mountains. So, one evening I went to Srinivasamangapuram, in search of bliss.



During those days, it was an enchanting place, a simple, remote village, very very quiet, and a small temple engulfed in silence. The luxurious silence was occasionally interrupted by a scampering monkey or a lone devotee ringing the temple bell. I simply soaked myself in the divine silence and aloneness of that evening hours. Sitting alone, on the footsteps of the temple, the radiant glow of the evening sunset, bathing the quiet village, it was a soothing and healing experience. (Today, the environment has totally changed. Serpentine queue of pilgrims everywhere, countless shops and vendors, paddy fields that have become car parks, serenity has fled to somewhere else.)

The last bus was scheduled to leave at 7 P.M., in the twilight darkness I made my way slowly to the deserted bus stop. While I was patiently waiting in the darkness for the bus to arrive, a young man accompanied by a very old lady approached me. The lady was shrivelled with age and should have been more than 75 years of age. The young man wanted to know if I was going to Tirupathi town, and if so, whether I could take this lady and drop her in Tirupathi bus stand? While I answered in the affirmative, the thought of this lady for company was mentally not liked by me. A disagreeable thought rushed through my mind, then. (Even now, when I recollect this incident, I am ashamed of that thought of irritation, that raced through my mind, then. Had it been a damsel, I would have gladly welcomed her, but, this old lady for company... oh no...), All my blissful moments at the temple were quickly forgotten. Perhaps, the young man wanted me to pay her bus fare, I thought.

The bus arrived and a few passengers got inside. The old lady boarded through the front entrance, while I opted for the rear entrance. As the bus proceeded, the Conductor came to collect the fare. I asked for two tickets, pointed to the old lady, in the front seat, as the other passenger. The fare, during those days, was one rupee, per passenger. I paid two rupees, and happily settled down, trying to enjoy the cool breeze that rushed into

the moving bus. A few moments later, a commotion in the front, alerted all the passengers. The old lady was standing and having a loud argument with the conductor, who was pointing a finger at me. The conductor came to me gesticulating, that, the old lady was scolding him, for, accepting her bus fare, from me! I was shocked; it was as though somebody had slapped me. My egoistic vanity, had made me to conclude, that, the young man, wanted me to pay, the old lady's bus fare, but here she was, standing and demanding that she be allowed to pay her own bus fare! At that moment, I felt so small and petty.

The old lady was pleading to the conductor to return the one rupee back to me, and accept her money instead. I requested her not to be bothered about it; after all, it was just one rupee only. Her reply really upset me more. She entreated to me "son. It is not a matter of one rupee, I will have to take rebirth to repay this one rupee back to you. Why do you want me to take another birth to repay this debt of one rupee?" I was simply jolted and shocked by her plea. Oh God! What lesson is she teaching me? I just could not answer her. It was the other co-passengers, who shouted at her and asked her to keep quiet. But, she was constantly turning and pleading to me "why do you want me to be reborn for this one rupee". My false ego and shame prevented me from taking that one rupee.

It was a relief, when the bus stopped at the final stop. We parted ways in the darkness.

That night, in the hotel room, the mind was engrossed in an endless searching debate. Is Karma, the operating system of this world? Is there a gigantic Karmic Stock Exchange, monitoring our actions, deeds and thoughts? Are successive rebirths generated for settlement of Karmic debts? Are we observing fasts, vrats and performing Homas to secure a good Karmic loan to tide over difficulties created by bad Karma? Are those worthless individuals in enviable positions because of their +AAA Karmic credit rating? Will this old lady, really be reborn and come to me, in some future birth, to repay a debt of one rupee? How, when and where will our future lives intersect, to settle this one rupee debt?

Oh God! What a great Karmic lesson, she taught me, in those twilight hours, beneath the Tirumalahills? Can even a one-rupee coin trigger a chain of Karmic reactions? If so, how can we, who receive piles of unsolicited gifts on every festival day, repay such Karmic debts? Are those who suffer in an aggravated manner from incurable diseases and crisis in some kind of a Karmic recession? Will the Gods favour us with good Karmic loans or bonds to overcome problems?

Who knows the ways of the Gods? But, my eyes are always searching for her, when will she come to me, with a one-rupee coin in her hands?



(The views expressed are personal)