

# The special gift

## A Buddhist story

**Key ideas: gifts, values, generosity**

One bright, sunny spring morning Ya-teo was sweeping the courtyard of her master's home when she saw something shiny and bright in the dust. It was a tiny coin, worth very little, but Ya-teo became very excited and picked it up. She came from a very poor family. They were so poor that Ya-teo had to work as a slave for a rich merchant. Her parents could not afford to keep her at home in the little Chinese village where they lived.

Ya-teo was very happy with the coin she had discovered. As a slave she had food to eat, clothes to wear and a mat to sleep on, but nothing of her own. She had no toys, no money to buy sweets, and she had to work so hard she had no time to play. But Ya-teo knew there were many people in the world worse off than she was, so she never complained. She took the tiny coin, polished it on her jacket and put it carefully in her pocket for safe keeping. It was her greatest treasure.

Several days later Ya-teo was called to the courtyard. Everyone from the house was there, slaves, servants and family. A young priest from the temple in the nearest town had come to talk to them. He told stories of the Buddha. Ya-teo always enjoyed listening to tales of Buddha's wisdom and goodness. Then the priest told them his special news. A new statue of the Buddha was to be made, a grand and beautiful image to stand in the temple. He asked if anyone would like to make a gift towards the cost. People gave generously. There were gold and silver ornaments, rings and coins.

Ya-teo was very excited. 'I can give my coin too' she said, and held out her treasure. The priest looked at it and shook his head. 'I didn't steal it. It is mine. I found it,' said Ya-teo, and she felt the tears start in her eyes. But the priest refused to take her coin, and set off back to the temple with his sack of gifts.

Much treasure was collected by the priest at the temple. At last the moment came when all the metal was melted down and poured into a mould. When it was cold, the priests all stood round to see the magnificent statue. When the mould was taken away they saw that it was dull and marked with ugly lines. The metal was melted down and poured again, but the same thing happened, and again the statue was spoiled.

The head priest called all the other priests together. 'Something is wrong,' he said. 'Were all your gifts given and accepted with love and kindness?' The young priest began to feel ashamed. He thought of the slave girl's coin he had refused to accept. He spoke to the head priest. 'You must go back for the coin,' he said.

So the young priest returned to find Ya-teo at her chores. He said he was very sorry to have hurt her feelings. He asked if she still had the coin. Ya-teo said she had, and that she would gladly give it if her treasure would make any difference. The priest took the coin gratefully and thanked Ya-teo.

Back at the temple the statue was, once more, melted down and the little coin was added. When the metal was cold and the mould removed, the priests saw a beautiful shining statue of Buddha. And on its chest, just over the heart, was Ya-teo's little coin. It too, was now bright, beautiful and shiny.