

Gessen was a Buddhist monk. He was also an exceptionally talented artist. Before he started work on any painting, however, he always demanded payment in advance. And his fees were exorbitant. So he came to be known as the Greedy Monk.

A geisha once sent for him to have a painting done. Gessen said, "How much will you pay me?" The girl happened to be entertaining a patron at that time. She said, "Any sum you ask for. But the painting must be done right now before me."

Gessen set to work at once and when the painting was completed he asked for the highest sum he had ever charged. As the geisha was giving him his money, she said to her patron, "This man is supposed to be a monk, but all he thinks of is money. His talent is exceptional, but he has a filthy, money-loving mind. How does one exhibit the canvas of a filthy, money-loving man like that? His work is good enough for my underclothing!"

With that she flung a petticoat at him and asked him to paint a picture on it. Gessen asked the usual question before he started the work: "How much will you give me?" "Oh, any sum you ask for," said the girl. Gessen named his price, painted the picture, shamelessly pocketed the money, and walked away.

Many years later, quite by chance, someone found out why Gessen was so greedy for money. Devastating famine often struck his home province. The rich would do nothing to help the poor. So Gessen had secret barns built in the area and had them filled with grain for such emergencies. No one knew where the grain came from or who the benefactor of the province was.

Another reason why Gessen wanted money was the road leading to his village from the city many miles away. It was in such bad condition that ox carts could not move on it; this caused much suffering to the aged and the infirm when they needed to get to the city. So Gessen had the road repaired.

The final reason was the meditation temple which Gessen's teacher had always desired to build but could not. Gessen built this temple as a token of gratitude to his revered teacher.

After the Greedy Monk had built the road, the temple, and the barns, he threw away his paint and brushes, retired to the mountains to give himself to the contemplative life, and never painted another canvas again.