The Joy of Generosity

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:02:22

Sally mentioned last night how in the way that the Dhamma has been taught largely in the West, we tend to focus on kind of the end of the three pillars: Dana, Sila, Bhavana. We've tended to focus more on Bhavana and kind of throw in Sila and Dana later on. So I thought tonight I want to actually talk about generosity, about Dana, and the way that the Buddha brought it into his teaching.

I read the short refrain in one of my talks: "Refrain from the unskillful, do good, purify the mind. This is the teaching of all the Buddhas." And of course we think of meditation practice—both insight and shamatha absorption meditation practices work towards purifying the mind, which means changing the habits from greed, from aversion, from hatred, to purifying those habits. But really everything the Buddha taught was towards awakening, towards purifying the mind. As far as I can tell, nothing was extraneous or just for the heck of it or about something else. Everything is about purifying the mind. It's not only meditation.

As Sally said, the three pillars are Dana, generosity; Sila, conscious non-harming, virtuous conduct; and Bhavana, mental cultivation. I want to talk about generosity tonight.

Bhikkhu Bodhi, who is one of the great scholars and translators of the Pali into English of our generation, just knows all the suttas, basically. He talks about the practice of giving and the special place it has in the way that the Buddha speaks about it as being, in a sense, the foundation, the seed of our spiritual development. And it really is the foundation. It says in the suttas, which we read over and over again, that talk on giving was invariably the first topic that the Buddha talked about to people. There are many suttas—and I'll read part of one later—where when he first meets someone, he gives what's called a graduated exposition, basically bringing their mind into enough clarity and upliftment until it's actually ready to hear the deepest dharma. And he always starts with generosity.

The aim of it isn't to say, "You should be a generous person." We all think, "Yeah, that's good, help people in need, let's give, that's good." But it's not just that. It's really a way—the foundation of the pure-hearted mind—that allows us to open, to unfold into freedom, into liberation.

Bhikkhu Bodhi points out that giving, generosity, Dana, is not one of the steps in the Eightfold Path, which seems more the actual moment-to-moment practice of looking at the mind. But he says it is actually the precursor, the foundation, the preparation that underlies and quietly supports the entire endeavor to free the mind from confusion. And then he just goes through the lists. It's not on the Eightfold Path, but it's the first topic in the graduated teachings, which the Buddha always gives. It's the first of the three bases of meritorious deeds. It's the first of the four means of benefiting others. And it's the first of the ten paramis,

or perfections.

These paramis or perfections, as you know, are the virtues, the beautiful qualities of mind that are cultivated in the Theravada tradition. They're cultivated by all beings who have the aspiration not only to awaken but to come into birth as an awakened Buddha who can then so benefit others. And generosity is the first. I just wanted to point out how the intrinsic importance of generosity is talked about so much.

Bhikkhu Bodhi says—and I also wanted to point this out—that generosity takes the form of giving of material things, of our time, of our care, lending an ear, whatever form of giving. But the perfection of generosity, the quality of generosity that brings in this brightening, this uplifting of the mind, isn't about the action. Of course all action comes from the motivation, from the intention. And so it's this intention of giving that cultivates non-clinging—I mean, obviously—but it actualizes non-clinging. It also cultivates, and I'll talk more about this, non-separation, a sense of mutuality, the experience of connectedness. And just in the doing of it, it's weakening the habits of greed and hatred and confusion or separation.

So generosity may be the foundation for the Eightfold Path, but also in the practice of it, in the doing of it, in the opening to generosity, it is an actual practice of non-clinging, of connectedness, of non-delusion.

What I also want to talk about from my own experience—if there were secret teachings of generosity, I mean, it's probably obvious, but to me, I didn't really understand this on a personal level—is that it's an absolute practice of joy and happiness. It's such a happy way to be in the moment in the world. It's such a joyful way to be with other people, this generous heart and mind which naturally moves into metta, into connectedness.

In this culture I grew up in, and I think this is a very generous culture in terms of offering, taking in, whether we're in a church or a synagogue or a temple or a mosque in our religious traditions, but also just in the lay culture. We all get seven billion requests from organizations a week in the mail. And most people I know really give a lot in that way. So that's generosity. And I feel good about it, but it's not that same quality of real joy that I've experienced over and over and over in Thailand and in Burma. Because it's like a face-to-face immediate quality of being that really permeates the culture, that permeates simple interactions between people.

Of course, it's not just in Thailand and Burma. That's just where I've done a lot of practice. And being Buddhist cultures, the sense of generosity as the foundation for the whole of Buddhist practice is very deeply inculcated in the culture. But of course, generosity is everywhere, and Buddhism doesn't own generosity. I'm just talking from this perspective.

I'm sure you've heard a million times how the Buddha, when he set up his Sangha of monks and later of nuns, really based it on generosity, on the mutual nature of generosity, so that the Sangha, the ordained ones, depended on the lay people, and the lay people depended on the monks and nuns.

Neither side could just kind of exist in isolation. This is from the Buddha himself, speaking to his monks:

"Brahmins and householders are very helpful to you. They provide you with the requisites of robes, alms food, lodgings, and medicine in times of sickness. And you monks are very helpful to Brahmins and householders, as you teach them the Dhamma that is good in the beginning, the middle, and the end, and you proclaim the spiritual life in its fulfillment and complete purity. Thus, monks, this spiritual life is lived with mutual support for the purpose of crossing the flood and making a complete end of suffering."

Just the sense that we're all in it together.

From our Western mind, the idea of monks and nuns going out every morning with their bowls and begging for food—I mean, that's the word we have, *begging*—it has a whole different context, doesn't it, than this sense of mutual support and respect, this understanding that we can't exist without each other.

Even now in Burma and Thailand, every morning in a monastery, the monks line up early, always barefoot, always in order from the most senior to the most junior, carrying their alms bowls. In silence, they go out into the local villages and walk in line barefoot for an hour, an hour and a half. They just have their route. They don't look up. It's not about going someplace and asking. They just walk with their eyes down, and if someone comes and wants to offer, they open the lid, the food is placed in, and they keep going.

I don't know what it is—early morning, just after dawn, something about the stillness in the air—but so often when I see that lining up and going out, sometimes it makes me cry. I feel like it's 2,600 years ago or something. It's timeless. It's a beautiful thing, and begging doesn't have anything to do with it. It's not begging. People who give, they give because they're happy to give. There's that sense of mutuality.

So generosity is very, very present in the culture. But the sense of happiness, the joy really, the feeling that after a while you don't know who's giving and who's receiving because it's just joy and metta all around—this hits me and strengthens in me every time I go to Burma or Thailand.

I first noticed it when I was a nun in Thailand for about a year, a long time ago. I just went la-di-da, I want to be a nun, practice in the woods, not have to pay anything, see what it's like. And that's how we are. But I was so struck from the beginning with how generous people were to me as a Westerner. In Thailand, at least where I was, there wasn't such a sense of poverty. Burma is a whole other story. But people were incredibly generous and so happy to be able to do anything to support my practice.

The remembrance I have in terms of the joy of generosity and the way it opens the mind and heart to freedom, to letting go, is from a forest monastery I was staying at for a while where there were monks and nuns. I was on one side of the river with some little kutis for nuns, and the head nun there was a young woman, a very sincere and dedicated practitioner, that was clear. There weren't that many kutis, little huts, for nuns. And the way it is in these monasteries or meditation centers is you can let them know when you're coming and they'll have a place for you, but at any time, any day, people can just show up. That's just how it is.

So in this little nunnery in Thailand, you could be settled in your little hut, and one day ten women could show up. You just never know. I would notice in my mind—and I came from having been on staff at IMS and Barre—there was always this little fear: Oh no, people are coming. I'm going to have to share my hut. I'm going to have to give up my hut. I have it, you know. And I would just notice that tightness in my mind.

But if anyone, any woman came, the first person to give up her hut was the head nun. Absolutely. I was never even approached to share, never mind give up. As soon as people came, she would move out into the cave, share with another nun, whatever—happily, joyfully, immediately. That letting go, that sense of community, that sense of connectedness. And I would see how I was: No, don't come here.

I think about how we did this whole room game at IMS, where the more senior you were on staff, the more you got to have the room you wanted and keep it. You get there, you dig in, you hold on. That's what seniority is about. And over there, the more senior, the more generous, the more open. Hmm, which way is the Dharma practice going here?

When I was in a good space, it was inspiring. When I was in a bad space, it was like, "Oh, you're stupid." But anyway.

The last seven or eight years or so, I've been spending about a month a year in Burma. The first time I went, I was doing a retreat at a meditation center for about six weeks. I knew some people who were there—the nun who was taking care of foreigners, a Swiss woman who's been a nun there for years, a friend of mine. So it was all very nice, very well taken care of. And it took a while for it to surface in my consciousness. Something was going on, but I couldn't quite put it into words.

After some weeks, I began to notice. I was having a hard retreat—just stuff that was going on for me, not the environment. The way they do the meals at that place is you go into the dining room and all the meditators—Burmese men and women, laymen and laywomen, foreigners from all over the East and some Westerners—the women and men sit at different tables, but you have little round tables that hold three or four people, and everyone has an assigned seat. The monks, of course, eat separately too. You could pick a table, you could be vegetarian or not, which is already huge generosity. At your seat, as you sit down, the places are set, and then little bowls of food are put on the table for whatever there is that day. The food was lovely, there was always plenty—really, it was like a great restaurant in a way.

I was at a table with a couple of nuns, Indonesian women I believe, and one of them just kept asking for this and that. "I want some hot chilies." And the women who were working in the kitchen—some were laywomen, some were nuns—they would come running and say, "Oh, you want chilies?" And they would go running out, I don't know where, to the garden or somewhere, and they'd come running back with the chilies. I'm thinking, "She's a nun. You're not supposed to want extra stuff. That's what renunciation is about." And every day she'd be complaining. She'd ask for this, she'd ask for that, she'd want more butter on her bread.

And unfailing kindness. Not just with a pretense of a smile, but happy. They were so happy they could bring her the extra butter. They were so happy they had some chilies they could find wherever they found them and bring to her every day.

It kind of slowly sank into me as I came out of my grouchy self-involvement that this generosity of heart in supporting the practice, and the happiness it was bringing the people who were offering the generosity—it starts to rub off on you. You can only sit there grouchy and grumpy for so long. "What's the matter? They're so stupid." Finally you realize, "They're really happy. Who's grouchy? Who's grumpy? Who's separate? I'm just sitting here eating."

It starts to rub off on you. I started to see—I was in silence, a yogi, so there wasn't that much I could do to interact. But even just in the silence, the generosity and the mettā start to brighten one's heart and mind. They start to support one in one's practice. You're having a gloomy day, you could just look around and see the ladies working in the kitchen and how generously they were serving, and the nuns and how generous they were with their time and energy. And it starts to soften the heart. It starts to brighten the mind. Okay, take a breath. I can keep going with my practice for today.

So that was my first experience where I consciously began to notice it. And since then, I've seen every time I go to Burma that it's both in the monasteries and nunneries between the ordained Sangha and the laypeople, but it's also just deeply imbued in the culture. And yes, this is a culture with probably one of the worst, most horrific, violent, hateful governments in the world, so I'm not saying everything is all peaches and cream. I'm saying that within this culture there's this spontaneous generosity and the joy that comes with it that is absolutely contagious. After a while, as I said, you really can't tell who's being generous and who's receiving. You give and give and think, "Wow, I'm just so happy. I wish I could give some more."

Just some small examples. When I went this year, because of the cyclone in May, there was huge destruction of many villages down on the lower delta, southeast of Rangoon, Yangon. Mostly foreigners can't go there these days. Some NGOs can. I don't want to get into all the politics of it, how the government didn't want to let people help, but there's still huge need down there—food, shelter, rebuilding schools, all kinds of things.

So this small nunnery we went to visit—again, a tiny little bamboo house. You walk in and half the floor is so rickety that a couple of big guys who came with us one time to visit basically broke the floor. I'm not kidding.

There are two nuns there, Ma Uttaratangi and Ma Uttamatangi—two sisters, one in her early forties, the other in her mid-thirties. They were telling us about their life when we went to visit them. These two sisters are running the nunnery. There's another grown nun, and then there are about ten girls ranging from a teenager down to six years old.

When you see these children—they're orphans, or they have one very poor parent. They all came from the

Delta two years ago. These two nuns, and there are many, many nuns in Burma doing this, have basically taken in either orphan little girls or little girls from such poor one-parent families that the family can't provide for them. Since it's a nunnery, the girls become nuns. And they wear pink.

So there are these little ones—you can't believe how cute they are, you can't bear it. They're this tall, in their little pink robes with their little pink sash. And they sit there, and they're so cute you just can't stand it. They're all over Burma.

The first time we went, Ma Uttamatangi—she's very outspoken, very bright—was describing their work. Ariyañani could translate, and she spoke with so much passion. She said, "These little girls, I just really want to give them a better chance in life."

So they're educating them. She's teaching them Burmese. She's teaching them Pali. She's teaching them the Abhidhamma. You walk into this crummy little bamboo shack and there's a blackboard covered with Burmese, Abhidhamma, and English lessons. The girls get up at four, start studying at six, study all day—but they're happy, you know, they're having fun. They're not beaten down.

And she was speaking so passionately: "Little orphan girls in Burma just get abandoned, or they get sold into servitude. I know what it's like to be poor. I want them to have a better chance in life."

She and her sister have completely devoted themselves to taking care of these little nuns, educating them. She was explaining, "If someone offers us a robe, a pink robe, that's really good—because if we cut it up, we can get fifteen little blouses for the little girls." You could just see how practical and tender it was. She talked about how they lose their slippers, they lose their umbrellas, so you have to be offered many more slippers than you would need for grown nuns. Just day-to-day stuff, but spoken with such passion.

Turns out later, it seemed like maybe she'd taken that on as her mission in life. But later, when she was telling us her whole story, it really wasn't that—that wasn't how she started. There's a whole other story of how and why she became a nun, which if I go into, I'm never going to finish this talk.

But she and her sister became nuns when she was really sick. Her parents were about to sell everything they had to take care of her. She heard this in her mid-twenties and said, "No, that's no good. What can I do?" She said, "I'll become a nun." And her parents, far from thinking, "Great, get rid of her," vehemently opposed it. No, no—even though they would have had to sell everything. But she insisted. Her sister agreed to ordain with her. Turns out her sister had always wanted to be a nun.

And she said she was so sick when she ordained that she would be lying there, and if she had her hand on her chest, she couldn't move it off. Or if her hand was lying down, she couldn't move it onto her chest. She was that sick. Two days after ordaining, she was all better. Stories like this all over—who knows?

Anyway, she and her sister came from the Delta up to Yangon, and they were in a study monastery for a few years, which is what nuns do. They really study very deeply all the Pali scriptures, and there are tests

all over Burma where nuns and monks take examinations. Once they've passed these tests, there are some really very educated nuns, and they come and teach other little girls.

They were doing that, but then the two sisters decided they really wanted to go meditate. They wanted to just dedicate themselves to awakening. So they were going to go to a meditation monastery. That's what they wanted to do. But just at that time, the Sayadaw from their home village who'd been supporting them died. And I didn't quite get how this followed, but there were a bunch of little poor orphan girls—this was only two or three years ago—and he sent them all up to these two sisters. "Now you have to take care of them."

And totally, they turned around. They dropped what they were going to do, found this piece of land, built this house themselves with their own hands, and are completely dedicating themselves—with passion, with love, with affection. You can see it when you're talking to them, the affection in taking care of these little girls, without any resentment, with total mettā and dedication. You just feel it hanging out there.

When you go and offer—so we were visiting nunneries and offering some of the money—you do it in a very formal way, face to face. You turn, you offer the money hand to hand. There's usually a photograph taken. So it's very formal. And then just as you're doing that, the nuns all chant, or monks would do a mettā chant, a long mettā chant and a kind of blessings chant—even the tiny little ones. And they all know it. It's so moving. There's this sense of real communion, of being connected. You go away feeling like, "Wow."

Like I said, who was giving, who was receiving? It's just this flow, this mutuality of mettā and dāna. Everyone is giving, everyone is receiving. It's not that sense of "me offering so much." Your heart lightens, it makes you happy, and it just keeps on going. It keeps on going. It's just how the culture is.

So when the cyclone hit and the government doesn't do much, you can see how so many monks, nuns, and lay people—anyone who had the opportunity—their spontaneous movement was to find how they could go and help. It's just in the culture.

Just a couple other examples—I could go on forever. I mentioned how Sayadaw U Tejaniya organized some rice dānas, some food dānas. One place was right in the village around where we were staying at the meditation center. And the way it worked was very structured: each house would get a little chit, and then people would come in, give their chit, and get the rice. But it was, again, in this real formal, loving way. People came kind of dressed up. It was a big event.

And for the people offering, it's not like you just say, "Here's the rice, take the rice." They really—Sayadaw would say, when I was taking a photo, he goes, "No, give me your camera, Carol. You go offer the rice." He hardly even speaks English, but suddenly he said that, because if you're the one giving, part of the giving is the actual face-to-face offering. It's so different from sending a check in the mail. I can't tell you. People were kind of dressed up, and you come and offer the rice.

didn't even have a crummy little plastic bag to put the rice in—some crummy plastic bag that had been used a hundred times. Some people came and they were putting it in their shirt or their lungi. That's how poor people are.

So then they went away. That was just it. And then the next day, a friend of ours—a Mexican man who was a monk there, so he spoke English—he would go out on the bindabat, the alms round, every morning. He had been doing that for some months. Going on the alms round, you go the same route, you get to know the people and who offers. There's a regularity to it.

So he told us the next day after the rice offering, he said it was so, so touching. He said there were people who had never offered before—really a lot of them—who were out offering rice the next day. Because now they had rice to offer. Immediately they turn around and offer it back. It's just so beautiful. And he said there was a little line of children, which he was sure someone organized, but still—the little kids, very formal in their giving. He was just full when he came back. And we were so happy that he could tell us, because we wouldn't have known. It's just there in the culture.

A year and a half before, when there were the demonstrations and, as my teacher said, the government was shooting monks as well as other people and throwing them in jail, the biggest insult the monks could do was to refuse to accept offerings from the generals or from the military. That's a huge insult. There were times during the worst period when, in the totally state-controlled newspapers, there would be big pictures of the high generals offering something to some prominent monk. You knew it was just for show. But many monks, for a long time—they called it a strike, I don't remember the exact term—they refused to accept offerings. That is so damaging to those who are refused. Some of the monks were even arrested for it. But it's a huge thing to do—to stop the flow of mutuality, to not allow someone to give.

So as I said, it's not just wealthy people giving to poor people. Everyone wants to share, like the people sharing back the rice.

I was walking down a village road between one meditation center and the other—about a ten-minute walk. There are lots of different kinds of little houses and cottages. It was late in the evening, about six o'clock, so the children were all out playing. The little ones would see me and laugh and run away—just kids being kids.

But as I was walking, a little boy came up to me. A very nicely dressed little boy, very solemn. So sincerely he came up to me with this tiny little flower and bowed and handed it to me. It was so touching. That was all. He didn't want anything else. I just said thank you and he went off. This is what the children are learning. It's really so beautiful.

A friend of mine who had spent some time in Burma said it creeps in. You don't quite notice how the generosity and kindness work their way into you—just in little ways like that. It's no big deal, just offering a little flower. But it's still with me now. I felt so happy, so touched. It was kind of the high point of my

week. And I'd had a nice week. Still, when I think about it now, it brightens my mind and heart.

I'm going to get to this—that sense of recollection is really important. It creeps in, but then you start to notice how it enters you, and you start sharing that, wanting to share, coming more from metta, from generosity, quite spontaneously. It really is contagious.

My friend was saying that when she got back home to Massachusetts—where people are kind, but it's not quite in such an open, spontaneous way in the culture—she noticed something. You come home in this open space, and it fades a little bit. You have to look harder to find ways to be generous. You don't just drop in on people. Over there, you just drop in. Anyone drops in. No one is going to walk up to me if I'm walking in Fairfax—a little eight-year-old boy handing me a flower. I'd fall over in shock if that happened. It's just a different way. People are kind, but people are busy. We're all so busy doing our things. We send our checks. I'll call you up—you're on my list. I really should call my friend who's suffering. Maybe I can get to it in five days. I'll have five minutes.

We mean well, but there's not quite the flowing. It's not quite so alive. She was just saying she noticed that, and I do too.

But I want to say, it's not just Burma. It's absolutely not just Burma. Notice whenever you hear of someone being really generous.

Let it in and notice how it affects your mind, how it affects your heart. It brings happiness. It doesn't have to be us doing the giving—just hearing of generosity lights something up inside.

But again, the most important aspect isn't what's given or how we give, but the motivations behind our giving. Those generals having their pictures taken while offering to the monks—that's not the power of generosity. It doesn't matter how much you give. It's not about that.

This is from the Buddha: "Even if a person throws the rinsings of a bowl or a cup into a village pool or pond, thinking, 'May whatever animals live here feed on this,' that would be a source of generosity, a source of blessings." So it's not what we give—it's how. It's that open-hearted connectedness, that generosity of heart.

This shows up very clearly in some of the stories from the time of the Buddha about a layman, a very wealthy man named Anathapindika, who was the foremost supporter of the Sangha during the Buddha's time. I want to read a couple of short stories because they're very much to the point about the importance of motivation.

If you've read suttas at all, you've noticed how many of them begin with "Thus have I heard"—which means Ananda is telling it—and then continue, "On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Savatthi, in Jeta's Grove, the monastery of Anathapindika." So many suttas begin this way. Out of forty-five years of teaching, the Buddha spent nineteen rains retreats in Anathapindika's monastery.

Anathapindika met the Buddha in the third year of the Buddha's teaching life. I want to read just a brief synopsis of how they met, because you can see that his generosity came out of a huge faith—a huge brightening of devotion and love—not out of a should, or because it would be good, or because people would think well of him, or because he'd have a better life in the next world.

The Buddha does talk often about generosity in terms of merit. It's frequently spoken of that way: if we do wholesome deeds now, we will experience the results of wholesome karma later in this life and in future lives. He talks about it that way quite a lot. But if you spend time in Burma or Thailand, or even with Anathapindika's story here, you see that while it might sound mercenary, the actual movement of generosity isn't about thinking, "Oh, if I do this, if I offer to the Buddha, I can be reborn as a deva." That's not where Anathapindika was coming from. It was this welling up of faith.

So the story goes that Anathapindika hadn't even heard of the Buddha when he went to his brother-in-law's house. His brother-in-law, who was also wealthy, was preparing some huge feast. Anathapindika asked, "What's going on?" And his brother-in-law said, "The enlightened one is coming for tomorrow's meal."

Anathapindika stopped. "The enlightened one? Did you say the enlightened one?" He just got so excited. It hit him right there. He felt, "Oh, even the sound of that is rare!" He just became so happy. He asked, "Can I go see him now?" And his brother-in-law said, "No, no—tomorrow would be good."

So Anathapindika went to bed, but he was so excited he kept waking up all night. Is it time? Is it time? Finally he got up way in the middle of the night and started walking in the dark, far out into the country where the Buddha was staying. It was dark, and he became overcome with fear and started to feel doubtful, thinking, "I should go back, I should go back." But the story says a spirit came and whispered in his ear, "Go forward, householder, go forward. Going forward is better for you. Don't turn back again."

Whether it's a spirit or our inner intuition, sometimes something tells us we have to go forward. And he went. The light began to rise, and he saw the Buddha walking in the distance, and his heart just opened. He fell at the Buddha's feet, so overcome he couldn't think what to say. Finally he just blurted out, "Did the Blessed One sleep well?"

What do you say to this person? And the Buddha, of course, gave him a beautiful verse in response: "Always indeed he sleeps well, the brahman who is fully quenched, who does not cling to sensual pleasures, cool at heart, without acquisitions. Having cut off all attachment, having removed care from the heart, the peaceful one indeed sleeps well, for he has realized peace of mind."

You see, it really doesn't matter what you say—you're going to receive something precious in return from the Buddha.

Then he taught Anathapindika, and this is an example of what the Gubboni was discussing: the gradual, step-by-step teaching. The Buddha spoke to him on the virtues of giving, on sila—virtue—on the perils of

attachment to sense pleasure, on the benefits of renunciation. And then, as is often said, when he saw that Anathapindika was ready in heart and mind—the mind was pliable, uplifted, serene, unobstructed—and he saw he was ready, then he gave him the teachings special to the noble ones: the Four Noble Truths. And Anathapindika understood: whatever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of cessation. He had understood the truth of the Dhamma. He had overcome doubts.

He was now self-dependent in the master's dispensation. He had realized the path and fruit of stream entry. That's how it's described.

You get that sense, and it takes us back to the giving, that the recollection, the bringing of the quality of generosity to our heart and mind, is one way in that actual moment of purifying the heart and mind, of its becoming unobstructed, uplifted, serene. Really very helpful—both the giving, the actual service, the generosity, the receiving, the metta, and even just recollecting, which I will come to in a moment.

From that moment, Anathapindika became the most generous supporter. He invited the Buddha and five hundred monks—it's always five hundred, just as Andy Alinsky says, that means "a lot." Whenever they say five hundred, it means a lot of monks, a lot of nuns. And then he said, "Let me offer you a monastery." He went back and searched and found this Jeta's Grove, bought it at a humongous price, and offered it. He became the biggest supporter.

But then—and this is again about the importance of motivation—his motivation was real faith, upliftedness of heart and love, with no self-involvement or self-return at all.

There's a story later that after he established the monastery, when the Buddha and monks would be living there, Anathapindika was always completely supporting them. He would send rice gruel in the morning. He would send them medicines and clothing and supplies in the evening. And every day, every day for the main meal, he would have several hundred monks come to his house. So his place was always filled, it says, with the saffron robes and the perfume of saintliness.

He lived in the realm of King Pasenadi, who was also a devotee of the Buddha. When King Pasenadi learned of Anathapindika's generosity, he wished to imitate him. So he also began to supply alms and food for five hundred monks every day. But one day, he learned from his servants that the monks would come and be offered the food, but then they would go into the village and hand the food that was offered from the king to their supporters, and then the supporters would give it back to them.

King Pasenadi said, "What's going on? Why is that happening? There's nothing wrong with the food. I'm supplying the best, most tastiest, most refined food you could have."

But the Buddha explained. He said that in the king's palace, his servants, his courtiers, distributed the food without any inner engagement. They were just doing it as a job, like cleaning out the stables. And some of them, in fact, even thought, "These monks, they're just parasites, and we're doing the work." He said, "Nobody can be comfortable accepting anything given in that spirit."

So the monks would take the food—not to do the harsh thing of refusing it, because that's not generous—but then they would give it to their devoted supporters, who would give it back with faith, with real generosity, and then they could accept it. So even the richest, most generous person—it's not about how much he gave. It was about the spirit, about the heart. That's really the practice of generosity.

Once I heard a talk from a Nepali monk, Upannika, who was teaching with Sayadaw U Pandita at IMS one year. He gave this lovely talk on generosity, and he offered about seven little points of practice—how you actually practice bringing awareness to times when you're offering, whether it's service or time or material goods.

The first is obvious: attention to the volition, attention to your motivation in giving, so that you really purify it before giving. "I should give this here"—really purifying it. The generous act of the bodhisattvas is: "With this act, may all beings be free from suffering." It can even get broader, but really tuning into that. And also, whatever you're giving, really be in the giving. That's the same thing—you're purifying the motivation, really abandoning the clinging to it. Really be happy that you're giving it. If it's your time, if it's money, whatever—be happy that you're giving.

And then U Pandita said—and this is what I've really learned from times in Burma—if it's at all possible, directly giving and receiving, face to face, in person. It brings such a more powerful sense to it. It increases the awareness of your interrelatedness.

He actually gave me a personal lesson in this. Sometimes I would be almost embarrassed to give someone a gift—either it's not good enough, or you don't want them to... you don't know what, just kind of embarrassed. I had bought him a gift when I was on retreat and had someone else give it to him. When I came out of retreat, he called me over and said, "No." He made me give it to him hand to hand so that he could really receive it wholeheartedly. And he said also, so that you're giving it with confidence, with real faith, with real generosity. It brings a real power of confidence into the act.

And again, as I described with the nuns, when you give something and they all stand there and chant for five minutes, you just get goosebumps. It's beautiful.

Give with the mind—this is obvious. When you're giving or talking or sharing, do it with the mind, with the heart focused on the giving. Just being mindful, being present. That's obvious. And as I said, there's a way in the formality of how it's done in Burma that really enhances this, that really helped me see: when you do it, you really are doing it with this real sense of the beauty and the power of the whole act—the giver and the receiver, the power of it for both. You don't just say, "Well, here's the money, see you later."

And it's taught. It's taught to the kids.

In one of the dānas that we did, we went down to some small villages in the upper delta. In one of these villages, we went to the small schoolhouse, because Sayadaw U Tejaniya apparently loves to give what he calls "candy dāna." He loves to buy candy bars and then give one out to each of these little kids. So he was

getting a total kick out of it.

The schoolhouse was this crummy little wood structure with nothing in it. There might have been sixty or seventy little kids, from tiny, tiny little ones to maybe eleven or twelve years old. There were three or four young women teachers. We went in, and the kids were all sitting in sort of an age order, sitting very carefully. We would line up—one of us would have a little sucker candy, another would have a little candy bar—and then we'd rotate so that everyone had a chance to give and receive.

The teachers would have each kid come up one at a time, and you could see this is really where they're learning it. Even the tiny little kids would come, and some would be all distracted, just wanting to grab it and run. The teachers would very gently correct them. Others came up so sincerely—they'd approach very solemnly, look at you, take the candy, and go away. But you could see how they were teaching it.

Another place we went that same day, the same kind of candy dāna, but it was offered just in the monastery, and all the village kids came running in. It wasn't under the auspices of the school or the teachers. And somehow the whole town felt a bit wilder. So it was the same thing—first we couldn't even get the kids to line up. Finally we got them to line up, but it was like this fever of greed over just a lousy little candy bar. They'd run to the back of the line and get in line again. There were so many of them, we couldn't tell. Some had these little rubber bands around their wrists, and my friend would say, "I've seen that rubber band before. He's been here before." We couldn't tell. Finally we had to make them all sit down and stay sitting down, and then go down the line. And you could see they hadn't really learned it. It was different—just kind of a mob scene.

This brings up another point: there needs to be clear comprehension of the giving in the broader context. Giving what doesn't hurt oneself or hurt another. What's really of value. What the giving and the receiving is in terms of fostering wholesomeness, not unwholesomeness.

At the end of this, we had a few little candies left, and somehow the structure broke down. And it wasn't the kids—it was the adults. One of my friends was standing there holding this little bag of hard candy, just nothing. And the adults, they started by kidding, but then it wasn't kidding, and it just felt like this frenzy of greed. It felt awful. It really felt awful to me. I felt like this isn't really right generosity, because what it's feeding is greed. And you could just see it didn't feel the same at all. No mettā. I mean, no big deal—it's just a sucker—but the difference between the two feelings was palpable.

And so the sense of formality and the sense of understanding, the clear comprehension from the Buddha again: how a person of integrity gives a gift. These are five qualities of a person of integrity's gifts. Which five? A person of integrity gives a gift with a sense of conviction. A person of integrity gives a gift attentively. A person of integrity gives a gift in season. A person of integrity gives a gift with an empathetic heart. A person of integrity gives a gift without adversely affecting himself or others.

A gift in season—just to tell you what that means. Five seasonable gifts: one gives to a newcomer; one

gives to one going away (which I've noticed—when you leave a monastery, everyone comes with little gifts); one gives to one who is ill; one gives in time of famine; and one sets the first fruits of field and orchard in front of those who are virtuous. These are the five seasonable gifts.

Lovely, isn't it?

And not adversely affecting oneself or others. There's another story from Anāthapiṇḍika, who was incredibly generous to the Buddha and the Sangha. Also, because he had so much faith, he was really virtuous and lived a very pure life.

And as I said, it really affected his whole family. It affected all the people he came in contact with. The whole sphere around someone who's generous starts to affect the people around—purity, happiness, love. It's contagious. And so it infected his family and his friends, and he was generous to all of them.

But he also had this sense of giving where it's appropriate, where it's useful, at the right time and not to the detriment of others. So there's one story of how, out of all his family, he had one nephew who inherited a huge fortune but squandered it all on drinking and gambling and womanizing. Then he came to Anathapindika and asked for a thousand gold pieces to start a business. Anathapindika gave it to him—and he squandered it all. Then he came back again a second time, asked for more, this time without a single condition. Anathapindika gave him five times as much—and he squandered it all again, completely squandered it all.

He came back a third time with no shame, begged for money. This time, Anathapindika gave him two pieces of clothing, but he squandered those too, sold them for everything. Then finally, the fourth time he came, Anathapindika told him to leave and gave him nothing. If he'd been just a beggar, he would never have left the house without anything. If he'd been just a hungry person—but the money wasn't for alms, just to squander.

And so his nephew just kept on that way. He wasn't willing to beg, and he died wretchedly outside the gates of the village. Of course, Anathapindika felt terrible. What should I have done? I should have been able to save him. He went to the Buddha, told him this whole story, and asked, "Should I have done differently?"

I think it's interesting. The Buddha said, "No, no. You couldn't have done anything different. That nephew belonged to the fortunately small number of insatiable people who are like bottomless vats. He perished because of his reckless behavior. You wouldn't have been able to save him."

I find that quite striking. It's just interesting how even someone as generous as Anathapindika and as powerful as the Buddha—generosity can't save everybody. There's that sense that at some point there's discernment in generosity. I just find that quite interesting.

So just to end, the last thing I want to say is about this contemplation, this way of using the contemplation,

the practice and the recollection of generosity to brighten, to uplift, to purify the mind, and then to support our discerning practice.

There are a couple of suttas that point to this. The Buddha said that if the heart is corrupted, then all actions, words, and thoughts get tainted also. At one point he's talking to nuns and then to Ananda, and he gives this example—I'll condense it—where if a person is abiding contemplating body as body, this is the four foundations of mindfulness: body as body, feelings as feelings, mental states as mental states, mind as mind—ardent, fully aware, mindful. So this is straight from the Satipatthana Sutta.

But as this is happening, it can occur with body or any of the four that an object arises, or a bodily distress that's unpleasant, or mental sluggishness, or some unpleasant experience that scatters the mind outward. Have you ever noticed that? Then the monk or the meditator should direct her mind to some—this is translated as "satisfactory image"—and I'll say what that means. It doesn't mean just, "Let's think about eating chocolate cake." It means something wholesome.

And from this directedness of mind to a satisfactory image, happiness is born. From the happiness, joy is born. With a joyful mind, the body relaxes. A relaxed body feels content. The mind of one content becomes collected. And then the meditator reflects, "The purpose for which I directed my mind to this satisfactory image has been accomplished. So now I will withdraw."

It's basically calling in a particular wholesome, uplifting contemplation to help collect and uplift and bring serenity to the mind when we're just lost—not that we just don't like what's happening, but that we're lost in what's happening. And then, no longer focusing on that, inwardly mindful of whatever arises, content. Not directing the mind outward, understanding, not focused on before or after, just present with what's arising right now: "I am mindful. I am content." That's undirected meditation—more like what we're calling choiceless awareness here.

So take that sense of some satisfactory image and put it together with this other sutta where the Buddha talks about six very helpful recollections: recollecting the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, your own sila or morality, your own generosity, or the devas. I'm just going to talk about generosity—just say what he says about it. It's this exact same thing of calling up the satisfactory image.

When you recollect your own generosity—and even the generosity of others will do the same thing—you think, "It's a great gain for me that among people overcome with the stain of possessiveness, I live at home." So this teaching is for lay people, not just monks and nuns. "I live at home, my awareness cleansed of the stain of possessiveness, freely generous, delighting in being generous, responsive to requests."

At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting generosity, her mind is not overcome with greed, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. Her mind heads straight, based on generosity. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the purpose, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful,

rapture arises. The body grows calm—the same progression. One experiences ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes collected.

So you get a sense how powerful this is. The recollection of your own generosity is not an ego trip. It's actually, in this moment, purifying the heart and mind, making it pliable, uplifting it, ready to open to the true Dharma.

The Buddha concludes by saying, "So you, Mahanama"—the layperson who asked him—"you can develop this recollection of generosity while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children." In other words, no excuse not to do it. And why would we want to not do it? It brings happiness. It opens us to the purity of the Dhamma.

I'll just end with a story. The man who would cook for us at these retreats in Chazwa worked so hard—getting up at two in the morning, cooking all day, traveling an hour into the market and back just to get special food for the Westerners on retreat. Not a spiritual guy; he was a cook for a big bakery in the city. But he was so filled with metta. And we'd say, "Don't work so hard, don't get up so early, take some rest." And he'd say, "No, everything we do is from dana intention, from metta intention—everything we do." And that gave him and the kitchen staff so much energy and so much love.

So it brings virya, it brings this open-hearted uplifting of mind, and it brings happiness to oneself and others. A great source of joy and goodness in this world.

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