Generosity

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:01:44

Last night Joseph mentioned at some point in his talk that all of the different teachings of the Buddha deal with transformation of the mind. And so what I want to talk about tonight is really that all the teachings do.

Here, of course, we're on an intensive meditation retreat. Most of what we talk about and look at is the aspect of the teaching of mindfulness meditation, of concentration, and really the cultivation of mind in that way, which is, of course, you could call it the apex or the highest fruit of the practice. But we also can get a little myopic at times, like we're looking so close. In the times when your meditation practice isn't working, it feels hopeless because there's no concentration or mindfulness and you're just spinning in negativity or self-doubt—if any of you have any sense of what I'm talking about. And we say "be mindful of it," and you think, "Thanks a lot. That really doesn't do much."

It helps to remember that meditation is not the only form of teaching the Buddha gave, and that all his teachings are in support of liberation of heart and mind. So tonight the particular teaching I want to talk about is generosity—the word dāna in Pali—because I feel like I've learned a lot about the joy, the reciprocity, the purifying quality of generosity, receiving and giving in heart and mind, in the last few years. I've learned a lot more about it experientially, a lot from traveling in Burma, but not just that. And I feel like maybe we don't talk about it enough.

As an active path for brightening the heart and mind, generosity actually cuts through clinging and ill will, and also cuts through that locked-in sense of me, separate from the world, that I need to protect and fear. An act of giving—of time, of energy, of caring, of physical things, it doesn't matter what—counteracts all of the kilesas in that way. It's a powerful practice. So I just want to talk a bit about it.

As probably most of you know, generosity was usually the first thing that the Buddha would talk about when he would meet somebody new who would come to him. Particularly with lay people, but also with monks and nuns, generosity was one of the first things he talked about, always.

This is from Bhikkhu Bodhi, who says: "Generosity serves as a basis and preparation which underlies and quietly supports the entire path of freeing the mind from the defilements." The Buddha really taught it that way, as a practice of freeing our hearts and minds from defilements, but it also has the power of supporting and underlying the whole path of awakening.

The Buddha chose to live as a monastic, as a renunciate. And so he had an order of monks and later an order of nuns. But the way he set it up—he was making it up, right? He was making up the order. He was

making up the rules. He could do whatever he wanted. He could teach in whatever way he wanted. And the way he chose to set up the order of monks and nuns was in a way that was completely through generosity and reciprocity, what he called mutuality, that was daily intertwined with the life of lay men and women. He set it up in such a way that monks and nuns couldn't have food or money, that they're completely dependent on lay people.

Here's how the Buddha expressed it: "Monks, nuns, Brahmins and householders are very helpful to you. They provide you with the requisites of robes, alms, food, lodgings, and medicines in times of sickness. And you monks are very helpful to Brahmins and householders, for you teach them the Dhamma that is good in the beginning, the middle, and the end. Thus, this spiritual life is lived with mutual support between ordained and lay people for the purpose of crossing the flood and making a complete end of suffering."

Basically, he set up the way the Sangha works so that monks and nuns are completely dependent every day on the generosity of lay people. Even now, in Theravada Buddhist countries, every morning the monks—and in some places the nuns—line up early in the dawn time and go out every day for alms round. They have a big bowl and lay people come and put in food, whoever wants to. They can't keep food overnight, so that's the food they have for the day. This is a huge living activity in all the countries I've been in, mostly Burma and Thailand. It's a way that there's always contact. The monks and nuns couldn't completely withdraw from connection with lay people and feel themselves superior or better. They're completely intertwined by generosity.

And the lay people, even now, come to the monasteries, to the nunneries, for teachings, for festivals, once a week to practice, to take the precepts, to hear dhamma talks, for their inspiration—like we try to do with a sitting group or a retreat. But this is a monastery or a wat in Thailand, sort of like a church, that there's one in every village, and it's the center of the spiritual life of the village.

In Burma, during the cyclone last year, in many places it was the monasteries where the monks would really be the ones who could safely go out and try to clean up the damage and have food, and the villagers would come to the monasteries because they felt safer there. So that's a real living reciprocity set up on generosity, set up on mutuality. It cuts through the sense of separation.

I always knew it was set up that way, and it seemed nice. And of course, the idea that to be generous is a good thing isn't really a far stretch—pretty much all spiritual paths have that. But what was kind of experiential for me was as if it were a secret teaching, because I never really experienced it so directly until I started spending time in Thailand, quite a while ago now. And then in the last eight years, I've been at least a month or so every year in Burma, where the spirit of generosity and friendliness—metta and dana—just permeates the culture. Not only the monks and nuns, but the regular people as well. It permeates everything, so you pick it up.

And what was kind of secret, what I didn't realize, was how incredibly joyful it makes one. How much

lightness and spaciousness and brightness and joy this sense of generosity brings—whether you're receiving or giving. It's like a circle, a mutuality that goes both ways. How much joy it brings to the heart! It really energizes one, uplifts one.

At first, in my Western way, if someone would be generous to me, I'd think, well, then one should give something back—kind of like quid pro quo. That's the way we do it, and it's still generous. But in terms of the Buddha's teaching, of course, this like everything isn't about outward appearance or the object given or how much or anything like that. It's all about the quality of heart and mind.

And so the conscious practice of generosity—giving, receiving, being really present with the receiving as well as the giving—has a quality of transforming the habits of our heart and mind. It has a power. Sure, nothing's permanent, but really a power to, when we're in a generous moment, we're not experiencing ill will or greed. We're much less feeling a sense of me, self, others, because there's that connectedness that's really quite palpable.

And so this was kind of—I could say it was the secret that seeps in, and all of a sudden you realize, wow, generosity is such a happy aspect of life, and one that, looking at it from the internal way, we can really consciously cultivate, call on, and recollect in our life, in our practice. Not just kind of work, work, work, mindful, mindful, mindful. Do generous acts and then think, well, if I think about it, that's just being egotistical. Play it down. It's very different there.

So let me give you some examples, partly to give you a sense of this, but also for me—just when I think about some of the little acts of generosity or qualities that I've met in people, I get really happy. And it's interesting to see. Some people have been talking in the interviews about how to change the channel in the mind when we feel that we're drowning in negativity or stuck on some particular personal or life issue. Not that you can just say, oh boom, it's gone. But we can actively sometimes change the channel. Metta is that. Sometimes it doesn't work. But actively speaking or sharing in some way—your time, your energy with someone else—in a very conscious way of being generous can also do that. Even just reflecting, recollecting your own generosity or the generosity of others also has the power to brighten, enlighten the mind and heart.

So really, everything I'm saying tonight, I'm just trying to offer as another aspect of widening and broadening our path, our practice of awakening.

So just a couple of stories to give you a sense of this. This winter I was staying at a small meditation center, and in the area where it's located, about a half an hour outside of Yangon, within like a ten-minute walk, there's at least fifteen or twenty very small nunneries. Very small means there could be like two nuns up to three or four adult women nuns, and often with eight or ten or in some places even up to forty really small little girl nuns.

When you see these little nuns, they're all in pink—Burmese nuns wear this lovely pink color. Their heads

are shaved. People who see these little girl nuns, that's it. It's all over. They're just so cute. You can't stand it. The first time you see one, you think, oh, she's so cute. And then you find out they're everywhere.

So anyway, these nunneries—all of the ones in this area are very poor, very poor. So I just want to tell you about one particular one we visited. We were going around looking, just meeting different women, different nunneries, and seeing ones that we could offer some little support to. So this one we went to—we were really drawn because it was two sisters.

One was 42, one was 37. And they had eight or ten young nuns—small girls who were either orphans, or had only one parent, or whose parents were so poor they couldn't support them and the children had ended up on the street. So these little girls ranged from about six years old, maybe this high, up to fourteen.

They were living in a little—I can't even describe it—one of these shaggy places made out of bamboo. It was smaller than just this space up here, maybe half as wide, going back there, with a little kitchen outside, a little brazier outside, made of plaited bamboo. And ten or twelve of them were living in this.

We walked in, and there was just such a feeling of metta and lightness in this place. We walked in, and on this little crummy floor, there's a tiny bookcase with Pali books and Burmese study books. There's a big blackboard, and on it, in Burmese script—but we asked what it said—they're teaching the little girls Pali, which is the language the Theravada sutras are written in. They're teaching them Abhidhamma. They're teaching them Burmese in this little crummy place.

They get up at four. They pray, which means meditate and chant for a while. They all have breakfast together. And then the two sisters start teaching these little girls until they all get together, have their showers, have lunch. Then the oldest sister, who really wants to study, goes away for the afternoon. She manages to scrape together enough money to take a bus into Yangon so she can study more. Meanwhile, the other sister teaches these little girls all afternoon, and then the oldest comes home. This is their life, except for two days a week when all the nuns have to go out—they don't go out every morning for alms round because they wouldn't get food the way the monks do.

So what a lot of the nuns do is twice a week, every week, at like five in the morning, they all get on a bus and go to some designated part of the city of Yangon. It seemed like all the nuns in the area had their own space, so they don't all go to the same place. And all day, from five a.m. until night, they walk around with their little bowls, and they get raw rice and a little bit of cha, a little bit of money. When they come home, if they have money, they can buy the other food. Sometimes they get too much rice and then they sell it to the rice stall guy down the road and get money for their other food.

So this is their life. And we were talking to these two sisters who, as I said, were filled with life. They were so strong about how important it is to help bring up these young girls because life without parents, life without an education—it's so hard here. They could end up servants on the street. It's so important that

they have a chance to better themselves. They were so filled with care for them. They said, "When someone gives us a set of robes, we think, wonderful, because now we can make fifteen little blouses out of these robes for these little girls. That's the way we think."

We assumed this was because many women become nuns and have the idea to start schools—we figured that's what they wanted to do, that was their plan. But no, not at all. They were acting from total generosity.

These two sisters had only become nuns in their early twenties. One, because she was so sick—she was almost dying for two years. She couldn't even move. She said if her hand was down on the ground, she couldn't raise it to her chest. If her hand was on her chest, she couldn't lower it. Her parents had been a little bit well off, but they had lost their money. She heard them talking about how they were going to have to sell their house to take care of her. And she thought, no, I can't have them do that. I'll become a nun.

She told her parents, who immediately said, "No way, you can't be a nun." Even though they were going to have to sell their house to take care of her. So she struggled and fought, and they said, "Okay, if your other sister comes with you."

So we asked the other sister, "How did you feel about that?"

She said, "Oh, I always wanted to be a nun, but they wouldn't let me."

So it was a big struggle with the family, but they were allowed to become nuns. This is one of these wild Burmese stories.

Two days after they ordained, the sister who had been so sick could get up and walk. She could start talking—she hadn't been able to talk before. She said she's a little weak again now, but it's been fifteen years. That kind of magical occurrence happens a lot there.

Anyway, they came to Yangon and studied. Just two years ago, they didn't have these little girls yet, and they were really deciding what they wanted to do. What they wanted was to go to a meditation center where they'd been studying—to really dedicate themselves to meditation, to practice, to become liberated.

But just at that time, the Sayadaw in their home village, way down in the delta, died. I didn't quite understand what happened, but somehow he died, and he'd been taking care of all these little girls. So just before he dies, he sends them up to the two sisters. "Okay, now you have to take care of these girls." This was never anything they wanted to do or had thought about.

And what did they do? They just immediately made a 180-degree about-face: "Oh, okay." With the help of their family, they got this little piece of land. By themselves, with the help of their brother, they built this house. And now they're completely dedicating themselves—as I described their life—to raising these girls and helping them have a better life. With not a trace of "I have to do this," but rather love and affection. You could see it in the way they related to the little girls and the way they related to each other. There was

just a real buoyancy and mettā in that place.

That's not an uncommon story. That's a kind of normal story, especially with the nuns—that's why I like visiting them. This incredible generosity of spirit and heart, together with this real mettā, this real kindness, without the kind of resistance of "okay, I'm stuck with these little girls." They just change the mind.

And it's not blind either. She said, "In ten years, once they really learn, if they want to disrobe and go live a life, great. They'll have good values. They'll know how to live a good life. That's wonderful. We're not trying to make them nuns for life. But if some of them stay nuns and they can teach, that's even better, because then we can finally go up and meditate." So they didn't forget that, you know.

But there's just this quality of not just me, but us. And the "us" suddenly changed from the two to the ten, and their activities changed accordingly. So that's just one example. And as I said, just being there—we're getting this through translators—you just come away feeling so happy. It's very contagious in that way.

And it's not just, as I say, a kind of mutuality. It's not just with the nuns or with the monks. It's really there in the culture—the sense of the joy of receiving. There's no shame in being on the receiving end of generosity. If you give something to nuns or to lay people who are hungry, the receiving is done with a real dignity, with a real face-to-face presence, just as the giving is done. It's always a little ceremony, and pictures are taken, and it's a joyful time. There's no sense of "this poor homeless person needs something"—it doesn't have any of that.

At the same time, in this little meditation center where we were staying, the village around had been affected by the cyclone of a year ago. The people were still quite affected; there was quite some hunger. So the Sayadaw, the head of the monastery—we had brought in a lot of money that people all over the world had donated—one of the things he did was organize what's called a rice dāna, offering rice to each of the households in the village, which was about 1,200 households.

And they know exactly. It's all extremely orderly. Each household gets a little chit, and on the day of the offering, they pile up the rice. Each person comes with their chit, and then you hand them the bag of rice. The women all put it on their head, these giant bags, and go walking off. Again, they're dressed up and it's lovely doing it. But it's fast—it's not a leisurely thing. You're handing out this heavy rice, they take it and go. It really moves.

Anyway, my point is that these were all the villagers from that village, and this is where the monks in that meditation center go for their alms round every morning—just this immediate village. The next morning, there was one Mexican monk among the mostly Burmese monks, and he was kind of talking to us. He told us that when they went out for the alms round, having been there several months, you kind of always go on the same route. You get to know the route, and more or less the same families, more or less the same people come out and offer the rice or the food. It's always done with this great dignity. People stand and

wait for the monks. They step out of their shoes. They kind of bow and give. There's something about it in the early morning—it's really beautiful.

But what this monk told us is that the next morning, after the rice dana, when they went out, there were families and people giving rice who had never been out there before. It's because now they had rice to give. It's so touching to me. The first thing they did on receiving rice was turn around and offer it back again—not all of it, but some of it. There's just this sense of the movement, the joy. It was so touching to hear. This monk who received it was really deeply touched, uplifted in his heart. And then you want to be more generous, and it's like a flow. But also there's a sense of the happiness of the people who then can offer something. It's a real living thing, and the longer I spend just watching it—not even being part of it—it starts to affect our hearts and minds.

Joseph said last night that violence can be contagious. But all of the moods are contagious. The wholesome, the beautiful states are really contagious, super contagious, like an infection—because it's touching that place of truth, that place of beauty in us. That's why it's so touching.

As I said, it's just in the culture. Later, we took food down on some boats into the delta to even poorer villages. It was a whole organizational thing—Sayadaw organized all of this, which was really quite a lot. He's a wonderful guy, very kind and caring. Anyway, we were doing the same thing, just offering some food. But it was all organized through the monasteries in these villages, so the villagers knew that the Sayadaw was coming with food. When we got there, the villagers had all brought things to offer back to the Sayadaw, to take back to his monastery—beautiful plants that they had grown, or fruit that they had. It was this really joyful thing where they all took their offerings in a big procession down to the boats, whatever they had that they could offer back. There's this sense of giving and receiving and joy all around. It's a very alive thing.

And it's so central to the culture that—what was it, a year and a half, two years ago? I don't know if you remember when there were big demonstrations again in Burma, and again it was shut down, of course. But one of the things the monks did was refuse to accept offerings from the military, from the big generals. The generals would come to the monastery and want to offer, and they would do it for show. They would come with cameras so there could be pictures in the newspaper of the generals offering to monks, which was a way of trying to keep their spiritual legitimacy. If the generals came to offer, or even on alms round, what the monks would do was simply turn their bowl upside down. That's all—but it's a huge insult. Huge. And if it wasn't a really well-known or protected monk, they were arrested and thrown in jail for that. Simply for refusing to accept generosity.

And what they're refusing recognizes what's really the truth about the way the Buddha taught generosity: the heart of it is in the intention, in the purity of intention, in the faith, in the kindness, in the connectedness. And so when someone's coming and offering not from that place, they don't really want to receive because it isn't really what generosity means in that circumstance.

So, as I said, it's so intrinsic that even the little kids... I was walking one day just between these two meditation centers. It's like a ten-minute walk on the road, just before dark. All the kids are out of school. It's a very poor little village there, so all the kids are just kind of running around wild. And I was just minding my own business, walking back. Suddenly a little boy—and he was still in his cute little school uniform, his little green shorts and his shirt, he looked kind of neat compared to the others—he came up to me very solemnly with this tiny little white jasmine flower. With great dignity and attention, he came up to me and bowed and handed me this jasmine flower. It just made me cry, you know, it's just so lovely. And I just bowed and thanked him in Burmese, one of the like three words I know. And that was it. That was all. You don't need to make a big deal about it. But just that sense of how that's in the culture and the connection it brings and the happiness, the upliftedness it brings—it brightens my mind and heart now, just to think about that little action.

So generosity has really far-reaching effects, whether we're giving, whether we're receiving. It doesn't stop with that little action.

I was trying to think of an example of this, and I remembered the book—if you've read it, it's been on the bestseller list in the States for years—called *Three Cups of Tea*, by an American man, Greg Mortensen. He was a mountain climber, climbing K2 in the Pakistani part of the Himalayas. Coming down, he somehow got separated from his friends and lost. He wasn't like, you know, out there dying—he was lost and in trouble—and he kind of stumbled into a Pakistani village. It's actually up in that part now, the northwest, that's having so much suffering and so much pain from the fighting.

Anyway, a family and the village head took him in. They were just kind to him, cared for him, gave him tea. The three cups of tea refers to a saying there: if you have three cups of tea with someone, then you're friends for life. He was so moved by that. I mean, he's an unusual guy, okay, it sounds like from this book. He swore that he would come back and help them build a school, and he went home.

His whole life has become about raising the money. He went back to build this. It took him forever to raise the money. He worked as a nurse in an emergency room. At one point—this is why he's unusual—he lived in his car so he could save the money it would cost to have an apartment, in order to go back and help build a school. I think he spent a year, he got the money, he went back, and got there, his way out. And they said, "Well, actually, before the school, what we really need is a bridge to go across this river here, because otherwise we can't even get the materials." He goes, "Oh, okay, then we'll build a bridge." And he didn't know what he was doing. Anyway, it just mushroomed and mushroomed, until now he has this huge foundation and he's building schools all over, and he goes back every year. From just a simple act of hospitality and kindness, it just keeps cycling. So we don't know.

A friend was talking to me a couple of years ago. She had been in—I guess it was Burma again—for a retreat for a couple of months. And she was talking to me about her experience coming back. She said how she didn't really notice at first. I mean, she noticed that people are really kind—the people who run the

guest house where she was staying just go out of their way to do little things for you. She's an acupuncturist. She met some acupuncturists, and they were so kind in taking her all over Mandalay and took her to see really big Sayadaws to work on them, and dinner. It just goes on and on. It's just like that. And she said at first, you know, she was appreciating it, but she didn't really notice what an uplifting effect it was having on her heart, on her mind.

But after a month or two—and it was the same for me the first time I went—I started to notice that I was not always happy, but happier. When difficult things happened, I would feel like I had some support, some sustenance, some pliability of heart and mind, some resiliency. I could actually notice the metta around me, the generous field around me, and you can call on that to give you the wherewithal to be with difficulty. So it's not like you're just happy, happy all the time. I don't mean that. But it's a real strengthening and uplifting.

She really noticed it. And when she came home—and I keep experiencing this too—we come back to the States and people are really generous. People are really generous in the States, and I assume here too. I'm not saying we're not. But she said it's not the same for her, and I've noticed this too. That kind of natural, spontaneous extending of ourselves to others isn't quite so free-flowing. Back in the States, it's almost like there's a little hesitation—you don't want to intrude on somebody's space, you don't want to seem like you're offering something that they could be offended by, or whatever other reasons we have. It's just not so naturally free-flowing. A little more closed in. We're generous, but we get all these letters in the mail and we write a check, or we do this, or once a week we go to the soup kitchen—which is all great, I'm not saying it's not. But there's just some immediacy of face-to-face connection, some natural free-flowing spontaneity that isn't quite as completely embedded in the culture. She just started to notice the difference.

In terms of how the Buddha talked about generosity, I want to give some examples, some stories about a man who lived during the Buddha's time and was seen as the most generous supporter of the Buddha: Anathapindika. Stories about him show up all through the suttas. I'm taking particular ones that highlight the teachings, the quality of the practice of generosity as a freeing practice, as a supportive practice for our path of liberation. What these stories really highlight is the importance of the inner motivation, not at all what's given.

Anathapindika is seen as the most generous, and he did happen to be rich, so in that way you could say he was the most generous because he had the most to give. But really, he was the most generous in terms of the motivation, the generosity of his heart, which arose not out of a should, but out of faith and joy and wisdom in the teachings.

If you've read the suttas at all, you probably know how many start out with, "Thus have I heard"—that's Ananda talking when it starts like that—"On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Savatthi, in the Jeta Grove, Anathapindika's monastery." It really shows up a lot in the suttas. The Jeta Grove was this

beautiful grove monastery that Anathapindika bought and donated to the Buddha and his whole Sangha. They spent nineteen out of forty-five rains retreats there. A rains retreat is like three months a year in the rainy season when the monks and nuns weren't wandering. They moved from place to place, but three months of the year in the rainy season they would stay in one place. Mostly they'd do their meditation and live a more secluded life, but also so as not to harm the crops that were growing. So again, the mutuality—not wandering around through the fields and harming the crops.

Just a little bit about how his faith arose before he started being generous. For me, it just speaks to how the beginning of generosity isn't a should or a wanting or what would be nice, but the deep inner movement of connectedness, of faith, and of real wisdom in the path of awakening.

Before he'd ever met the Buddha, Anathapindika came to his brother-in-law's house to visit. Usually they were so happy to see him, but this time something was going on and they were just, "Oh, hi, hi," and everyone was busy. He said, "What's happening?" His brother-in-law said, "We're inviting the Enlightened One, the Blessed One, for a meal." When he heard that—"Enlightened One"—it just shot a bolt of lightning through him. He said, "Who? The Buddha? I've got to go see him." His brother-in-law said, "Well, tonight's not appropriate. You can go in the morning."

He was so excited he couldn't sleep. He kept waking up—you know that feeling—"Now is it morning? Now is it time to go?" Finally he couldn't wait, and he just went out in the dark and was walking way far to find the Buddha. But he got so scared.

He got so nervous, just completely overwhelmed. And he got so scared that he thought, "I better go back. I better go back."

And as often happens, an invisible spirit urged him on. We can see that as an invisible spirit, or we can see it as our own inner intuition: "Better for you to go forward. Keep going forward." So he kept going.

And then, just in the dawn, he sees this serene person doing walking meditation in the distance. Of course, we know who that is. He sees this person, but he's afraid—too shy. But the Buddha sees him and calls him by name: "Sudatta"—which no one called him; only his family knew that name—"please come."

So he knew he was in the presence of the Buddha, but he was so nervous. You know how it is when you meet someone you really want to meet and you're so nervous you just can't think of what to say? So he threw himself at the Buddha's feet and said, "Did you sleep well last night?" He felt like an idiot after that. But the Buddha doesn't care.

So, of course, the Buddha gave him a whole teaching. This appears often: "The Blessed One gave Anāthapiṇḍika a step-by-step teaching." And this shows up in many other suttas, and I'm bringing it in because it relates to generosity.

When the Buddha meets someone who hasn't really seen the Dhamma, isn't really quite in tune with the

teaching at all, he gives instruction step by step to bring the heart, the mind into readiness—into a state of openness to hear, to understand the depth of Dhamma. You can't just blast everybody.

And he starts by giving talks on generosity. So he begins by talking about the virtues of generosity, and then the power of virtue, of non-harming behavior. And from there he goes to the perils of vanity and getting lost in sense pleasure. He talks about the benefits of renunciation. And then—I love this line—"when he saw that Anāthapiṇḍika was ready in heart and mind, pliable, unobstructed, uplifted, and serene."

That's really what happens when we're transforming consciousness, working with generosity, working with virtue, working with renunciation. It has the power to affect this transformation in our heart, in our mind. Even momentarily, our minds become uplifted, unobstructed, not clouded by hindrances, serene. That's really important.

And then the Buddha gives him a teaching on the Four Noble Truths, because now the heart-mind is open to take it in. It's just very practical.

And at that point, "the dust-free, stainless eye of truth opened for Anāthapiṇḍika. Whatever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of passing away." He had understood the truth of the Dhamma, overcome doubts, and was without wavering. He was now self-dependent in the dispensation. He had realized the path and fruit of stream entry.

That's, in the Theravāda, the first level of awakening. And I love that sense of "self-dependent." It doesn't mean one is completely, totally, forever free of greed, hatred, and delusion. But there's that sense that you can rely on your faith, your understanding. Yes, we get lost again and again and again. But you can rely on the trust and faith to find the way again, to call on the tools you need.

So at that point, when his faith and his wisdom were really alive, that's when the generosity came forth. From that moment, he invited the Buddha to eat, and the saṅgha to eat. And later he paid a mint for Jeta Grove because the prince didn't want to sell it—just many stories of his generosity.

But the point I wanted to make is that it begins with that upliftedness, that joy, that real love of the truth. It isn't personal to the Buddha. He's supporting the possibility for this truth of Dhamma to keep on being shared. That's really very important.

And there's actually another story right after this about Anāthapiṇḍika that highlights again the importance of motivation—that it's not about the object, or the time, or what's given, how much or how little. It's all in the motivation. That's what liberates our heart and mind. That's what uplifts consciousness.

So after a time, the king of this area, who was a follower of the Buddha, quite devout—King Pasenadi—he heard how generous Anāthapiṇḍika was.

Anathapindika would have five hundred monks and nuns come every day and offer them food, and

everyone felt so filled with light and serene in his house. So Pasenadi said, "Yes, I want to do that too." He decided to offer a wonderful, delicious meal to five hundred monks every day.

But after some time, he learned from his servants that after the monks were offered the food, they would take it with them and go to their supporters in the city. The monks would give the food to their supporters, and then the supporters would offer it back to the monks.

So King Pasenadi asked, "What's up with that? I'm giving you really good food—what's going on?" He brought this question to the Buddha.

The Buddha explained to the king that in the palace, the courtiers and servants distributing the food did it without any inner feeling at all. It was just their job—give out the food. They could have been following orders as if they were cleaning out a barn or taking a thief to court. Those were the Buddha's examples. They lacked faith and had no love in the doing of it.

And so when anything is given in that spirit—this is from the Buddha—no one would feel comfortable accepting it, even when the meal was made of the most delicious food. So the monks would take it to their supporters, and their supporters would offer it back with a purity of inner intentions. That's the act of generosity. Even though the supporters didn't originally give them the food, it was that purity that makes the receiving and the giving really alive.

There's another statement from the Buddha that emphasizes this same point: "Even if a person throws the rinsings of a bowl or a cup into a village pool or a pond, thinking while they do it, 'May whatever animals live here feed on this'—that would be a great source of generosity and merit."

We can all do that, right? Pour out our water and say, "May these animals, may these plants live." The mind is being purified in that moment. The heart is being uplifted. Throughout the pouring of water: "May all beings have fresh water." That's all it takes. Over and over and over. You can see how it really changes the way we relate to life and each other, how we recognize that we really are connected in that place. We're not just about "me." It really does bring in an openness of beauty that is very, very powerful.

I wanted to offer something from a talk I heard from Bhante Jnana Panika, who came many years ago to IMS with Sayadaw U Pandita. He was a Nepalese monk, and he gave this talk on generosity that I loved. He offered six points—just six points for the actual practice of giving. I found them lovely, and I want to share them here.

The first: when you're actually giving something—and it could be a book, it could be just your time to listen to a friend, it could be anything, it could be pouring the water on the plants, whatever it is—the first thing is to give attention to the volition with mindfulness. This is all acts of mindful presence with ourselves. You consciously get in touch with a pure volition. So, for example, when pouring water, we can just do it automatically, or we can take a second and reflect, "May I really offer this." That's all. Give attention to the volition. With this act, may all beings be free from suffering. That's a practice. As we wash

our hands: may all beings have clean hands. With this act, may all beings be free from suffering. Just try dropping it in over and over and over. See the effect it has on how we feel, how we relate to the world.

The second point: whatever one is giving, take a moment to see if there's any clinging to it, and see if you can just abandon that clinging. If there's a hesitation—should I give this or not?—just take a moment and feel the clinging, not with aversion. Notice the clinging, and sometimes we really can abandon it so the gift is given wholeheartedly. Sometimes not. There are no shoulds.

But just taking that little moment to see, to abandon the clinging.

This third one is interesting—not always possible, but I think it's part of what makes dāna so alive in Burma and Thailand. When it's possible, when it's appropriate, to have the giving and the receiving be direct, face to face. That's really powerful because it increases so much the awareness of the interconnectedness, of the joy, of the love, the mettā that's moving back and forth.

Sayadaw U Pandita made me do that one time. We were on this retreat, and I'd heard him say he wanted a book—kind of a simple book in English, he was learning English—about Jesus, about Christianity. He wanted to learn. So I was sitting, but it was at IMS, so I had a lot of friends, and I had a friend buy the book and give it to him. And also, I have to say, I was a little shy. I sometimes see myself being shy about giving a gift—it's not good enough, or whatever. So I was hiding a little bit. I was on retreat, I mean, I couldn't do it, but I was also hiding a little bit.

And he could really tell what was going on, a lot. When I came out of the retreat and I was just kind of paying my respects to him, he said, "This book—you take this book, you hand it to me." He said, "It's a wonderful book. Face to face."

So he made me really hand it to him. And then it was like a real teaching, because he took it, we were both holding it, and he was really present. And it's really what they do in Burma and Thailand when you offer dāna or receive—really there. Not like, "Oh, you're so wonderful," but accepting it one hundred percent and saying, "May this gift be a cause for your awakening, for your enlightenment."

Can you imagine giving—and this happens a lot—you give somebody a little thing and they say, "May this be a cause for your... may you realize Nibbāna in the shortest possible time." That's what they say in Burma. Can you imagine being somewhere, you give somebody a Coke, and they say, "May you realize Nibbāna in the shortest possible time"? It's another culture, but it's nice, you know—you want to give them a Coke again.

Again, that nunnery I mentioned to you, that was so kind—the one I was telling the story about. It was another example of the giving face to face. Our friend Jack Kornfield was leading a group this winter. He brought about fifteen people to Burma, kind of on a tour, but they'd all donated a lot of money to a foundation that Jack's on the board of—a project foundation for the people of Burma. So it was really a way to raise money. He actually raised like three hundred thousand dollars; these people had donated to

build houses for people who'd been in the cyclone and such. So he was taking them around, and he came to where we were in the monastery. It was their first day, and he knew I was there. He'd call me up and say, "Carol, so can we go see some nuns? Just something—go see some nuns." He wanted to go see this other teacher who wouldn't let him come. So we went to see these nuns, and Ariyañāṇī and Vīrañāṇī, my two Western nun friends, and I thought this was the best place to take them. Of all of them, it's really little, it's really poor, and there's this great mettā feeling.

So we took them there, and we told them, warned them. This group of like fifteen people crowded in. First of all, these big old Westerners crowded into this little room I told you about, and actually started cracking the bamboo floor. I mean, it was a scene. So we're all crouched there, and the little nuns are kind of standing up because there's no room to sit. And they're just talking and telling their story, this and that. That's all.

And then at the end, kind of talking to the head of the group, they wanted to donate some money. They went out, and Jack had said to me, "Oh, we'll give you some money to give to them." I said, "No, no—you give the money to them. That's the whole thing." He said, "Okay, okay."

So they went out, got the money, came in, and offered it, which you do—you just hand it over in an envelope. And they do what they do, and we knew this would blow them away. All the nuns, including the little ones, are standing there, and they chant a mettā chant for like five or ten minutes. These little six-year-olds, they know it, and they're putting their heart into it. And by the end of it, these guys were just... they were gone. They were crying. "Let's give more money!" "No, no, no—that was already a lot. You'll see many, many more people."

You don't need to give more money.

And they came out, and I'm not exaggerating. I saw Jack two months later, and that was the first thing he said: "You knew it was going to be like that, didn't you?" It was just wonderful. They were like floating. It's hard to explain. It's just some little bit of chanting. But it's that face-to-face encounter and the reciprocity—you leave having given, feeling like, who gave? Who received? You received so much more than you gave in terms of the beautiful qualities of heart.

So that's the third recommendation: get face-to-face.

The fourth: when you're giving, and this is obvious, give with your attention, with your mind focused on the giving. Really do it wholeheartedly. This is something I've often noticed in myself—"Oh yeah, yeah, you can have this." But instead, it's really about not making it offhanded, but truly feeling, "Oh yes, I would like to offer this to you." That lets in the moving out of the sense of self. It lets in the absence of ill will, the absence of delusion, the absence of offhandedness. There's that real heart-to-heart generosity. Just mindfulness as you do it.

After giving—this is the fifth one—continue to be mindful of your motivation, your volition. Because you

know how sometimes you give and then think, "Oh, I wish I didn't do that." Or you say, "Oh sure, I'll be glad to spend some time with you," and then you go home thinking, "I've got so many other things to do." So continue to be mindful, because it might change. And if it changes, you can again get back to that place of generosity.

The sixth, and this is again important, is the aspect of clear comprehension with all of our mindfulness—to be aware of the broader context. So that when we give, we give in a way that doesn't harm ourselves or harm others. We give in a way that's appropriate. This is an aspect of wisdom.

And there's another quotation from the Buddha about this: "How a person of integrity gives a gift. Five ways a person of integrity gives. 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"—meaning at the appropriate time. "A person of integrity gives a gift with an empathetic heart. A person of integrity gives a gift without adversely affecting himself or others."

So there's that aspect of wisdom, very similar to compassionate action—we can't always know all the effects, but there are times we think we want to help, yet it could cause more trouble. The same with giving.

And there's a story, again from Anathapindika, that I really relate to, as it could happen today. Do you give a junkie money, if you know they're going to buy more drugs? I'm not saying we know what the answer is, but there are real ethical questions about what to give.

So Anathapindika, remember, was incredibly rich, and his kindness spread out to his whole family, his whole household, his servants. His family members were all serene and generous, and it spread to his friends—not by teaching, just by being who he was. The generosity and the happiness were contagious.

That said, he had a nephew who inherited a huge fortune but lived a wild life—drinking and gambling, squandering his wealth on entertainers, women, and needy friends. When he spent through his whole inheritance, he asked Anathapindika, his uncle, for money.

His uncle said okay. He gave him a thousand gold pieces, but said, "Use this to start a business. Use it to get yourself going again."

But he didn't. He just squandered it. Then he came back to his uncle again and asked for money. This time, Anathapindika gave him five times as much—five thousand—but said, "This is a severance. This is it. Make something of yourself. No more."

He squandered that and came back again. And this time Anathapindika said he would give him clothing, but nothing else.

Even that he squandered. And the next time he came back, Anathapindika said, "No, I'm sorry, I'm not going to give you anything."

It ended up that he didn't want to be a beggar, and he died wretchedly. His body was found outside the city wall and thrown into the refuse pile. That's pretty wretched. And of course Anathapindika felt terrible and went to the Buddha and said, "What could I have done?"

We have these kinds of situations sometimes in our families, with our friends, with people we know. And you try, you try, you try. So even with the Buddha, even with Anathapindika, there was a point where the giving was adversely affecting them. It wasn't real generosity.

And the Buddha said—so we don't ever know. He could see everybody's lifetimes and history. We don't know that. But he said that Anathapindika really couldn't have done anything. It would have just gone on and on like that. His nephew belonged to the fortunately small number of insatiable people who are like bottomless vats.

I just think that's interesting. Not that we can't all change, but that some of us can just get so inured. So that's the sixth kind of giving: giving aware of the broader context in a way that doesn't adversely affect oneself or another.

The last thing I want to say about the teaching of generosity as part of our path of awakening is this: just as I explained how the Buddha used it as a graduated teaching, when you see your heart and mind is closed, or dull, or dark, when you're caught in clinging or craving, and you listen to the Four Noble Truths, or you think about some teachings that have been so wonderful, and it's just like—you can't get there—call on generosity. Call on virtue, non-harming behavior, which I didn't talk about, but which has the same kind of qualities.

Sometimes in the actions—even the small actions of throwing in water, offering something to a friend, clarifying your motivation, really paying attention—so, actions. But this is something I think we really don't think of or use enough in the West: not only the actions, but the contemplation of our past actions is a very powerful source of brightening and freeing the heart and mind.

The Buddha talked about this. He spoke of six wise reflections. In another place he says that when you're meditating and your mind gets really caught, pulled inside, spinning in something, then consciously call up a wise reflection, a beautiful reflection. Change the channel. Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha—those three reflections, which are powerful for people in countries where that arouses a lot of faith. That may or may not be true for us.

But the fourth reflection is to recollect your own virtues, your wholesome, non-harming, kind behavior. The fifth one is where you recollect your own generosity. You consciously remember times that you have been generous and really reflect, let it in, on what a wonderful thing it is for your clarity of mind, awakening of heart, that you have done these generous acts.

We don't tend to do that, right? We sit and think, "Oh, that's really an egotistical thing, to run over all your generous acts." But this is what the Buddha said:

At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting generosity, her mind is not overcome with greed at that moment. It's not overcome with aversion. It's not overcome with delusion.

This is exact pointing to the moment-to-moment transformation of mind or heart, simply by recollecting your generosity.

And when the mind is not overcome with passion, aversion, or delusion, her heart heads straight based on generosity. And when the heart is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones has a sense of the goal, a sense of the Dhamma, experiences joy connected with the Dhamma. And in one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed experiences ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated.

So, you should develop this recollection. You should 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.

When we recollect generosity, our heart goes straight. We realize the goal, a sense of the Dhamma, and we experience the joy connected with the Dhamma.

Let's just sit quietly for a moment.

Shantideva said, "When I have done something for the sake of another, no amazement or conceit arises."

It is like having fed myself. I look for nothing in return.

Thank you for listening.

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