Dāna Talk

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 7:04

Now being around two o'clock, the schedule asked that everyone come for closing announcements. It's a bit of a mistake, my fault really—I should have checked the schedule more carefully because it would seem better to have done this at the end of the afternoon. But it had already been arranged, and then I thought, well, coming and going. A weekend is a weekend. We know we have to leave tomorrow anyway, so it's not like a surprise to you. Let this be very much part of our practice. We'll go back in again to continue silence and dialogue and so forth. This is just one of the events arising.

Also, maybe you can feel in the course of this retreat the change of form, where it's a bit more flexible in some ways and interactive. And even with Tija's beautiful songs last night, a little of that devotional quality. If you go to Buddhist Asia—back to Burma and Thailand and places like that—and maybe I mentioned this—it's very much a devotional practice there for people. People go with such reverence to the temples, and generosity is enormous in those cultures. Later this afternoon, we'll talk some about the Pāramitās and Bodhisattva and that kind of expression into the world.

I remember one of the most moving experiences of being a forest monk, a monastic for the years that I was, would be to go out on alms round in the morning, sometimes with a few other monks, to walk barefoot five or ten miles to some village and come back with our bowls. The areas where I lived mostly were quite poor, on the border of Laos and Thailand. In the dry season, very poor—not a lot to eat. People would wait there in the morning for the monks to come through the village. We'd be silent, and then they would offer some of the food they'd made for the day. As I said, they had enough rice, but in the dry season there wasn't a lot else—a few vegetables, some of it like tree leaves chopped up with chili peppers and old broken fish sauce with a lot of pepper so that it would last for months.

They would place the food in the bowl with so much reverence, even though they didn't have much. And I think, okay, I grew up in the U.S., and even though my family didn't have a lot of money, if I was in trouble I could wire home and my mom would send me five hundred or a thousand dollars to get me out of trouble. That's more than the average annual wage of a lot of the people in these villages—double, triple it. What was I doing taking their food?

But they saw us as carrying something that was so important for their culture. There was so much reverence—not just for the particular monks, but for what we stood for in the temple. They so valued that the culture had the teachings of Dharma, of virtue and generosity and wisdom and understanding and compassion. The monastics really represented that which they loved about their culture, among one of the most precious things. And so they were saying, here, we'll give of the little that we have.

You can't say thank you—you can't say, "Wow, I got a mango, fantastic, thank you!" You do it all in silence. All I could do is receive it and say, all right, I have to practice now. I have to take their generosity, which is so enormous.

You feel it if you go now to the great temples too. You go to the Shwedagon in the center of Rangoon and people stream in. Yes, there are offerings, but more than that, there's just so much love and compassion and devotion to Dharma that's woven into the cultures.

So IMS has become that place for a lot of people, for our lives—many of us as old students who come back here. And it's through the generosity of the whole community of people that it has blossomed in the way it has, together with the Forest Refuge and the Study Center. It's in beautiful shape.

Often we wait to the end of retreats and do the dāna talk—please help support the teachers and things—which is a lovely thing. But it doesn't at all communicate the magnificence of the generosity that's kept the Dharma going for 2,600 years, and how you feel it both in those home cultures and, in some way, here in the food and the walls and all the new things that have been done here.

Your support for us as teachers makes it possible for us to teach. It's really fantastic, and then we can teach other people. So it's really meaningful and very beautiful and accepted with a great deal of gratitude.

These things—whether it's generosity, not just supporting the temple but living a life of a generous spirit, not so self-centered, living a life that has gratitude in it—these are what make our heart joyful, along with the Brahmavihāras of mettā, karuṇā, compassion, joy, and equanimity. I would add the Brahmavihāras of forgiveness, of gratitude, and of generosity in some way. These are the awakened heart.

So this is the pre-dāna, dāna talk. But it's also an invitation to feel all this as part of our practice in some really beautiful way.

So with that, I turn it over to Daphne and Roberta to add things about IMS and everything else.

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