

01. Dāna - Generosity

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 13:17

Namo tassa bhagavato harahato samma sambudassam Namō tassa bhagavato harahato samma sambudassam Namō tassa bhagavato harahato samma sambudassam

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

I'm going to start on the ten perfections. I'll just run through them quickly: generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution, loving-kindness and equanimity. We won't do them all tonight. We'll just do the *dāna*, which is generosity.

Dāna is the core virtue for the Buddha because whenever he's teaching laypeople he always starts with *dāna*, generosity. The reason is that you can be completely immoral and yet be generous. So a thief can be very generous even if it's with your money. It's like a quality that can exist prior to a good morality. Then he always talks about morality, then he goes on to rebirth, and then finally when he feels that the audience is open enough, he hits them with the Four Noble Truths. So he has his way of gradual teaching.

By the way, when you hear *dāna* within Buddhist company, they're normally referring to giving food to monks, because when they say they're giving *dāna*, that's what they're normally referring to.

The whole point about generosity, of course, is that it undermines selfishness. Our society is particularly selfish, I think, compared to others. That's the enemy of generosity: selfishness. The more subtle enemy, of course, is the feeling of doing it for feeling good, and we'll come to that in a minute.

Now, the scriptures talk about three conditions for a wholesome giving. If you're offering wealth, if you're offering money as a donation, it has to be earned virtuously. It's interesting, isn't it? If you just thieved it from the bank... It's like if people win on the lottery. Now, it's no big evil thing to win some money in the lottery, but it's still based on taking money from other people. Even though the other people have gladly put their money in, it's still a slightly off way of earning money. Gambling is a form of gambling. Even if you were to give that money, there would be just that little bit of unwholesomeness about it. In fact, I know of one person who won a lot of money. He was a Muslim and he offered it to his mosque. They wouldn't receive it. They wouldn't take it.

The gift itself, like the amount you give, has to be appropriate, has to be wise. Somebody was telling me just now that somebody's bought their daughter, I think she's 12 years old, a 500-pound watch. It's pretty much, isn't it? What does it do to a kid of that age? So you've got to be wise about the amount you give.

And the receiver themselves has to be worthy of your gift. They have to be worthy of it. So I mean, it's no

good giving month tickets to Las Vegas. It wouldn't be right. And when people ask you for money on the streets, you have to be careful. I always... you know that they're either going to use it for drugs or for drink, so it's one of those little dodgy things. I mean, if you say well look I'll buy you a hamburger and they say well I don't want to eat and they just want your money for a bit more drink... In fact there was once in London and this young guy came up to me and said, can you give me some, can you help me? I said why do you want it? He said well I want to buy some hash. I said I don't want to do that. He said oh come on, I'm being truthful. I thought, well... he thought because he was being truthful therefore he was worthy of a gift. It's funny.

It's the same when you offer to do something for somebody. So you're offering time in that case, in which case you have to be careful of your motives. Often we think we're doing something out of a pure heart but there are subliminal unconscious conditions that we put on things. You have to be quite open to any negative feelings. Now, remember that if you're offering to do something for somebody and you're aware of these little things like, well, they might give me some money when I'm finished... remember that to be aware of it is not to be dominated by it. So you can still be aware of that unwholesome thought and then determine that you're going to do it for wholesome reasons. Because there's an intention there, it's not activated. When it's subliminal, when it's unconscious, it can have an effect on what we're doing. And then you know that afterwards when they don't give you anything and you're upset. So then you know that there's been some sort of subliminal reason for doing something. Our awareness, our mindfulness puts us in contact with these little subterranean desires.

And of course what you're doing is worthy. It's no good saying to the judge, I was only helping him rob the bank. I didn't want any money. The act itself has to be virtuous, has to be wholesome. And again, the person has to be worthy of the gift. You have to feel they're worthy of it. Often when you have a next-door neighbor who's elderly, and they want a bit of help, so obviously that's... But I remember I used to visit a friend of mine. Every time you turned up, they'd say, oh, I'm glad you've come. Can you help me do this? And after a while you think, well, I've got to stop going, frankly. I'm being a bit abused now.

So those qualities about the virtue of your giving, the purpose of your giving, what it is you're actually giving and the virtue of the person who is receiving your gift, that makes the perfect gift.

When you make an offering often we do it quite impulsively and then often we regret what we've given or what we've done. If we can get into the habit of just stopping for a moment and just saying, well, I'll think about it or I'll just consider that for a minute and just get the right attitude going... When you actually give something or decide to do something for somebody, just make sure that you've actually phrased it within yourself to make that offering pure. You say something like, well, I'm giving this without any hope of return, or I'm doing this... That doesn't stop you doing things, offering things which aren't, shall we say, pure generosity. I mean, at Christmas you give presents and you get one back. That's all right. It's a social interaction. It's not evil to do that. It's just that it's not coming from the pure heart.

And remember that if you do give something, or you do something for somebody, and then you get this little voice come back saying, truly you are a most generous person, you're quite extraordinary, your virtue is above everybody else... So when you hear that little voice, you point to it and say, ah, I see you, Mara, the evil one, but it didn't actually affect my action, so therefore it didn't have the effect it would normally have of making what we do a little selfish. So it's seeing our unwholesome intentions which disempowers them. It's when we don't see them that they creep up behind us and then we realize afterwards that there have been unwholesome intentions.

And I suppose it's a paradox when you think that the more you give with that way, the more joyful you feel. But it's because we can rejoice in another person's joy. That's why we feel joyful when we help somebody. And then, of course, the mistake arises. You start doing it in order to feel good. See? And the whole thing... So let's be careful. Mara's tricky.

And the last thing is about spontaneity. Spontaneity doesn't arrive spontaneously. You've got to work at it. So if you think of sports people... I mean, like a tennis player, they're just acting, you can't even call it a reaction really. I mean, they're totally in the game, with the game, acting spontaneously. But they've done hours of practice. So at first it might seem that this is forced, contrived. And you're sort of playing this game of saying, well, why am I doing that? Okay, here I give with the fullness of my heart. But it's through the practice of that, that eventually you find yourself doing things spontaneously. Which is slightly different from doing something impulsively from old conditionings, which you normally tend to regret.

So if you're like me, you tend to say yes too quickly. You do the yes, and then you think, I don't want to do that. What did I say that for? So it's getting out of that habit. And it's not insulting to somebody to say, well, hold on, I'll have to think about that. It just gives you a bit of a space to make the right intention, and then there's no regrets.

So, just remember those three factors, just to end off with that. What is your intention? Is the gift worthy? Is it coming from a worthy place? And is the person you're helping, in some way or other, worthy of the gift? So, that's why they say the most perfect of all gifts is to give it to somebody who's fully enlightened. If you put an advert in the paper and say, is anybody fully enlightened because I want to make this perfect gift? Because in doing it with a perfect heart and giving exactly what the person wants, and this person is very worthy of your gift, because they've perfected the path, and through that example they spread merit into the world.

Merit is a funny way of translating *puñña*. I found a very good translation for it. It's goodness power. Goodness power. I thought it was a really good translation.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all insidious intentions sooner rather than later.

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