

Gratitude, Generosity, Renunciation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

The Buddha began any talk he gave to laypeople with dana, generosity. ‘Even a thief can be generous!’ We can be generous with our time and with our wealth. For the act to be true generosity it has to be given without conditions. If a friend needs a lift and you help her out, and there is a thought that she can be called upon when you are in need, then that is not generosity. It is a business contract. Business contracts are fine, but should not be confused with generosity. If you are out with someone and offer to buy the tea and are upset when the friend does not reciprocate, then it was not an act of generosity. That too was a business contract. An act of generosity has to hurt a little. It’s hardly generous giving £5 a month to a favoured charity. What would it feel like giving £10 or £20? What if a friend is taken to hospital, how long should your visit last. If it is up to you (within reason), it is not generosity. Generosity puts the other first. In other words, generosity always – that is always! – asks for renunciation. We are giving up time and wealth for the benefit of the other – without recompense or refund. And it always hurts a little. When we give something up, we let go of a little attachment, of a false necessity. Every time we give up a little attachment, the self shrinks a little. The self manifests as clutching ‘for personal use only’ and out of fear of loss. Generosity releases the cramp. This is the gift of generosity – releasing us from false needs and dependencies. But what motivates generosity in the first place. There’s compassion, of course, when we see suffering. Expressions of love and joy too. But it is gratitude that can bolster our giving. Spend just a moment considering what you have received where payback was never asked: as a child (the Buddha reminds us that even should we carry our parents on our shoulders throughout our lives we would never be able to repay them the gift of life), support of family, education, health care, our culture – the Buddhadhamma. The paradox is that more we give, the more the sacrifice, the more the sympathetic joy. But more, much more! This virtuous circle twirls us towards liberation.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.