

Gratitude, Generosity and Renunciation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 12:31

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-awakened one.

So the topic for this evening were the ten perfections. I'll just read through them. Generosity, morality and renunciation. Wisdom, effort and patience. Honesty, determination, goodwill, and equanimity. This is one list I never bothered to learn. So you can see that's a bit too much for one evening.

So what I've chosen is generosity since we're at that time of the year when we give presents. So generosity rates highly in the Buddhist teachings. If you remember in his own personal story, he went through that great doubt just before he became liberated. So the great doubt really centred on who was he of all people to try and find the end of suffering. And as the myth goes, the earth goddess rose and said, he has every right to do this because he has fully perfected the virtue of generosity.

So basically what gave him that little bit of extra energy as far as I'm concerned is that he knew he was doing it for other people. So if you think about Mount Everest when Sherpa Tenzing and Edmund Hillary got up there, they opened up the gates of Everest and now everybody and his dog can get up there. So that's the same with the Buddha. Once he discovered this path as he said the gates of the *dhamma* were opened and that business of generosity was what gave him the last little push to go for it.

And whenever he's talking to lay people he always starts off with generosity and he points out that even thieves can be generous. So after they've stolen a thousand pound from you they can always be generous with it and give it to their mates. So what we have to distinguish is between what you might call just ordinary generosity and spiritual generosity.

I mean, at this time of the year, you're giving presents. So if you buy a family member, you spend a lot of money on an amazing pair of socks and they send you a scrappy pair of gloves. Well, you know what they're going to get next Christmas. So I mean, it's a sort of generosity, but obviously there's a bit of payback. And it's the same with when you help people. Like if somebody says come and help with the garden or do some decoration, well you're very happy to but you presume that when your garden is doing or you need a bit of decoration somebody else now they'll come back and do it for you. You're very upset if they don't. So that's what you might call just friendly generosity.

But I think that we get to spiritual generosity when we're making donations to charities that obviously have nothing to do with us personally. So making a donation to things like Oxfam, Médecins Sans

Frontières, all those sorts of charities, we're obviously giving something and there's not going to be any personal return for us at all.

Now that's a different sort of generosity and we can call it a spiritual generosity. So it's giving something without any expectation. So how do you do it? This is the point you see because normally speaking even whether we are aware of it or not there's always a bit of greed in there. We're always doing it for some payback. So whenever you're making a donation whether it's putting money in a box or you're going to just press a button on the screen, you have to suffuse the heart and mind with that intention. That this is for such and such and I don't expect and I don't want any return. That has to suffuse your mind and then when you press the button when you actually drop the coin or the money into the box.

That's what's conditioning you. And then of course the evil Mara will turn up and whisper in your ear, you truly are a very generous person. So as soon as you hear that, you say, ah, I saw you Mara, just like the Buddha did, I see you Mara, you didn't fool me this time. Or he might say something like, that's too much, get some back. You don't think it's that much. See so that's the old stingy Mara. So as soon as that comes into your mind you note it. You see it's there but that wasn't the intention. That was not conditioning. This is really important. Remember that the actual conscious intention with which you do something is the main conditioning factor.

So just keeping that in mind whenever you're going to give something, even to a friend, even if you're going to help them with decoration, you can still do it as a pure gift. And that has that effect of developing in us just a natural generosity.

So the question is how do you develop this generosity? Well, I mean, obviously there's things like compassion. If you feel bad about something or bad about some situation, then obviously you're prepared to give. Also for joy, you know, birthdays, Christmas marriages, you just give naturally because you want the other persons to have even a greater enjoyment, greater joy.

But these are dependent you might say on those sorts of relationships of compassion or joy. But if we want to develop a sort of general attitude of generosity the real thing to develop is gratitude.

And I don't know whether you've ever done this, but if you make a list of everything you've received in life for which you've not paid, for which was just given to you, it can be a bit overwhelming because you realise it's impossible to pay back what you've been given.

You're just starting with your parents, even if they were the most awful, terrible people in the world who messed up your life completely. The fact is, they fed you enough to keep you alive and in this particular lifetime you happen to meet the *dhamma* which is going to liberate you from suffering so even for that you can be grateful. And then there's, I just made a quick list here like society, you know, the health care you get, the social care, the education. I mean your parents could not have afforded all that. All that was given because of the general commitment of the community towards individuals.

Then you've got teachers, your ordinary teachers through school, your spiritual teachers, all these people have given. And I mean, especially during school, I bet you never gave anything to your teachers. I don't remember. As a teacher, the only thing I ever received was a bottle of wine from one of my students. Eight years for one bottle of wine. That was their expression of, I can't have been a very good teacher, that's all. That's what I put it down to.

Then your employers. You see you have to thank your employers whether you like them or not. The point is that they give you work and it's through your work you earn money. What about the government? See they never do what you want them to do but you know somebody's got to do the dirty work so you have to thank them for that.

And then there's all the little things, little things like just the gifts of the day. For instance I was trying to get on the computer at the centre this morning and Kristin and then Dita went out of the way to try to get me on it. Failed completely of course but the fact is that they were there just giving that bit of help. So even during the day these little things like opening doors saying you know keep well I hope you're happy and all that. All those are just little offerings to us that we don't recognise as generosity.

So once you begin to reflect on the amount of stuff we receive for which we don't have to pay anything, we don't even have to say thank you. I mean, if you think about the dentist, did you walk out of the dentist saying thank you? You sometimes forget that they've actually given you a service.

So if you just make a list of all the things that you've received in this life then of course there is this unrequited desire to repay and of course you can't repay and I doubt most of these people that I've mentioned would want you to repay but it invites you to really develop your own generosity.

Now, finally, the reason for it, of course, is because it's part of the spiritual path. And so one of the perfections is this generosity, supported by gratitude, which isn't listed, shall we say it's presumed. But the other factor that comes in now is renunciation, just the natural renunciation. And what we mean by renunciation is what is not feeding our desire to indulge our desires.

So every time we give something away some of our wealth or some of our time we're actually renouncing something. And that process of renunciation is letting go of all that greed and all the greed and everything that comes from acquisitiveness which is the manifestation of delusion. So the more generous we are the more we're undermining that sense of delusion.

And that will eventually, according to the commentaries, unfortunately it doesn't actually say this the scriptures but you can see the logic of it, just by exercising generosity that in itself is a path to liberation.

So you can see that there's a lovely little virtuous circle here of gratitude, generosity and renunciation which as it were just spirals us, it twirls us up towards *nibbāna*.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused confusion and that by

your devotions of generosity, you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

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