



Dana: Giving in Theravada Buddhism

Wara Nyana ^{1*}, Dr. Yeshpal ²

¹ PhD., Research Scholar, Samrat Ashok Subharti School of Buddhist Studies, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India

² Assistant Professor, Department of Languages, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India

* Corresponding Author: Wara Nyana

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Abstract

Giving is commonly recognized as one of the most fundamental human qualities, demonstrating one's humanity and potential for self-transcendence. Giving also holds a special place in the Buddha's teaching, one that distinguishes it as the foundation and germ of spiritual development. According to the Pali suttas, the Buddha's "graduated exposition" of the Dhamma always began with a "talk on giving" (*dānakatha*). The Buddha often started his speeches by elaborating on the value of practicing giving to a group of people who had not yet accepted him as their teacher. The other aspects of his teaching, such as morality, the law of *kamma*, and the advantages of renunciation, would only be introduced after his audience had developed an understanding of this virtue and only after all of these principles had left an impression on their minds would he elaborate on the Four Noble Truths, which were the Awakened Ones' singular discovery.

Keywords: āmisadāna, abhayadāna and dhammadāna

Introduction

Giving, strictly speaking, does not exist as a part of the Noble Eightfold Path, nor does it figure among the other requisites of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiya dhamma*). It was most likely removed from these groups because giving does not, by definition, lead directly and quickly to the emergence of insight and realization of the Four Noble Truths. In a distinct capacity, it is giving functions in the Buddhist discipline. Nonetheless, while sharing is not directly counted among the path's components, its contribution to progress toward liberation should not be disregarded or minimized. Giving can also be associated with the personal attribute of generosity (*Cāga*) when viewed from another perspective. This viewpoint emphasizes giving as an inside propensity to share, a personality developed by outward acts of giving and, in turn, makes possible even more brutal acts of self-sacrifice. Giving is not seen as an externally evident act of moving an object from oneself to others. Generosity is one of the essential characteristics of the *sappurisa*, or excellent or superior person, along with faith, morality, learning, and knowledge. Giving, as the quality of generosity, has a particularly intimate link to the entire movement of the Buddha's path. The path's purpose is to destroy greed, hatred, and delusion, and cultivating generosity directly debilitates greed and hatred while promoting the pliancy of mind required to eradicate delusion.

The Perfection of Giving

Offering perfection is practiced by helping beings in various ways, including providing happiness, property, body, and life to others, eliminating their fear, and training them in the Dhamma. Giving is divided into three categories based on the object to be provided: sharing of material things (*āmisadāna*), issuing of fearlessness (*abhayadāna*), and giving of the Dhamma (*dhammadāna*). The object to be delivered can be of two types: internal and external.

When the Bodhisatta distributes an external object, he distributes whatever is required to whoever needs it. Knowing that someone needs something, he spreads it even if it is given without being asked for, and even more so if it is. He provides enough, not too little when something needs to be supplied.

He does not give because he anticipates receiving something in return. And when there isn't enough to go around, he divides evenly whatever can be shared. He does not grant things that harm others, such as weapons, poisons, and intoxicants.

When asked again, he provides householders things that are proper for householders and monks things that are appropriate for monks. He gives to his mother and father, relatives and kin, friends and colleagues, children, wives, enslaved people, and laborers, all without causing suffering to anyone. He does not contribute because he seeks riches, honor, or renown and wants something in return. He never gives a discarded object as a gift, not even to ungrateful beggars who mock and humiliate him. He always offers care, a calm mind, and a heart full of compassion.

First and foremost, this is a method of practicing giving external presents

Two approaches can be used to comprehend the innate gift. How? Bodhisatta surrenders himself to another and enters into servitude, putting himself at the disposal of others, with a spiritually oriented mind, for the sake of enlightenment, desiring the supreme welfare and happiness of all beings, similar to how a man would give himself up to another and go into slavery or service for the sake of getting food and clothes. Others may require his body parts— he distributes them to those in need without hesitating or cringing. Thus, Bodhisatta gives up an internal object in two ways: for the pleasure of others or his self-mastery while satisfying the wants of those who ask. He is generous, believing that "I will attain enlightenment through non-attachment." As a result, the internal gift must be comprehended. Giving an interior present, he only gives what leads to the recipient's well-being. Bodhisatta does not intentionally offer his body, limbs, and organs to Mara or the wicked deities in Mara's company, thinking, "Let this not lead to their harm."

A discourse on the Dhamma conveys the Dhamma offered without bias and with an unblemished mind; this discourse consists of systematic instruction conducive to happiness in this life, delight in the next life, and ultimate liberation. Through such teachings, individuals who have not yet joined the Buddha's Dispensation are attracted to it, while those who have already done so mature.

In detail, to those whose minds are inclined towards the enlightenment of followers (*savakabodhi*), he provides a lecture establishing and purifying them (in progress towards their objective) by elaborating on the noble attributes of whichever of the following topics is appropriate: The awakening of a disciple includes seeking refuge, exercising restraint via virtue, guarding the doors of the sense organs, eating in moderation, applying to alertness, practicing the seven excellent dhammas, applying to serenity (*samatha*), and by focusing on one of the thirty-eight objects (of serenity meditation) throughout that time; Vipassana (application for insight) involves thinking about the subjects of insight-interpretation, such as the physical body, as well as the progressive stages of purification (*visuddhipatipada*), the perception of the right path to follow (*sammattagahana*), the three types of explicit knowledge (*vijja*), the six types of direct knowledge (*abhiñña*), the enlightenment of a student and the four discriminations (*patisambhida*).

Additionally, he provides a discourse that establishes and purifies beings in the two vehicles (leading to these two types of enlightenment) by elaborating on the greatness of those

Buddhas' spiritual power and detailing the specific nature, trait, purpose, etc. The ten prams are described in their three levels by explaining the scope of the spiritual force possessed by those Buddhas. This lecture is intended for beings whose minds are inclined to *pacceka* and enlightened Buddha enlightenment. Bodhisatta gives the Dhamma to beings as a gift as a result.

He offers his treasures in exchange for the genuine Dhamma's treasure, his kingdom in exchange for the title of Dhamma's king, monasteries, parks, ponds, and groves in exchange for the attainment of *jhanas*, etc.; the gift of his hands so that he may extend beings the rescue hand of the genuine Dhamma to help them over the four streams; the assistance of his feet so that he might be inscribed with the fortunate wheels the gift of his eyes to get the global look; the gift of his ears, nose, etc., to obtain the spiritual faculty of faith, etc.; the gift of his body, thinking, "May my body be the means of life for everyone in the world! May it provide welfare and enjoyment to all beings at all times, even when only seeing, hearing, recollecting, or ministering to me!" And to rule the entire world, he provides the gift of his skull.

Giving in this manner, Bodhisatta does not provide out of resentment, the suffering of others, fear, moral guilt, or chastisement of people in need of presents. He doesn't give what it means when there is something extraordinary. He refrains from praising himself and criticizing others. He does not give out of a desire for the fruit, hatred for those who ask, carelessness, or lack of regard. Instead, he offers generously, personally, at the appropriate moment, thoughtfully, without bias, and joyfully all three times. Giving something with a delicious flavor—like flavored roots or other objects—to deserving recipients after thinking about it in terms of taste is providing something with a flavorful gift. Or he gives up something tasty, like grain, cows, etc. Beds, chairs, other furniture, coverlets, and mantels should be used to illustrate how to provide practical gifts. For example, after acquiring a bed, chair, cushion, pillow, undergarment, or upper garment and considering it from its tangible qualities, he gives it to deserving recipients. After acquiring the aforementioned natural objects, he gives them up. Since the mental-object base is the focus of this statement, the gift of mental things (*dhammadāna*) should be understood in terms of nourishment, drink, and life.

He distributes nourishment, such as ghee, butter, etc., or a drink, such as water, after acquiring an excellent item like nourishment and believing it to be a part of the mental-object basis., the eight different types of beverages, such as mango juice, etc.; or, viewing it as a gift of life, he offers a meal with a ticket or a meal every two weeks, etc., arranges for doctors to attend to the sick and injured, frees animals from nets, has fishing nets or bird cages destroyed, releases prisoners from jail, causes an injunction to be given prohibiting the slaughter of animals, or takes any other similar action to protect beings' lives.

He dedicates his entire act of giving to the well-being and pleasure of everyone on Earth and to his unwavering liberation via the attainment of ultimate enlightenment. He commits to pursuing unending desire (for good), focus, inventiveness, knowledge, and freedom. There are four barriers to giving that Bodhisatta must get over once he has made the mental decision to completely give up any possessions that come his way, whether they be animate or inanimate. These obstacles include a lack of prior giving experience; the inadequacy of the gift; the gift's quality and

beauty; and worry over the gift's loss.

1. The Bodhisatta should conclude that he has not been accustomed to giving in the past, which is why a desire to offer does not arise in his mind right now, even though he has objects that can be shared and suppliants are present. I'll provide a present so that my mind will like giving in the future. Let me now donate what I have to those in need with an eye toward the end. As a result, he offers a kind, generous, open-handed, and joyful present in giving up. He also gives gifts when requested and enjoys giving and sharing. The first restriction on granting is therefore destroyed, shattered, and eliminated by Bodhisatta.
 2. Once more, Bodhisatta thinks, "Because I was not inclined to give in the past, at this time, my requisites are defective," when the thing to be given is inferior or flawed. So even if it hurts, let me make a gift out of whatever I have, even if it's a meager and cheap gift. In doing so, I shall eventually achieve the highest level of offering perfection. As a result, he provides whatever assistance he can: he is generous, open-handed, enjoys giving up, is willing to help out when requested, and enjoys giving and sharing. The second restraint on offer is therefore destroyed, broken, and removed by Bodhisatta.
 3. Bodhisatta corrects himself when there is a refusal to offer because of the greatness or beauty of the thing to be given: "Good man, haven't you created the yearning for the highest enlightenment, the loftiest and most superior of all states? Then it is appropriate for you to provide outstanding and lovely things as presents for culture. As a result, he gives what is excellent and beautiful; he is kind, open-handed, and enjoys giving up. He also provides when requested and takes pleasure in sharing and giving. The third shackle to giving is thereby destroyed, broken, and eliminated by Bodhisatta.
 4. Bodhisatta, while presenting a gift, observes the loss of the facility and comments, "This is the nature of material goods, that they are vulnerable to failure and to passing away. In addition, the reason my interests are now reduced is because I did not provide such presents in the past. Let me, therefore, give as a gift whatever I have, whether it be little or much. In doing so, I shall eventually achieve the highest level of offering perfection. Thus, he offers whatever he has as a gift, being kind, kind, and willing to give without being asked. He also enjoys sharing and providing. The fourth shackle to giving is therefore broken, eliminated, and destroyed by Bodhisatta.
- 13JF5274VuNthhwKkLrYyZW73smjSYAEenCariyapitaka, translated by I.B. Horner, included in Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon, Part III.
 4. (Wheel No. 251/253). See Nyanaponika Thera, *The Roots of Good and Evil* (Wheel No. 221/224). See Kamma and Its Fruit.
 5. London: Pali Text Society. In *The Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning* (Paramatthajotika), Commentary to the Minor Readings (Khuddakapatha); c1960.
 6. The thirty-two major and eighty minor characteristics of a Great Man's body.
 7. The four floods of sensual desire, desire for existence, wrong views, and ignorance.
 8. The "three times" are before presenting the gift, while giving it, and after giving it.
 9. Doubtlessly the commentator means cows as a source for the "five delicacies"-milk, curd, butter, ghee, and cream of ghee-not as a source of beefsteak.
 10. Dhamma refers to the sixth sort of object in this context, not the Buddha's teaching. The explanation that follows in the text explains that this class of items also contains the life faculty and the nutritional essence of food.

In conclusion, the key to releasing the harmful restraints on the perfection of giving is to reflect on them in whatever way is acceptable. The process employed for imparting perfection can also be applied to virtue perfection and other perfections.

References

1. According to Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation of the Cariyapitaka Atthakatha, *The Discussion of the All-Inclusive Net of Views* (BPS). 1978;289-96:322-323.
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3. EW Burlingame, trans. *Buddhist Legends*