

INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

Practising Generosity

What is generosity?

- There is a difference between the substance of generosity and the intention. Giving is primarily a state of mind, so we need not be hampered by a lack of material resources. The most important aspect of generosity is the intention.



- We can give a very expensive present, but if it is with an impure motivation, this is not generosity. We can give just a scrap of food to a dog, but with a bodhicitta motivation or the simple wish that they be happy, this becomes true generosity.



- We may encounter a resistance within ourselves to giving, so it is important to investigate - do we lose anything when we imagine giving it away? Do we lose anything by giving love? All that we can take with us when we die is what we have given away.

Why is generosity important?

- The cause of a human rebirth is morality, but the cause of a perfect human rebirth is morality, aspirational prayer and *generosity*.
- Generosity is the first Perfection because it is the most important. We need to practice it first in order to progress with the others.
- Generosity is a way of accumulating merit, or 'luck'. It is essential for success in all other practices. Without merit we will never develop Bodhicitta or wisdom. No matter how hard we study, we won't learn or retain anything.
- The results of generosity include rebirth into a realm of resources, wealth, a good reputation, being naturally liked by all, the good and the wise will follow you, and you will be confident and untroubled in all company.
- You can tell a good Dharma practitioner because, among other things, they are free from stinginess and delight in sharing and helping others.



Combining generosity with the other 5 Perfections

- Ethics - give without thought for yourself or for reward. Guard the mind and concern yourself with the welfare of others.
- Patience - applied if someone continuously asks for more. Concentrate on people who give you difficulty (eg. beggars).
- Joyous Effort - great pleasure is gained in fulfilling the wishes of others. Giving with respect increases our happiness.
- Concentration - remember to rejoice about giving after you have done so. Become aware of opportunities to give, develop presence of mind when to give.
- Wisdom - remember that the gift, giver and recipient are dependent on each other, (otherwise, with an inherent view of them all as independent, it is a worldly activity).

The 4 types of generosity

- 1) Material Generosity. Food, money, medicine, and one's own body (by serving others, in mandala offering, by giving it to the Buddha, giving blood or organ donations)
- 2) Love. "May others be happy" - thinking this. Actually caring for those in our immediate environment. We may have no food or money or power, but we all have the potential for unlimited love.
- 3) Fearlessness. Saving the lives of others (insects, in my presence or on my land, helping refugees, sheltering the persecuted). Freeing from fearful situations. Using our political or social power.
- 4) Dharma. Explaining the Dharma, which includes giving advice when asked, helping others look at a negative situation in a different way, reciting prayers out loud to animals, and causing others to act virtuously. This is the best type of generosity, because we are showing others how to be free of suffering. Also giving skills - computer, anger management, parenting, reading, cooking.



5 things make a gift good

- Give with reverence
- Give thoughtfully
- Give with one's own hand
- Give good things
- Give thinking of the result

5 timely gifts

- To those just arrived
- To those leaving
- The sick
- The hungry
- First fruits to the virtuous

How to practice generosity

- Motivation. The best motivation is bodhicitta. It is also the strongest motivation, because the benefit will continue until you reach enlightenment. We must be careful to set our motivation so our generosity will bring good results, especially since most of our practice is on the level of imagination. Try not to give with ulterior motives (so others like you, think highly of you, or so you get something in return). Rather, try to think of the recipients as your spiritual friends, because without them there is no way to attain the perfection of generosity.



- Substance. Try to offer the best we have, not second best or junk to the opp-shop. Make sure it is honestly acquired, not obtained through force or deceit. Give what you can, but aspire to be able give more later. Always give just a little more than comfortable, but not so much that we regret it. And finally, don't give inappropriate things such as weapons, poison, or alcohol to a monk or an alcoholic.
- Give to the Three Fields. The field of enlightenment (the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), the field of merit (one's mother and father), and the field of mercy (the sick, old, weak, hungry, homeless, disadvantaged). Try not to discourage others from practicing generosity, even if we don't approve of who they give to (eg. to a church).