

Generosity: The Primary Buddhist Virtue

Generosity = *cāga* (but also means relinquishment or letting go)

Giving = *dāna* (also refers the thing given)

The Ten Wholesome Actions: **Giving**, virtue, mental cultivation, humility, service, sharing merit, rejoicing in the merit of others, listening to the Dharma, teaching the Dharma, straightening out one's views. D.A. III.999

The Four bases of social harmony: **Giving**, kind speech, service, being equitable. D.N III.152; A.N. II.32

Ten Virtues of a ruler: **Giving**, virtue, altruism, honesty, kindness, self-control, non-anger, non-violence, patience, uprightness.

Four Virtues of a householder: honesty, self-discipline, forbearance, **giving**.

Sequence of graduated discourse:

“At that time the Buddha gave a gradual instruction to the householder Upali on **giving**, morality, heaven, finding fault with carelessness, no longer being engrossed with sensual pressures, and the merits of renunciation. Upali's mind was ready, supple, free from hindrances, exuberant, and dedicated, and so the Buddha proclaimed the teachings of all the Buddhas, that is, suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering and the path to the end of suffering.” M.N. I.379-380

The Ten Perfections: **Giving**, Virtue, Renunciation, Discernment, Effort, Patience, Truth, Resolve, Loving Kindness, Equanimity.

Giving is stated at the beginning [of the paramis]: (a) because it is common to all beings, since even ordinary people practice giving; (b) because it is the least fruitful; and (c) because it is the easiest to practice.

Giving has the characteristic of relinquishing; its function is to dispel greed for things that can be given away; its manifestation is non-attachment, or the achievement of prosperity and a favorable state of existence. ...

Further, when a suppliant asks for something, a bodhisattava should reflect: “He or she is my intimate friend, for he or she divulges his own secret to me. He is my teacher, for he or she teaches me: ‘When you go you have to abandon all. Going to the world beyond, you cannot take your own possessions!’

A Treatise on the Paramis by Acariya Dhammapala

Quotes on Generosity from the Pali Suttas

In Praise of Giving:

- 1) “Giving, a Dharma life, caring for relatives, and blameless deeds: this is the greatest fortune.” Sn 263
- 2) “The gift of Dharma surpasses all gifts.” Dhammapada 354
- 3) “There are two kinds of gifts: a gift of material things and a gift of the Dharma. Of the two, the gift of Dharma is supreme.” Itivuttaka 98
- 4) “A person responsive to requests, compassionate to all beings, delights in giving alms.” Itivuttaka 75
- 5) “Having overcome stinginess, the conqueror of this stain should give a gift.” Samyutta Nikaya I.32

The Benefits of Giving:

- 6) “Making offering you should cleanse the mind in all ways. For the offerer, the offering helps abandon hatred.” Sn 506
- 7) “The householder who is a faithful seeker and in whom dwells truth, Dharma, steadiness, and generosity, does not sorrow when he or she passes away”. Samyutta Nikaya I.215
- 8) “Some provide from the little they have,
Others who are affluent don’t like to give.
An offering given from what little one has
Is worth a thousand times its value.” Samyutta Nikaya I.18
- 9) “Even if one throws away the rinsing from a pot or a cup into the village pool or pond, wishing that the living beings there may feed on them – even this would be a source of merit, not to speak of giving a gift to human beings.” Anguttara Nikaya III.57
- 10) “A vast shower of merit will pour down on a giver.” Samyutta Nikaya I.101
- 11) “By giving one unites friends.” Samyutta Nikaya I.215
- 12) “Directing one’s mind to the states of faith, learning, generosity, and wisdom, one has a comfortable abiding.” Majjhima Nikaya 68.10

13) “Monks, if people knew, as I know, the fruits of sharing gifts, they would not enjoy their use without sharing them, nor would the taint of stinginess obsess the heart. Even if it were their last bit, their last morsel of food, they would not enjoy its use without sharing it if there was someone else to share it with.” Itivuttaka 18

14) “If beings knew, as the Great Sage has said, how the results of sharing has such great fruit, then subduing the stain of selfishness with brightened awareness, they’d give in season to the noble one, where a gift bears great fruit.” Itivuttaka 26

15) “When, with a trusting heart, believing in a good outcome,
A virtuous person gives to an immoral person a gift rightly obtained,
The giver’s virtue purifies the offering.

When, with an untrusting heart, not believing in a good outcome,
An immoral person gives to a virtuous person a gift not rightly obtained,
The receiver’s virtue purifies the offering.

When, with an untrusting heart, not believing in a good outcome,
An immoral person gives to an immoral person a gift not rightly obtained,
Neither’s virtue purifies the offering.

When, with a trusting heart, believing in a good outcome,
A virtuous person gives to a virtuous person a gift rightly obtained,
That gift will come to full fruition.

When with a trusting heart, believing in a good outcome,
A person free from craving gives to a person free from craving a gift rightly obtained,
That gift is the best of worldly gifts.” MN 142

Practicing Giving:

15) “A lay follower is accomplished in generosity by dwelling at home with a mind devoid of stinginess, and by being freely generous, open-handed, delighting in relinquishment, devoted to charity, delighting in giving and sharing. Samyutta Nikaya V.395

16) “How does a true person give gifts? Here a true person gives a gift carefully, gives it with his own hand, gives it showing respect, gives a valuable gift, gives it with the view that something will come of it. That is how a true person gives gifts. MN 110.23

17) “If you have little, give a little; if you have a middling amount, give a middling amount; if you have much, give much. It is not fitting not to give at all. Kosiya, I say to you, ‘Share your wealth, use it. Thread the path of the Noble Ones. One who eats alone eats not happily.’ Jataka V.382

18) King Pasenadi asked, "Where should a gift be given?"
The Buddha replied, "Wherever one's mind has confidence." Samyutta Nikaya I.99

19) "A good person gives in five ways: out of faith, with respect, at the right time, generously, with without denigrating the other." AN V.148

20) "There are eight reasons for giving:

- 1) out of affection
- 2) in anger
- 3) out of stupidity
- 4) out of fear
- 5) to maintain a family tradition
- 6) in order to have a favorable rebirth
- 7) by giving my heart will be glad and happiness and joy will arise in me
- 8) in order to ennoble the mind and adorn the mind.

21) There are eight ways of giving:

- 1) spontaneously
- 2) out of fear
- 3) to reciprocate a gift
- 4) in hope to receive a gift in return
- 5) by thinking it is good to give
- 6) by thinking it would be improper to deny food to a renuncant who has none
- 7) in order to get a good reputation
- 8) because it ennoble the mind, adorns the mind." AN VIII.31

[The Theravada tradition explains that ennobling and adorn the mind is preparing the mind to practice insight and concentration. A.A. IV.123]

Quotes concerning wealth:

21) Wealth destroys the stupid
But not those who seek the Beyond.
Craving for wealth, the stupid
Destroy themselves as well as others. Dhammapada 355

22) "Contentment is the foremost wealth." Dhammapada 204

23) "For householders in this world, poverty is suffering.... Woeful in the world is poverty and debt." Anguttara N. III.350-352

24) "Thus from the not giving of property to the needy, poverty became rife, from the growth of poverty, the taking of what was not given increased, from the increase of theft, the use of weapons increased, from the increased use of weapons, the taking of life increased – and from the taking of life, peoples life-span decreased, their beauty decreased." Digha Nikaya III.68

From the Diamond Sutra

“Furthermore, Subhuti, in respect to things, a bodhisattva should practice giving without dwelling anywhere, that is to say, giving without dwelling on forms, giving without dwelling on sound, smell, taste, objects of touch, or objects of mind. Subhuti, a bodhisattva should give as follows: without dwelling on any notion. And why? The merit of a bodhisattva who gives without dwelling in any notion cannot be fathomed.”

Zen Story

A monk once asked the Chinese Zen master Hui-hai, “What is the gate of Zen practice?” Hui-hai answered, “Complete giving.”