

# 2006-10-22 Generosity

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

I've been surprised repeatedly that the way that Buddhist practice has changed me was not what I anticipated. I had certain thing in mind. And then it seemed like the Dharma had something else in mind. And there's a variety of ways I'm sure I've been changed to, like, I couldn't have imagined that was gonna be detected this way. But one of the ways is, has to do with the quality of generosity, the field of giving. And when I came to Buddhism, I had no particularly interested in generosity or had no particular feelings of gratitude. It wasn't no it wasn't that I was absent of those. It had no particularly important for me. And in the course of my years of Buddhist practice, this variety Writing experiences I had, that were catalysts for me to to have a stronger strong appreciation for generosity and giving and to be affected by the deeply. One tell you one story of the first time I was practicing in Thailand I was given a small little cookie cookies a Thai word meaning a little hut efficient. It was the edge of the monastery was kind of like a duck over a swampy area. It was dry that time of year but it was

on stilts and a little porch.

Did you know maybe I don't know how big 10 by eight foot and there's a little portion of the steps going down from the heart. And then there are these wooden planks that went across the kind of swampy area over to where it was always dry and And every morning the monks in the monastery would go out on alms round. And they would go out with their bowls and the people, villagers would come forth and put the food for the day in the bowls. But I was not a monk. So I did not go on the alms round. So instead, I stayed back in my little cookie, and meditate in the morning. And one morning, I've been meditating inside. And I ended my meditation and I opened the door to my cootie, the opposite of the porch. And then I had a view of the porch the steps in those plants going out and open the door and there I saw on the top of the steps, an apple and some cookies that someone had left for me, which is nice. But what really struck me really was an impact on me. was as like my art my gaze then went up, down towards this planks going off distance there was a monk who was walking away. And I realized that he did not know that I was going to open the door just at that moment. And so he was not doing

he was like giving me the apple and cookies in order to get recognized for it in order to receive tax and that's, you know, so that's probably for him. My guess is Who knows, but my guess is that it's been 25 years now. My guess is he's forgotten. He did it did it. But I haven't. Very simple acts of generosity had a big impact on me and it partly was a surprise that someone would give without staying to receive Thanks for staying to be recognized. That was a kind of, you know, I was kind of spiritually remedial course. You know, I have a lot of stuff to learn. And so I learned that I found that something. And so now I'd like to do a little thought exercise with all of you. If you're willing, if you'd be willing to just close your eyes for a moment, give you a little exercise, think about think of some day see if you can think of some situation in your life where you were the recipient of an incidental act of generosity. So it was really easy and incidental almost. But that incidental act was quite significant for you. Someone gave you something we did something for you that was kind of simple, easy to handle, but had a big impact on you. can think of a big impact and a moderate impact? And if you remember such a time, how does that make you feel? Where do you feel then what do you feel now remembering it and effective. Take a deep breath and let go of that. Now see if you can think of a time when you performed an incidental act of generosity something easy. There was have almost anybody think about it or just happened to in the course of your day it is a simple thing, gave something to someone or did something for them and that it was significant for them. It was a big deal for them had a big impact on them. Now can you remember how you felt then or how you feel now remembering it would affect you to be the giver. Take a deep breath like that. Now see if you can remember a time in your life when you were the recipient of a major act of generosity. It was a really big deal. Maybe a big sacrifice that someone did in order to give you something or do something for you. How did you feel about this? You feel about being recipient of this big act of generosity. How do they affect you? Ready Go that then one more remembering Can you remember a time when you are the donor The Giver a major act of generosity big deal for you experienced sacrifice we need to do this thing and give this thing

for someone else.

And what was it like for you to do this? I didn't make you feel how do you feel? Now remembering You can take a deep breath like oh and when you're ready, open your eyes. What were some of the differences between these different acts of generosity? You notice any differences between when there were big or small acts? Are you the recipient Are you with a donor The same either way, and how did it make you feel? How did it How did it make you feel?

aligned forces the universal

forces of the universe we're aligning in the correct direction. Next to us.

I thought they were different. The first example that you gave that was the sort of the smaller, active giving or receiving seemed like the different sides of the same coin, and the one that was more

personal and home possibly in that ask sacrifice of you was was different, there was much more thought involved. And

in a way one had to really think through the ramifications. And

in a way, give much more of yourself because you were sacrificing in a way some something that you wanted and one had to put that aside in order to do something else. So it's sort of grown up in a way where we decided that it's not all you it's

there's others involved

and giving of yourself apart into the rotor.

I found differences on a slightly different line.

I found it

emotionally more comfortable to be giving I found it emotionally a lot more challenging to be receiving.

It's much more of an edge there.

You have any sense of why it was an edge why it was more difficult to see?

Probably a little bit around, feeling probably a little bit around feeling worthy was a joke.

It was around software and stuff. And so receiving something was much more of a challenge to him. He didn't feel worthy of it. Right. And it's also I think, why.

In some respects giving was easier because that created a little reflection of self worth for me.

I found a difference between the small gifts and the big gifts, the small gifts Were acts of Oh, they were acts they were doing something for somebody else in both directions. And they were small, but they truly truly felt like gifts because they hadn't been asked for or expected. On the big gifts that I received, I had some resentment. I kind of agree with the last person who spoke. And when you asked why. I think maybe it's because I felt obligated to feel more for that person than I really did.

And in giving a larger gift, I felt like I couldn't give enough. So the small gifts worked a lot better for me.

It probably depends on the ones we brought forth, but I noticed a difference between the small gifts given and the larger ones, the small ones I found were kind of like,

one, they had the element of wanting to surprise someone and please them. So I wanted some recognition from those. Some of the bigger gifts were more genuine in that sense of rightness or alignment that was mentioned earlier, it just felt something was sort of flowing through and happy to be a part of that.

For me, that didn't seem to be a big difference between the giving and receiving but this smaller gifts seem more spontaneous.

And

so it was kind of a relief of that there's no time to second guess the motivations behind this.

Appreciate it.

Big gifts I have a tremendous gratitude, two to two very big gifts given to me. And to this day when I think about it, with being able to come to this country as an immigrant and have a job

lined up, my heart just goes

for it. I have the greatest gratitude to that. And of course, I had, I was lucky enough to get people were good. I went to missionary school where the my schooling was paid for. And these two gifts changed my life. But I had a very high I have a very hard time

receiving gifts anymore. I feel like I don't need anymore. I've been given enough. And it's really a good feeling.

To be able to giving has been easier now

because I've received so much. Thank you so thank

you everyone. And we'll see this side of the room.

So

I in my course, on my own practice, I represent a certain trend of a certain way of practicing Buddhism. That often is the case here in the west of people who begin with meditation practice. And, and then they kind of go backwards in Buddhism. And what I mean by this is that classically, in Buddhism, you don't start with meditation practice, but you start with generosity, practicing generosity. Practicing ethics, practicing, creating healthy relationships between yourself and others. And then after having that as a foundation, then you would practice meditation practice. And but, you know, in the 60s and 70s, a lot of us, you know, kind of were rejecting ethics. That wasn't what it was about, right. And, and it was, you know, getting to the heart of the matter, the essence of this spiritual discipline in life and so meditation was like the be all and end all. And as many people in the West discovered is that as mutation has an effect on us, relax as the heart relaxes the defensive ways or the ambitious ways of the eat the greed and the hate that we might have that it opens up to a greater sensitivity that is expressed both in love and caring and sense of connectedness to others. And it feels more natural. Then to give the natural feels easy, it feels some kind of that's kind of what the heart wants to do. And for me, once that happened, sorry to happen, then I began to appreciate that giving was also a good practice. It wasn't only something to be done when it's spontaneous, but it's also something to help to do as a practice. It's not quite spontaneous when it's a practice, right? When you take it on as a spiritual discipline you take it on this is this is like my practice and we do this in different circumstances. So what do you think some of the benefits are, from cultivating generosity as a practice?

I think as a

sense of ease

Create a sense of ease, a sense of ease.

Thank you.

Mike in front of you, Victor. You get to look at your motivation, say a little more

the aspect of well, why does one give? What is when giving towards the possible consequences of one's giving the unintended consequences, the ability to see through the immediate gift? You know, what are the ramifications? Here's, everything has a ripple effect. So, I've been going to choose wisely how one gets because there's unintended consequences. Okay, great. Thank you

very much. Further up here in the front,

giving, because you're a participant

giving opens up my heart and gives me a sense of oneness with that, to whom I'm giving. Thank you.

Well, sometimes I often think the source of happiness is getting something that I want or having things the way I want them. But being generous, seems to be a better source of happiness. For me, May my wife Redmond article from the economist last week about altruism. And it said that they found that people who give like to charities I think was the study was the reward center in your mind gets stimulated and produces kind of a dopamine kind of chemical and produces some kind of sense of well being, as with food and sex and some other things. So, you know, this idea that, you know, given by giving, being generous, taking care of others is a source of happiness as also a biological basis besides the ethical basis.

One thing I read,

one of the Buddhist books in the last couple of months, is if you have the ability to give, you'll always feel wealthy always have more than you need. And potentially with money, it's easy to see but if someone

is able to to spend time with somebody who needs the time they can feel generous and time also.

Thank you on the front.

I think sort of addressing the issues of self worth that people were talking about before it's a wave. It becomes habitual, if you're sort of doing it after a while and it replaces the harmful habits of it can just change your self perception and just without after a while without thinking and you start to give, oh, yeah, I am the kind of person I can be.

It does make you feel more worthy, sort of similar to you so it can increase your sense of self worth.

Audrey said something earlier, that there a number of times I've made gifts and made the other person feel very awkward. It's hard sometimes to know how to give. So you help somebody truly and not make them feel uncomfortable. It's more likely when I try to help somebody financially, then with time But it happened in both cases, I find that too. And

it's also a practice is it generosity is a practice. There's also a wonderful practice in receiving. And it's a it's a gift to be able to receive Well, I've had I've tried, I mean, I feel sad about sometimes when you've been a few times in my life, we're actually trying to offer something to someone do something. Once I was simple, I was going to drive them to the airport. And I was really happy with the idea and it was a big deal kind of hard for me to get the airport and nice really quick but maybe happy that you could take her there. And she refused to let me do it. And the reason was that she didn't want to impose on me and I thought okay, you know, and then finally I gave up but I felt a bit sad that you know, my, the source of happiness that I had the sense of happiness, which I think was nice and pure was somehow

you know, wasn't received by the world and we received by her and good to go anyway. Work Offline.  
So it's a gift to be able to receive properly as well.

Can I continue?

I'm by nature, a very good critic. I see, I'm by nature very good critic, I can see where things can be improved where their problems. In the early days, when I was running my company, I would tell people where they could improve. And my brother who was trained as a social psychologist would say, Barbara, you have to say, the good things as well as the things that are critical.

And I had to actually practice

and I also couldn't receive compliments. And I literally for several years, my brother would help me practice he'd say, when somebody give you a compliment, don't deflect it. Just say thank you, and then go on to something else. That's step one. But it's that's another giving and receiving of just compliments, receiving them giving them in a way that works.

Great. Thank you. That's a great thing to say. Yes.

I was reflecting on.

You have spontaneous times when you're being spontaneous about gifts. And there's other times when you're really reflecting and I had a friend who was in difficulties in was just trying to decide at one point what I would offer. And I got to a point where I thought of some things that I would offer and I decided, Okay, this, this is what I should offer because when I think about this, I feel a sense of settledness sort of that was telling me that what I've chosen to offer was not like more than I could feel comfortable with or less than I

could feel comfortable with.

But then I had to accept

when offering that the person might not

choose to receive what I was offering, and that was actually the harder part. the easier part was choosing what to offer. The hardest part was dealing with the fact that the person might not accept what I had to offer.

Thank you The Oh yes, one more.

Well, I went to say I'm very grateful for this conversation, because you all have helped me make a few connections. One is I'm more aware of my own thoughts, which get in the way of generosity. And so the idea of moving towards a practice which really is about myself in a free way giving and then it and reflecting back for the benefit of that lovely endorphin taking the other person someone added it because otherwise I find these easy that some of us at least I have seen myself in negotiation with myself, is it the right gift? Is it the right time? Is it the right motivation? And it obstructs the energy, the lovely energy and feeling so the idea of going to practice is deliberating.

And yeah, that's the idea of the practice deliberating. And, and part of the part of the practices, someone said, you also get to look at all the different varied motivations and fears. And there's a lot lot that can go on to get kind of churned up, that normally wouldn't have a chance to look at. So it might be more than just the beauty, the beauty that comes out, it might also be your ugliness that comes out. I don't want to No way. You know, this is my practice. You know, you know, I want it I want to try to be generous here, because it's a practice to be generous. But I don't really want to get to look at all that. And so one of the reasons why I like I'm very fond of generosity, being at the beginning of the Buddhist path, is that it has to do with our relationships with other people. And meditation, for the most part is Something internal, something interrupts for oneself. And it could, for zero, sometimes meditation can actually be self absorbed in an unhealthy way self absorbed and even narcissistic. And it's about me and my, my well being. And the fact that the path begins with generosity suggests that, that somehow the practice that you find the way the practice relates to other people. So it's not something you cultivate alone, but you do in relationship to other people. I think that creates a healthy sense of certainly connectedness, but also in hints to attempts to mitigate or tails helps to challenge some of the self centered ways that we might do spiritual practice. Having said that, one of the benefits of generosity of giving, doing things for others There is joy that can produce joy for us. And I've done acts of generosity that years and years later, I still remember happily, brings me a sense of joy and happiness. And it would have been very easy not to give in some sometimes I've given. And I probably never would remember that incident again, I didn't give it to kind of disappear from my memory banks, but because of the act of generosity as part of it. Now I have this memory of something that I did, that when I think back on brings me a sense of joy. So is it possible to avail ourselves? avail yourselves, have the joy of generosity, seek some of you tap into or do not allow you do not you not avail yourself of that joy? As much as as possible? Do you give and then forget about it, or do you give and allow yourself to feel some joy there's a Buddhist practice of remembering the good things you've done, and allowing yourself to feel the happiness and joy from that. Because that's selfish. It might might cause attachments, anything can cause attachments. Emerson, we all agree that not selfish.

Who cares?

That's getting close to the the. The Buddha gave a series of reasons why people might be generous. And I don't think it's meant to be an exhaustive list. But I thought it was kind of interesting. One could give out of affection. One could give an anger we can give out of stupidity. No one can give out a fear.



One can give in order to maintain a family tradition, we can give in order to have a favorable rebirth. When we can give with the idea that by giving my heart will be glad and happiness and joy will arise in me. And when can give in order to ennoble the mind and adorn the mind adorn the mind. So, just make them happy, but adorn the mind make the mind beautiful. It's an interesting idea.

And whether the tradition talks about this means there adoring the mind

is that it's shaping the mind or conditioning the mind. So that the really good qualities of mind present that will make it easier for you to get into the meditation practice to go deep in meditation. So to cultivate qualities like the joy and happiness joy, happiness is a sense of well being is very helpful for developing deep meditation practice. It's cultivating the capacity to let go, letting go, it's like a muscle we have, that you can strengthen. And letting you know letting go is something that comes together with generosity. Usually you don't hold on when you give and their sense of healthy relationship to others that happen from that, as I talked about, what are some other good qualities of mind that might come from generosity, that your ways of adorning your mind being less attached? Less attached to the actions? Okay. Thank you. Yes. to Mike nearby

I don't think I think that if you're giving you don't need to avoid as much, I was remembering as you're talking, I am not as good at this anymore. But when I lived in DC, I would always go down this route and there would always be beggars there. And I would just have money and I would just, I would just intend to be giving to people. So I didn't really need to avoid anybody. And now it's sort of, I don't encounter beggars as frequently. And I'm not as prepared but, but there it's just, I didn't need to avoid anybody. I could just walk freely because I knew I was going to be doing was anything else trying to protect

Ajahn Amaro who's a Buddhist monk, he made a vow at some point to give to people whenever they asked him, if he even if he has something, let me do something. And many years ago, he had this very expensive Palm Pilot For the kind of thing I looked at, Buddhist monk threw into that. And that is, and he said, Oh, someone gave it to me was a gift to them. And so you know, and then he said, when he told me about his practice that if anybody asks him for it, he won't give it to him, you know, not gonna keep it. And he still has it. No one's asked. I thought of asking in order to test him, but there's, there's a freedom that comes with that kind of sent that kind of attitude. My hope is that one of the ways we adorn the mind is by being less selfish. So there's kind of a paradox there, right? We're trying to adorn the mind, which might seem like it's selfish. But one of the most beautiful qualities of mind is to be selfless. Not to not not be clinging, holding to the greed of self And sort of to cultivate that capacity. And that after all is very closely connected to freedom. The path of Buddhism is leading to freedom. And if you're clinging to something clean yourself, you can't be free. So part of it kind of clear, I think it's pretty clear the connection between generosity and freedom because generosity is an act of setting something free, giving something hopefully we can do it freely. There is a Zen story is student teacher conversations that's recorded in Zen tradition. Where a teacher a student asks the master way

Hi, what's the gate of Zen and then it will say hi says generosity. And I love the story because again, is something go in, in through and you Come out of, I think usually you think of it especially like first thought about story on the gate into then soon was asking how to get into then. And so this teaches through generosity, but it's also a get out of it. So the way in and out of Buddhism, so you can get into it, you know, when you're finally ready to get out of it

because

in and out generosity is a great practices great thing. And generosity, the flip sides and one of the flip sides of guests or the other aspects of generosity is gratitude. And, and hopefully the two go together that that somehow feel the generosity that produces a field of gratitude. And it's really a beautiful thing to function in a world of a field of generosity and gratitude. Gratitude is one of the great feelings to be grateful. Beautiful, thing to feel grateful. And, and to participate in that field of gratitude by being more be being generous, is also beautiful. So perhaps after this discussion today, some of you will be inspired to explore generosity as a practice a little bit more than you have. And it can be very simple. You know, it doesn't have to be a big deal. It might kind of stretch yourself a little bit or look for opportunities and, and see what benefits come both to you and to others in giving and receiving and helping to create a field of goodwill and gratitude, who you're good at. It lays the very important condition for the growth of the spiritual life. So thank you very much. grateful