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SPEAKERS

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So today I'd like to continue this series of talks that I've been giving on generosity. And this is the third talk. And today's topic will be service as generosity, service as a form of giving. And so a little bit set the context for it. generosity is a very important practice and quality of heart in Buddhism. It's championed and encouraged quite a bit. There's a lot of lists that Buddhism is famous for that have generosity in it. There's the 10 wholesome actions. In one list with generosity is the first one. Interesting, it's called the for basis for social harmony. Give giving speech service and being equitable. Isn't that nice? And then it's the also that The first virtue of the 10 virtues of a ruler. So wouldn't it be nice if all the rulers practice generosity? Maybe they do. I mean, it's usually it's public service, supposed to be. And, and it but it's also the four virtues of a householder. And the fact is called virtues is kind of nice as opposed to duties. It's a four beautiful qualities. Its honesty, self discipline, forbearance and giving. And then it's the first of the 10 perfections 10 parties. When I was a Zen student, I was introduced to a beautiful I think, teaching about generosity and the connection that has to Buddhism and has to do with a story of a monk who comes in asks the Zen Chinese Zen master way hi What is the gait of Zen? And way hiree responded, complete generosity or giving completely. And why I like this answer. Is that or this question is that a gate is something that you go through both directions. If you go in to the home or something in the temple, you go through the gate, but you also leave through the gate through entering and leaving. And so the monk doesn't ask, you know, what's the gate into Buddhism though? I think that's probably what he was implying, was the gate into the path of freedom, liberation. And, but by answering the complete giving, I'd like to think that the Zen master was also pointing out this is the way you leave Buddhism. And you know, I don't know if you ever leave Buddhism Exactly. But if Buddhism is awakening is freedom of all Then there's the expressing of that. And we express it into our world. And so you want to kind of leave behind the practice in a sense, once you've matured in the practice. So generosity can help you into the mature maturing of practice. And once you've matured in practice, then generosity is also the expression of that maturity, the way out the way back into the world. This idea is also expressed in Japanese and teaching that in Buddhism, there's really only two things there is sitting in meditation, and they're sweeping the temple courtyard. And the temple courtyard doesn't stop at the temple gate. It's the whole world. So the idea that you sit in meditation, in order to purify yourself, clear, clarify yourself discover the possibility of freedom of compassion that resides in our heart. And then coming from that freedom, then you would somehow respond to what's needed. And if the courtyard needs sweeping you sweep. But you know, it's the whole world's our courtyard. So we sweep wherever we're needed. And this was kind of my introduction to the idea of service and generosity in many ways, was through my own practice of Buddhism and meditation, that I was not burdened, growing up with a sense of a duty, to be generous a duty to be of service to what is it God country and isn't the expression the surface service to God country and the crown.

And but one of the one of the surprises that I had was that as I settled into a meditation practice, that my self centered hardness began to fall away, there was my preoccupations tend to fall away. And I found it to be quite a beautiful thing kind of an Inner Wealth, to have a heart and a mind, which was not caught up in attachments and concerns, wasn't caught up in guilt, anxiety, which my mind had been, and rather a mind which was free and open and relaxed at peace with itself. And in a certain beautiful way, kind of empty, empty of all those things. And what I found was when I left my meditation and went into wherever I was going next, that there was a response that tend to tended to arise or come out of me in response to what I encountered. And that response has a lot to do with what the needs were around me if the courtyard needed to be swept Then if I had time and had the ability to take care of that, then I would offer that to the sweeping. But there was an unselfish consciousness to that. It wasn't like, Oh, I'm the great sweeper and you know, I better I better everybody better be looking at me so that they can see that I'm, you know, what a great sweeper I am or how, what a great helper I am or something. But it was just kind of what what arose out of me. And this idea that generosity or service or serving would come out of the emptiness of beautiful emptiness or freedom of the heart was part of the gift I felt that Buddhist practice gave me. It was renewed or kind of rediscovery discovered but re appreciated when I was a new parent. And one of the surprises of being a new parent was the degree to which so I have to say this in a way, there's not going to, you have to give me Be patient, as I say this to explain myself. The degree to which I didn't count. So what I meant by that is that I mean, I didn't feel like I was too caught up in myself. But it was so clear when these children were babies that their welfare was paramount to just was a natural thing. And whether they woke up in the middle of the night, whatever was going on their needs, as a baby was, you know, just can't seem to come pretty naturally automated, that's what you do. And, you know, some of you may remember if you were a parent, remember the disaster it was in the, in the sense in the sense that of how much you had to give up. So for example, you know, many, many parents point out you know, that before they had children, they care a little bit about how they groom themselves. You know and as a new parent sometimes you know you just don't have time for a shower. You couldn't care less you know you got to go shopping and you know who cares you know you're too tired to care anyway and so things that you were really important before just fall away and so it was just I felt I found myself as I was a new parent a certain kind of beautiful I felt falling away of self concern like I didn't like eautiful way of feeling I don't care I don't I don't matter here anymore. So getting up in the middle and I know I'll be tired the next day it doesn't matter. So I don't know if I conveyed that but it was felt beautiful to have this kind of freedom and other people who are completely tired with it about themselves. You know, some of you probably been around yourself long enough that you know it's it's so tiring got the same thoughts and said same concerns and worries and you know, give me a break. And, and sometimes the acts of service and caring for someone else is such a relief from the alternative.

But it's also a source of joy to do it. And it was a source of joy and, and delight and kind of freedom and ease. I was surprised by some of the ease with which being a parent, some of the things I did as a parent. So maybe this is where I have to warn you about the gruesome next example to prepare yourself. One of the great surprises as a parent when my baby my kid was a little baby was you know, kids get sick and they throw up right. And so we you know, our bedroom had a carpet and so it wasn't the best thing to throw up in a carpet, right? So this thing of the kid was throwing about to throw up and then cupping my hands together like this, and to receive the vomit and, you know, that was something but the back that I wasn't grossed out about it. There was something about that maybe the closeness the bond of parent and child, it just was, you know, it was like, you know, it was a kind of ease with it to kind of freedom with it. Okay, that's what's happening. And so I don't know how that conveys to other people or whether I'm just strange. But another important lesson that I had about kind of serving others or attending to other supporting others, which I think we would service has a lot to do with was many years ago, I went for a hike in a desert environment with a group of people was kind of like a guided

hike and a large group of people. And there was a one woman, elderly woman who had difficulty with a hike because it actually was a difficult hike because it required climbing over it was going through these canyons and ravines and, and we had to kind of climb over certain canyon walls a little bit, you know, eight foot tall Over boulders, it was really narrow with some places and steep and all kinds of things. And so it became quickly apparent to me that this was probably too hard for her to do or very difficult for her. And so I stayed behind she was the last one I stayed behind with her. And whenever she needed help, I would help her up, or, you know, lift up or lift her up or pull her up or whatever was needed. And very quickly, I was surprised by what I was feeling. And as I did it, I started feeling happier and happier or happy is not quite right word but a glowing warm feeling in my body, kind of reading from my chest. Not that this is really strange, I'm this is really good. This feels good. This feels good to be there. Same thing behind and giving her a hand and, and I partly kind of continued because it felt so good for me. And that was surprised. Many years later I read about oxytocin, which is this hormone that gets released sometimes when you act when you have compassion, and part of the function oxytocin is make you feel Good, and feel warm and happy and kind of relaxed. So perhaps everyone was going on. And perhaps that's the physiological basis where people say that if you want to be happy, help others. It's a beautiful thing too. But it's not so automatic, that helping others being of service to others, serving others, helps you be happy, helps if you can sense of ease and well being, it's not automatic that it arises out of a sense of freedom and delight. Part of the, it's not automatic is that sometimes we have these very important, very strong messages of responsibility. You know, we have a duty you're supposed to, and there's so the world has so many needs. And so you know, and, and we're responsible for all of them. And, you know, you read the newspapers, you take the amount of people read newspapers so much anymore, but read the news somewhere. And,

and, and some people feel distressed by everything. And from that sense of distress often comes a feeling of I think it often arises out of a sense of inadequacy. People often feel feel inadequate, feel more distressed by every possible thing that they read in the paper, feeling of helplessness. But I think one of the advantages of meditation practice Buddhist practice, for example, is to be able to drop away fall away the feelings of inadequacy, which is a feeling of that activity of the mind, insecurity. The sufferings and pains that we carry with us that resonate with the pains in the world can be settled and healed and fall away. And so when we encounter distress in the world, it doesn't have to trigger our own distress, but rather, and so rather than triggering duty responsibility, which is a duty, it triggers our ability to respond and actually likes the word responsibility When we when we break it up, response, ability, the ability to respond. If you take said there were too quickly, responsibility, then I'll say that that's my, that has been my Achilles heel, my sense of being responsible, and I've had to spend a lot of time in my life, looking at how I feel responsible for other people's welfare well being and learn to kind of, you know, not to get wrapped up and caught by that. So, but the ability to respond is a beautiful thing. And so part of the function of Buddhist practice is to help free ourselves from you know, the tightness of duty, the conflict of trying to be altruistic and not really feeling at peace oneself. I've known a lot of people who have dedicated themselves to service out of some sense of responsibility or need that they have need for recognition need for approval or something. And in doing that, exhausted themselves, tied themselves up and in doing that also conveying perhaps

the importance of tight duty the importance of sacrificing ourselves unnecessarily or painfully, you know how we do something is as important as what we do. And so if the how we do it is out of our freedom, then the acts of generosity we do convey freedom, if how we do it is a practice, to free ourselves a practice of discovering compassion. That's a beautiful thing to convey that sense of practice. But if we act generously out of a sense of duty, and a sense of obligation and sense of ego or self identity that has to be You know, somehow shored up. If that's how we do it, then that's what's in some ways gets conveyed in the activity we do. And we're probably not really conveying what we most want to convey

to people. And doing that. Though I know sometimes people act generously because what they want to convey is they want to get the other person obligated in return. So that's, you know, that's what some people want. But that doesn't come from freedom. I love the word service. Though I know that some people are troubled by it because it implies maybe some kind of duty, but I don't see it that way. I see the word service is coming from the word serve. And I kind of prefer the word serve to the word help. And occasionally when the word help is used, sometimes it comes along with I'm better than you. I'm the one who's in a good position. You know, poor you, I'm going to help you. Whereas in my mind serving as little more than connotation that you're not better than anybody else. But you're just attending you're serving, you're offering me support you let me help here. We're all in it together, or even sometimes serve it as a connotation to being a servant, which means that you're a little bit lower than everybody else. And it's your job to support and help. That has a lot of problems, that kind of view. But, you know, maybe it's just my idiosyncratic way. I kind of see it also quite beautiful. And I see the I hopefully, the role of someone who's a Buddhist teacher, is to be a servant more than be a leader and to be serve and support and help people in their practice. And perhaps, this serving others I don't know the right is caring for some others is a beaut, also beautiful word caring for others, like you'd care for a friend, where you're equals Not that you're better not that you're a servant, but that somehow you're meeting and supporting someone else more like an equal. As you know, I may some of you know that in Buddhism, there are three kinds of conceit. So there's a conceit of, I'm better than others. There's a conceit that I'm inferior to others. And there's a conceit that equal to others. And so that doesn't leave anything left, right. It does leave something. And what it leaves is not playing the comparison game. And a free heart isn't doesn't need to compare itself to self or others. It doesn't need to be someone in relationship to other people. And so to serve, to be of service, to care to attend, to be generous, to help the baby doesn't have to come from any kind of comparison idea. As a self and other, we'd rather can come from just an openness of heart, a willingness of heart a caring of art. And as people do that, then it's I think it's more natural or more simple or something for us to find the right balance between what we have to give the world, what our skills and capacities and interests are, and what the needs of the world are. So someone, for example, who perhaps their skill, and love is cleaning house. What they do is they'll offer there's cleaning services. And in fact, there was now that we have this retreat center inside retreat center that just trying to get started and remodel and stuff. There's a woman who's professional quite think she's retired now but was a professional and in a high powered field who said came to us and said

I just love cleaning. I don't want to be a big time volunteer for you, I don't want to be involved in fundraising, I don't want to be, you know, what, I want to come to your new Retreat Center, and I want to be in charge of cleaning. And she goes around and cleans, he loves it. That's what you know, that's what she loves. That's her interest. That's what she can offer. Someone else may be loves to write. And so maybe they write fundraising letters. And that's what they offer. Someone else, you know, loves gardening. And so they offer their gardening now, if that's what they offer, that's what they offer the world. And so there has to be some connection to who we are. For it to be, you know, come freely make sense. And adult but it also has, you know, I think also it's natural to respond to the need around what's there. And so I imagine that if the fundraising person by person writes fundraising letter shows up and you know, there's been an earthquake and everything Falling down, that that's kind of natural and to offer to clean in that kind of crisis, but which is a kind of a match to that kind of kind of kind of a balance or we find ourselves in this wonderful kind of relationship. But to feel like you have to do everything, or to feel like your every obligation to, to be of service any particular way. It just a burden. My understanding of service is supposed to be part of the freeing process, the part of the Day of Service is its expression of freedom, or it's a way that for you to find freedom. And if you don't feel happy or peaceful or relaxed, in some kind of way from from it, then perhaps there's more deeper work to do. You know, stop sweeping and you start meditating. And clear yourself out. Work, work on yourself until

your act of service can be beautiful. I don't think there's an obligation to be of service But I think it's a natural movement out of that freedom of heart that comes from practice. And it's a beautiful thing for our world. Because our world certainly needs a tremendous amount of help support service. There's so much suffering so much problems that go on in our society. But perhaps, more important, then all the things we can do is what we convey in how we do it. So can we do it joyfully? Can we do it to convey freedom? Can we do it so that we're at peace with it? Can we do it so we don't get people given the message of obligation and burden? I think that's one of the tasks of mindfulness is to look and clarify what's going on for us. There is a teaching in Buddhism That when we're practice generosity, we practice service. The end result should we should be peaceful. Peace should be a result of it, rather than exhausted and in conflict. And there's another another teaching of Buddhism around generosity. I think I talked about it last week is we're not supposed to be generous in such a way that we harm ourselves. So we're as important as anybody else. So how can we offer without offering too much of ourselves so we start harming ourselves. Because if you harm ourselves, then we're not going to be in a position to offer the beautiful heart that we have to others are the most beautiful aspects of heart, the compassion, the freedom, the ease the generosity of spirit, I think comes best when we're not suffering ourselves, not burdened ourselves.

So

I myself am very inspired by all the service and support and volunteerism that goes on in our world. I read recently statistic that said that 60 million Americans, so about a quarter of the population, I think, volunteer on some regular basis in something and that doesn't count. You know, all the people who are taking care of their kids or their parents or, you know, their spouses or something. There's a lot of caretaking goes on. And I think it's quite beautiful. And, and I hope that, my hope is that as people mature in Buddhist practice, that they become survivors, that they become people who and out of their own beauty comes a caring a sweeping The Temple of our world to bring greater justice, greater equity to bring greater peace and greater healing to our planet that needs so much of it. So, those are my thoughts. And we have a few minutes if some of you would like to ask some questions or make some comments about the topic of service I'd be very interested to hear.

My name is Tori. And this is my first time here and I feel like this was definitely the talk I needed to come for, because I run a organization called Beyond Good intentions that helps people rethink how we're serving the world, particularly in the form of international aid. But what I'm trying to do now is get young people, particularly college students to rethink their motivation for serving. How do we get them to transition from that obligation? And that sense of selfishness almost because it feels so good to serve into more freedom based service.

That's a great question. I love it. I don't know if I have a good answer at all, but, I mean, you know, my first thought was maybe inappropriate to, you know, have them meditate. You know, I don't know if that's going to get much success with that with a lot of them. But, uh, the second thought I had was a naked fun. You know, make it fun and enjoyable, the whole experience and I think the fun and the joy part, I think will support the best quality of service.

I like this quote by Suzuki Roshi who said, it's hard to help people.

Because sometimes the resistant

ethical quote was probably part of it may mean that mean it's a little quote, okay. Probably part of because they're totally resistant is part of the quote.

Yeah, it's part of the idea. But so I like what you said about you instead of helping you prefer

the word to serve because maybe it's easy to serve people, even though it's hard to help so if we shift our Yeah, the point C part part of the what's nice about the word serve, is that you can serve people who can't be helped.

You can Offer them tea you can, you know, do things for them variety of things. And you know and then but in Buddhist monasteries there's often a role of being the attendant or the server of like the abbot. And the abbot doesn't really need to help but it's a nice kind of thing to offer. One of the, I think, great ways of exploring this idea of generosity and service, caring, tending caring for others, and your own relationship to it, is to practice secret, secret acts of generosity. So that, do something that serves someone else to support someone else that helps someone else that does something nice to someone else. But do it in such a way that they don't know you're doing it. And then see what I've like for you. See, see if that nourishes you, whether it brings you happiness and well being or whether it kind of makes you anxious. for recognition, or whether you feel like that doesn't really count because only you know, you know, people notice. And my hope is that exercise of giving privately secretly will teach a person the joy of giving. That's the joy in the giving the purely itself without all the kind of kind of connected attachments and concerns that come into play when people know that you're giving

us here in the front.

Now you also heard it's what do you don't give that hurts? It's not giving that hurt.

It's what you don't give that hurts. Yeah, I mean, if you have something to offer, and you hold it in and tight and protective and medic, said, What do you mean?

You don't? Yeah, yeah. It's what you don't give or

that hurt. It's Not giving

that hurts him being a miser hurts

or being protective and not give you know, for what you mean, or Yeah,

it's just really giving. It doesn't hurt, you know, right but

that doesn't hurt it

hurts not to give

sometimes. Sometimes you can see over here to your left

it's also the first time for me. I'm here with Tori. And I have a kid. Yeah, and we have a kid that's very young, and my girlfriend and gives much more to the kid than I do because he has this natural mother urge to to do that. And I'm more relaxed. I think it's gonna figure it out anyways, and if it's really bad and it will cry. So we have this conflict of her saying to me, you're not giving enough and I end up doing the thing. I say Well, you can choose not to do it as well. But I guess you can't so fast. It's really we have

this imbalance of giving to the kid and I, we often wonder together, if we listen to your talks in Berlin, I'm from Germany. And we often wonder how can we solve this imbalance? Because it comes up every day.

You can agree to differ. I don't know, I don't know what occurs to me listening to you is that the advantage of having two parents is that they can have different roles. And it's perhaps that different roles create a nice balance, that one can be the one who really shows generosity, but the other one shows more, the kid has to become more self reliant, because it's possible as a parent to give too much. And it seems like it's giving supporting it's like the best thing you can do. But, you know, of course, that's you have to stop doing it. What you do to a baby You know that they don't Baby, you get everything that baby needs, you know, just sacrifice everything for the welfare of the baby. But at some point the kid has to do start taking care of him or herself. So you know, generously hopefully, you know, with great service and joy and peace, you know, you know, we cleaned the poop off the butts of this baby. And at some point, if, you know, we keep feeling generous and more supportive, you know, the kids 27 and we're still we're still cleaning, you know, something is wrong. So at some point, we have to kind of let them kind of be off on their own. But it's not a you know, it's it's, there's no clear line of when you start that movement of letting them be self more self reliant. And so different parents can make different choices about where the intuition but when that is, and perhaps you know, life is always about making a mistake, to some degree and always then finding our way in correcting so having two parents, then you know that you can be both sides of the perfect of doing it perfectly. And so that way the kid gets both sides and maybe that's a good way to go forward. So agreeing to disagree, and realizing you have two different roles. If you both did exactly the same way. Maybe the kid doesn't have as much flexibility doesn't see different options. So that's what occurs to me. I wish you well.

And, you know, it's possible that you know, I don't know you know, you just don't know you and you said a few words, but, you know, you have to be little bit careful that it's possible. The person who needs you generosity is not your kid but your partner. So the more she complains, maybe the more you should support her Okay, so I hope that was okay. And so next week we'll do the last talk on generosity and I guess Thank you all very much