

2011-10-30 Generosity As Freedom

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SPEAKERS

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So today I'll give the fourth talk in the four part series on generosity, Buddhism, Buddhist teachings and generosity. And the topic for today is generosity as freedom. And one of the hallmarks calling cards of Buddhism is freedom, liberation. And it's really at the center. What Buddha's is trying to offer and trying to guide people to is an experience of profound meaningful freedom or profound peace that comes with freedom. Peace and Freedom are often considered synonymous. And so how is it that generosity is an expression of freedom? Earlier in these four part series I talked about freedom, generosity. As a practice, and they will practice the generosity in order to understand what's else better to understand where one clings, understanding one's relationship to other people with relationship to oneself. There's a lot of learning and development and growth that can happen. If you take on generosity as a practice, which means you might not necessarily always feel like you want to be generous, but you feel it's useful as a way of growing and developing. But also, generosity doesn't have to be a practice, but rather an expression of our freedom. It's a kind of a natural movement out of no longer clinging. The Buddha gave a description of a lay person who is accomplished in generosity, and this is the description. And what is the accomplishment of generosity. Here a noble disciple dwells at home, with a mind free from stinginess, freely, generous openhanded the lighting in relinquishment, one devoted to charity, the lighting and giving and sharing. So certainly done the persons on the practice their work to be free of clinging. Here's to find a stinginess with clinging or holding on too tight. Giving freely they do the connection between generosity and freedom. Open handed, open handed I think means without any strings attached here. And then delighting in relinquishment. This word relinquishment is very important word in Pali, is chogha. And it's sometimes translated as generosity. But it also has a meaning of relinquishment. And the word dāna, which many of you know is often the word that sometimes gets sometimes gets translated as generosity doesn't really mean generosity. What it means is giving the act of giving. And it means the gift given. And there's many motivations for giving that we can have. Some of them are not so solitary. And some of them are quite beautiful, but there's many motivations for giving. And there's many kinds of gifts to give. But it's not necessarily imbued with generosity to give because you can give out of obligation you can give out of fear, you can give out of wanting something in return. chogha is the word that usually translate into English as generosity, but it also has an immediate meaning of relinquishment. And relinquishment, is kind of an odd word perhaps in English because we don't use it that often. And it can maybe have SP associated with with things like giving up perhaps, abandoning, but here the relinquishment means giving freely giving, but by letting go so it's not an abandonment, like almost like a dismissal, like I'll just, you know, relinquish that effort. But it's more an act of open heartedness, a wholeheartedness that expresses freedom and results in joy. So here it says, One delights in giving and sharing. So this is the, you know, one definition. And so what is that movement of relinquishment of letting go, we're in the letting go, we feel wealthy. We feel rich. Is it possible and the Buddha talked about the Inner Wealth and generosity is part of that Inner Wealth. There's something quite beautiful that dwells in our hearts or is our hearts or can be in our hearts and

to discover that discover is discovered inner beauty to discover peace. The lightness, the open heartedness

and ease like a refreshing breeze going through the heart, or like all the doors and windows are opening the heart. There's no defensiveness or fear or closed or contraction. And to feel that it's a feeler well it's worth a lot more than a lot of wealth. There's a story in ancient times Buddhist times of I don't know if it's a king or a wealthy businessman who became left all that behind library left it to his family I guess and and became a monastic and since he'd lived a quite a wealthy life the other monks at all this guy's not gonna last you know your because it's a little bit you know, a little bit rustic to be a monk you're you're living in the outdoor outdoors living in, you're living in a forest and just a few things and eating arms, food and things. This guy's not gonna last and In one day, the monks who were bedding or things like that kind of last heard this former wealthy men, often the distance, exclaimed quite loudly, be happy, happy. Something like that. And they looked at each other. Oh, yep, you see that he's decided to go back to his old life. So they asked them, they said, No, no, I'm not going back. I'm just so happy in this life here. Because here, I don't have to lock my doors. No one's trying to rob me and steal my wants all these things for me. And I feel so much at ease and relaxed, and I feel peaceful in this lifetime. So perhaps that's pointing to an inner wall that's possible that he felt when I was the second time I went to Asia to practice I went and ended up just going to sit a retreat with Pandita Burmese Burmese teacher in Nepal. And before the retreat started, I was wandering around the streets of Kathmandu just waiting, just and I came across a Buddhist kind of store that had Buddhist art and statues and books and things that a lot of those in Kathmandu. And in the window, one of them was a Buddhist statue. And this Buddhist statue really resonated with me like wow, like, I spoke to my heart to something meaningful for me or something. I felt kind of resonated something really deeply with this statue. And I thought, you know, I think I've maybe I should buy this. And it said, \$100 and \$100 for me back in 1985. I think it was 84 was one third of my entire wealth. And I was, you know, in Asia for the duration, I wasn't there was no particular plans to come back. I was just there to practice, but I had very little money. But I thought I really would like to have this. And so I was, you know, for about three days I walked by look in the window, wonder what should I do? Should I buy it or not, is a big, big, you know, percentage of my money, so I had to think carefully. And then on the third day, I, it occurred to me that the most beautiful thing that I know is a pure mind is a cleanse mind of mine that's not clinging to anything. And to see that mind experience of mine to see the most beautiful things in the world in the universe. And then when I thought about that, I thought I thought, oh, rather than buying spending that \$100 for this Buddha I'll use it To support someone else so they could practice and experience that beauty, that beauty for themselves. That's what occurred to me. And then I don't know if it was that afternoon and the next day, kind of out of the blue arrived my girlfriend from California and she had less money than I had. But she came also to practice. So then I that money I had \$100 actually went along the way for how we were practicing and living and was able to help help her also to stay and both of us ended up I think at that point staying. It's almost a year in Asia, staying in monasteries and practicing. So this Inner Wealth that's possible.

The idea of generosity being connected to freedom is also inherent in a very important key And to call the army so that part of meat does the perfections. And these are 10 qualities of heart virtues, which when they say when perfected, is the springboard for liberation. And, but in order for these qualities to be perfections, they have to be intimately connected to both Freedom, freedom of heart, and compassion. So there's many form beautiful forms of generosity, but they're not necessarily connected to freedom. They bration not necessarily connected to compassion. But when they're connected, then it becomes a part of me which is very beneficial for ourselves. It builds it builds beautiful qualities and becomes kind of support and a stability and a foundation for a healthy and beautiful life. And so they talk about the perfection of generosity is being the first of these 10 parties and When I hear the word

perfection, I get little bit troubled. Now you're gonna be a perfectionist, you know what is mean to do it perfectly. But when I think about it, the word parmi also kind of has a connotation of that which takes you to freedom takes you to the other shore. Or it means other. And, and I think of it like taking the bus to San Jose. If you want to go to San Jose on the bus from here, you want a bus that takes you to San Jose perfectly. Which means that it got you there. It doesn't matter if it's an old bus or a new bus. It doesn't matter too much. Perhaps if it's a slow bus or a fast bus. You know, the fact that it gets you to San Jose, it's perfectly done his job. Or if you want to drive over to Berkeley on the Bay Bridge. Usually the Bay Bridge does a perfect job and getting your cross and And so the power of me is that which perfectly conveys you carries you, or expresses freedom and compassion. And it's quite beautiful that these two are woven together, freedom and compassion. And I kind of think of them as being inseparable, that somehow our freedom of heart that we have is a you know, is an openness of heart leads to the hearts being sensitive, feeling a feeling heart. And as we feel with our freedom, we feel the situation the world around us, and it elicits our compassion. As we feel our compassion freely, as we feel our compassion fully. We will feel the places where we're not free because it places we're not free is where we suffer. It's where we cling and hold. And so the movement of compassion is to move through that and resolve it, dissolve it, to find the freedom. And so, this idea of compassion and freedom being closely connected is a very important when I think for me, certainly I think much of Buddhist tradition. So, here is a description of Theravada Buddhist texts on the perfection of giving. the perfection of giving is stated at the beginning of the 10 because it is common to all beings, since even ordinary people practice giving and because it is the least fruitful of the other 10. And because it is the easiest to practice. I like this one is easiest to practice. So, to begin where it's easiest, though it's not always that easy, but, but I think it's easiest in some ways that perhaps my day is Because to the degree to which it requires something, do something physical, to do something in the world action. A lot of the other parties have to do with doing something. It's not about necessarily action, but transforming your heart. So for example, the last part of me is equanimity, to transform your heart so that you're able to go through life with a modicum of equanimity and peace without being caught up and reactive, is a much more hard thing to do then, to offer something to someone or the ninth perfection is loving kindness, and to really develop loving kindness is not an easy thing to do, and to have it be a regular part of one's life. You know? So it's here at the beginning where it's supposedly easiest. Giving has the characteristic of relinquishing

its function is to dispel greed for things that can be given away. Its manifestation is non attachment. And its manifestation is the achievement of prosperity. Isn't that interesting? And there's idea, maybe a little bit superstitious, but the idea that, that as we give this way, that actually we benefit from that ourselves, you reap what you sow. And so there's an ancient ancient idea that actually if you want to become wealthy, you should give the generous. Further when someone asks for something, a bodhisattva a person who's doing this practice should reflect this person is my intimate friend. For he or she now divulges their own secret to me. This person is my teacher, for he or she teaches me When you what catches me when you go, you have to abandon all when you die, you cannot take your possessions with you. So when someone asks you for something, they do that they're your your good friend, intimate friend because they're sharing something that's here they have the word secrets. I mean, very private. I don't know if that's true, but they do. They're sharing some part of themselves to you. That's how you view them. And then you view them also as your teacher. Imagine that you're, you know, people, your teachers, your kids. Dad I want because they teach you when you go you abandon at all going when you die, you cannot take your own your possessions with you. There's a story in the ancient Buddhist world of a monk who walked around with this patch robe robes. He had nothing but his bowl and his robes. He'd wander around He was a famous teacher with teach. It's well known for his practice. And maybe because he was well known a local King one day gave him a golden alms bowl and monastics with those things are allowed to own they receive. And, you know, there's they're not

going to resist gold bowl as much as as much as they're going to. You know, it just, they don't think about it just just a bowl. So he was walking around, and one night he was going to sleep in a forest. And he noticed in the trees, kind of kind of skirting around was a thief looking at his golden bowl and so he saw this and so he took mine over and got his bowl and went over the thief and handed it to me. And here you can have it and the bowl rat and the different With the ball, and the monk went to sleep for the night, and the next morning, the thief came back and said, Here's your bowl, I can't take it. And in fact, the fact that you could give it so freely has inspired me. And I'm here to be here to become your student. So I don't know if it's a true story, but but I will, I will tell you a true story about a monk Ajahn Amaro was a monk who lived in California for many years beautiful, man and friend of many of us, and he, I don't know when but maybe 10 years ago or something. He was given one of the kind of first kind of smartphones I mean, he could do email in this thing, you know, back when back long ago, ancient world and it was a cost a lot this thing back then. I don't know if it's true. And someone had given it to him. So he was with him hanging out with him and he pulled out his little thing and was checking his email or something and said, Ajahn Amaro, what are your monk your renunciant? What are you doing with it's expensive? You know, I have a sloth, you know, I have a cell phone too, you know, but I just have a cell phone, you know, it's, it's, it doesn't do anything. So make calls. If you remember those days, and, and, you know, What, are you doing this expensive thing? You know, you're a renunciant you know, you and, and he said, explained to me, well, in fact, it was given to me. So I received it, and I felt I reflected on it. I felt it was okay for me to have to keep provided that if anyone asked me for it, I would give it to them. So you can imagine what's through my mind.

To clarify what went through my mind was, was maybe I should test them and find out, you know, really means this. But out of respect for him, I thought I won't do that. But I kind of believed he would. If he didn't, he didn't feel like an acquisitive kind of guy.

It is one of the most beautiful things in the universe that I know is a heart that's liberated. The heart that is not contracted or afraid or tight, constricted, it's not resistant. That is just so open all the doors are open. So open that in almost I could so open that there are no walls so And that maybe there is no heart. It just like everything, everything in flow so freely is a breeze through it all. And to be able to have some sense of that, that beautiful wealth, Inner Wealth or freedom or delight or ease or peace, and to encounter the world, from that place. And then from that, to allow the movements, the motivations that come from that, to move from us into the world, is a beautiful thing. And one of those things is the movement of generosity, to relinquish, not to give away or dismiss, but to relinquish the sense of freely, completely opening the hand and letting go and offering to forgive. If relinquishment has the connotations of giving up, then it has I think the beautiful connotations of giving up Which in the old days apparently meant not abandoning or surrendering, giving up meant offering up onto the altar to, to make, to make to sacrifice used to mean to make sacred. And so there's something about offering up. There's something beautiful about coming from this freedom of the heart, and offering and release releasing. Because of what it what it does for us in here. As a part of me, it's important to remember that it should be also be connected to compassion, which means there has to be some wisdom involved in the giving are some deep seeing because you can give freely and do someone a disservice. And so, you know, is it really the right thing for this person is compassionate and supportive? Is it helpful for this or for a lot of people to really help and support and be meaningful for many people or not? I remember and maybe this is maybe a little bit of a non sequitur but remember many years ago, I think was 18 or something. I went up to Portland with some friends. And this man who was seemed like he was drunk and smell as alcohol from his breath, what kind of homeless came up to me and said, Can you give me a quarter? And I looked at him and he said, I said, Yeah, I'll give it to you if you're not gonna buy alcohol with it. And he stood up in a kind of very dignified way. It was beautiful, his dignity and nobilities he stood up, he looked me right in the eye and he said, something he said something like,

it's my choice. What I do with it. You know, and I realized that somehow when I told them if you only if you don't buy alcohol with it, I had kind of demeaned him. I kind of you know, saw this kid, you know, he's kind of like telling him what to do and, and I felt that he expressed his beauty in that moment, something beautiful. And maybe it was a little misguided, maybe I think it probably went off and bought alcohol anyway. But it was something very touching for me. And so this idea of compassion and respecting people's dignity and nobility in the giving. So we're not helping people when we give but as I talked about last week, perhaps we're serving we're supporting or even better. In Mahayana, Buddhism, when they talk about the perfection of giving, giving becomes perfect. When there is no giver, there is no gift and there is no receiver. Not the fact there is nothing at all You sit on home in your couch, do nothing, but rather that in giving, there's no self consciousness of being the giver. Giving, there's no sense there's even a gift being given. And there's no receiver. There's an intimacy, there's a flow. And so I'll end this, this talk in this series and generosity with a story from the Chinese and tradition, where a monk asked another, what is it like to be the great bodhisatta by the great embodiment of compassion, a great deal of compassion. And

the monk who answered said, it's like taking your hand at night to rearrange your pillow. So it's a little bit maybe cryptic answer, but here you know, what is it like to be the great Compassionate One, the one who support helps the world the suffering of The world what it's like is as unselfconscious and as free as when you are feeling a little bit uncomfortable with your pillow at night you go and kind of bunch it up and move a little bit and then let it be and in doing that perhaps at night there's no you there's no pillow there's no doing it just kind of so Stefan Katya so free and so easy to do it. Can we go through the world? Where are the best qualities of our hearts? generosity being one of the primary ones is offered to the world and that kind of ease and unself consciousness and beauty. It is possible and to reach that to do that takes off in a lot of practice. And we can practice generosity, and we can practice mindfulness meditation. In order and ethics and all the different aspects of Buddhism, so that we can do the inner work, to give birth to the most beautiful and wealthiest parts of our hearts, and then we can share to others. May all beings be the beneficiary of our mutual generosity to each other. We all take good care of each other. Thank you