

# 2018-10-14 Generosity

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## SPEAKERS

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So what I feel inspired to talk about this morning is generosity. And generosity is one of the four central practices in our particular Buddhist tradition or school. And those four practices are mindfulness, ethics, loving kindness, and generosity. Sati, sila, metta and dana. And these four qualities of the practice are not just practices that people do, but they become kind of qualities of the heart or they are manifest station of the good heart that kind of reveals itself, as we kind of deepen or open up in this practice here. So much so that, to my surprise, because of my background and upbringing, I kind of relate to these four as kind of sacred. Their sacred qualities are very special and, and there's a certain kind of feeling of reverence inside or a feeling of care caring for them, or for a certain kind of feeling for there's a wholeness in life with these four qualities kind of circulating around and operating together. And that the absence of them or not having them just seems like I'd be bereft or, or enough bereft is the right word, but that feels something was really deeply off off kilter or askew. are somehow in my heart. And so they're really kind of central to this tradition and certainly to how I've evolved as a person in this tradition. The generosity is one of them. There, there's a wonderful little story fable maybe. So once in Buddha's story, once upon a time, there was a monk who had very few possessions and had a old patchwork robe that he worn, often stepped outside under trees. But he, one of his students was the king of the land, who had given him a golden begging bowl, because Buddhist monastics will travel around with a alms bowl. And when the lid is not on, that means they're available for people who like to put food in it so that they can have food otherwise they don't eat. So he had a golden one. So one day, he was going to lay down to sleep outside and one of these places where he sleeps outdoors and he saw that lurking behind a few trees nearby was a person who was intent on stealing his bowl because it's cold right? So he got up and went over to the person and handed in the bowl. And now I don't have you here you know, and now I don't have to worry about you at night. Something like that. And the person couldn't believe is good luck and ran off and then the next morning when the monk woke up, the thief was there. And with the bowl and said I want to return this bowl but I've never met anyone who has this kind of freedom to be able to give away and offer something like this such great value as if you had no need for it. And somehow I felt that you you had greater wealth. Because you gave it to me, sir. And so I want to learn what you know. So I'm here to be your students. That's a nice story, I think.

So the, and what am i joys in my life is not only learning generosity, but I learned a lot of it because I was a recipient of it. And pretty much every stage of practice that I did in Buddhism, there was some kind of way that I felt I was a recipient of the practice, recipient of a lot of goodness and support and all kinds of things. And it was very clear that you In the early years of practice, that the people who were my teachers were just not doing it to become wealthy, that they there was an abundance of generosity in their teaching and their time and their dedication to try to offer the opportunities that I had. It was clear that when I was in Japan, that practicing the monasteries there and that there was a tremendous outpouring of support for the people who are practicing and, and they kind of the wonderful story that

kind of epitomizes for me was I had very little money when I went to Japan to practice I was there for a year was something like \$200 \$250. And I decided that you know, the reasonable thing to do when you have enough little money is to get a job. And so I decided to, it was pretty easy to teach English in Japan back then. So I'd set up to do teaching English had a job. But I had a week or two a couple of weeks before it started. So I went off to a Zen monastery to do a retreat. And, and during that retreat, I said, I didn't come to work. I was already ordained as a Zen priest and monk. So I didn't come to Japan to teach English. I came to practice Buddhism. So I don't know if this is going to work, but I'll take my chances. So I decided that when I came back to Kyoto, I would cancel my job. So that is in the middle, the retreats at the end of the retreat. There was was retreat was offered freely to monastery but there was a custom that you would at the end, if you're a visitor, that you put a little bit of money in a very nice little envelope and go to the abbot and make this offering and there wasn't really expected it would be much money in it. One monastery I practiced in here in the United States, where they had this custom. I was told to get go to the bank and get three brand new dollar bills, \$1 bills, and put them in those special envelope and the end of retreat, go and give the abbot that \$3. But there's something about the envelope, the newness of it, that kind of made a kind of a ritual kind of much more as being expressed than, than just, you know, you know, throwing a ball of dollar bills in the direction of the teacher. So there was a custom, so I put in money for and gratitude for having done the retreat. And we talked for a while, and it became clear that I used to have I was ordained by a Zen master, but due to circumstances, I no longer had him as my teacher. So I was a masterless Zen monk. And it turned out that in Japan, there's a custom of supporting master list Zen monks by giving them train money so they can go look for a master And so we were talking a little bit about this and it was clear I was leading, I wasn't asking him to be my master the habit. And so he said, Just wait a minute, and he went to the back room and few minutes later he came back with an envelope and he handed it to me. And so I left him with my envelope and he gave me with my envelope and, and, and his envelope had more money in it, then I had my impulse and my train money so here I made this decision to devote myself to the practice. And the first kind of kind of the first thing that happened once I left the retreat was this wonderful here I was, I didn't expect it I received support for my exploring pursuing the practice. And so it went for me that it over and over again in my life where it seemed like It was risky to choose the Dharma over the reasonable things to do. And I chose Dharma practice. Somehow things came together to offer support. And so I feel because of that, I feel changed by that experience. I feel I've inspired by it. in Burma, wood, I practice in Burma and people would come and sometimes they came in offers little bit of food for us, the Westerners who are practicing there, and it was clear that some of the people offered us little food, things were pretty poor. And I was so inspired by this, that I said, I have to practice now for them. You know, for their sake, I have to kind of be worthy of what's been given to me. And it wasn't a burden those feelings, it was actually kind of it kind of made my heart sing like Okay, okay, now, it's not just for me.

It's, you know, but yeah, I gotta try harder here, replied myself more. And just delighted by it all. And so if you go all the way back to the time of the Buddha, there's a lot of emphasis on the value of generosity and giving. The Buddha said something like, if you knew the benefits that come from offering the generous gifts, you wouldn't let a single meal go by without sharing it somehow. And there's a wonderful one that was a Zen monk. For years, we would eat in the meditation hall and it kind of ritual way and, and the rich chanting and eating and bowing in all kinds of things. But at the end of the meal, you are active during that portion of that ritual eating. You had to always take a little bit of the food that you received, and put it on a little stick you had with you and your next year bowl and put it there. And then they would come along the people who served you the food and that collect a little morsel of you know something Put there, and they've collected from all the people who were eating. And then they'd go off and offer it's someplace in nature. They put it out in the woods or something for the critters or something. It's an offering, symbolizing to say you don't ever eat something, you never received something without then turning around and offering it back. And it was a ritual. And the amount of food

that went out to those critters out there was pretty small. But symbolically to feel this exchange that we're connected to the natural world, the nonhuman world, its wider world, and that we're living kind of in a mutual exchange in a relationship to it. Slowly slowly dawned on me by everyday doing this little ritual, you know, it's good. I'm slow learner sometimes but, but it was headed in over time, it had a big impact on me. And Buddhism, especially through the monastic community, is set up to be a gift economy. A gift economy is very different than a commercial consumer economy, where you just have money to buy. A gift economy has a lot to do with the relationships, the field of relationships you're in. A gift is something that's for generously in relationship to the contact relationship people have with each other. And it's a feedback system of care of support of respect of, of generosity, that to be intact, everyone has to kind of play their parts. So from an aesthetics, they have to be ethical. They have to be worthy for generosity. They have to pick off the season that they're practicing uprightly and well and their ethical and maybe their kind and variety of things. And if they aren't, then people aren't inspired to offer them food and also their money. sticks have to be in relationship with the lady. Because the idea is that if you receive something from them, you're supposed to offer something back. And the only thing that monastics can offer back is they're allowed to offer really is teaching. And so there's this reciprocity, of giving and taking, it puts them in kind of personal contact with each other. It kind of commercial consumer economy that we have here, this country, all you need to do is have money. You have a relationship with money, and where your where your goods come from, who produced them, has very little bearings very easy to ignore all that where your goods go after you're finished with them and you put them in the trash or something. And it can be a bit so easy not to give any thought to that money. And the money exchange of money, creates the creates a very different system of exchange, and they give the economy there's so much that's lost and they're really lationship to the natural world to the human world to each other. That doesn't simply doesn't happen. Now, maybe that's why some people prefer it. Because some people don't want to be in relationship to the world and other people too much. Especially if you have to share with them. And it just kind of it's more, you know, it's some, for some people, it's fear involved, and it's better just to be kind of in your own little world. Some people, it's greed that's involved, I just want it for myself, and I just want to benefit myself and not have to think about anybody else at all, and I deserve it after all. So no matter if those my analysis is, you know, filled out very well. But it might it's very interesting to consider the difference between a gift economy and a commercial economy.

And Buddhism, over down through the centuries, has primarily existed in a gift economy. Where the whole exchanged of generosity is built into the fabric that keeps it going and supports it's a Mexican makes it happen. So this the practice of generosity has a lot of aspects to it. So one aspect is in terms of what I just said now is what it does in terms of establishing healthy social relationships. And often it said in Buddhism, that generosity is the first practice that people practice is the gateway into Buddhism. And if that's the case, then the gateway into Buddhism is not a personal exploration for your own sake, but immediately puts you in a field of related relatedness relatedness to other people, because you know, yeah, generally, I guess you can be generous to yourself, but that's very, you know, that could easily be confused with selfishness. But the but generally generosity is done outwards to others to giving a connecting to others. And so it's establishing the field of practice your Buddhism, that it's something is interrelated, interrelated, interrelated to people. Like in our tradition where we emphasize so much meditation, oh, sit down and close your eyes. It can lend itself to a feeling of being self involved into this practice, and even being selfish and kind of actually some people being disconnected and intentionally pulling back from those relationships and what goes on and, and that, that might have its place and time to do some of that. But the foundation of the liberation of Buddhism is one that keeps us the heart completely open to the world of our relationship to people, people around us The other aspect of generosity is that it's a practice. And as a practice very interesting, and they say it this way that generosity is non obligatory. If it's obligatory, it's not generous. So there's kind of, to be non

obligatory means that it comes it'll vary from place a free very much from place of freedom inside, or openness or goodness or, or, you know, self motivated, Lee just feels good or feels right. If it's an obligation, then it's giving, but it's not generous. Now, giving is not bad. You know, they're non generous giving isn't, doesn't have doesn't have to be generous. But here, here is where it gets interesting in terms of Buddhist practice. This, it's possible to take up the practice of giving. Because we think we realize or understand that the practice of doing it is beneficial in a variety of different ways. So deciding to be generous, to beside designed to give, you get to see and look at a mirror for to show you all the ways you don't want to give. You see what I'm not very generous, I'm actually miserly or I'm too afraid to give or I'm too annoyed with that person to give or it's just all this stuff that goes on. There's a rich inner world that exists that that interferes with our generosity. And it's really good to learn what that interference is. And so to practice, be giving, even when you don't want to, can, can it and if you did with mindfulness for this purpose Really reveals a lot of what's going on inside of us. This is actually very important, because generosity can be seen as an ideal. What beautiful ideal. But it's possible to be oppressed by ideal ideals. It's possible to have this big like you, I don't live up to it. I'm supposed to be this way and I'm not and, and now I have to kind of force myself to be generous and it just kind of very quickly becomes, you know, kind of a mess with ideals.

But one of the values of ideals is to help us see how we don't live up to the ideal, meaning what interferes with the ideal. And that's actually a great lesson. Because if you see how you're selfish, see how you might be greedy or miserly. See how you're afraid of other people. See how You know, all kinds of things about yourself, then you have a chance to work through it, you have a chance to look at it and take an inventory and decide, is this really how I want to live my life? Is this really the best for for me. And if you work through that, you still don't have to be generous. In fact, it might be that the circumstance you're in doesn't call for generosity. It's the wrong ideal. And if you thought the idea was to be generous, you could give in the wrong situations. But working through the obstacles, generosity gives us a lot more ability to kind of come come from many places, not just from a generous place. So to practice giving, as a mirror as a challenge. And many years ago, there was a teacher I know who encouraged people to go around in their wallet or in their pocket with a \$20 bill. And the practice was find someone you don't know, their next week to give it to. And in the back then \$20 more like maybe \$50 now. And so, you know, it's like \$50 I mean, you know, do I give it to and why do I give it then, and all these different issues come up personal issues, interpersonal issues, in that reflection about who should I give this to, and why and how and all these things. And, and this is kind of the practice of giving, for the benefit of understanding ourselves better. Practice of giving also can teach us something about letting go and how wonderful it is to not be holding on and the joy of opening up the joy of stepping forward, kind of with an open hand open arms here, freeing something inside of us. And there's a way of giving that is freeing. It is a way Giving which is done with something, a profound feeling of reverence for life. So, the example of when I was in Japan, when this envelope was given to the teacher, when I did that, there was a feeling of something special going on, there was much more than just, you know, my generosity, there was also a human connectedness and care that goes on there that has some depth to it as well. The Buddha gave some instructions about how to give. So this kind of interesting list. When gives a gift carefully, by maybe that means thoughtfully with consideration. The memory This is 2500 years ago before they had PayPal When gives it with one's own hand. So that you know. So this really could do it in a personal way in a way that's we're kind of in it or connected to it or it's wholehearted. And so even if we use, you know, a credit card or something or some other way, send in a check sometime, what would be the equivalent of doing it with, with our hands to you know, to really kind of do it in an intentional, embodied way, like you're really doing it therefore, when gives it showing respect, that somehow respect for the other person as part of it. When gives a value to gift, I think that just means that we feel that it's useful, important, valuable. So those are some ideas about how to give, but there were some other wonderful ones.



I thought Although there was one, there was also the Buddha said that once you give a gift in such a way to not demean the other person or not, disrespect the other person or denigrate the other person, because sometimes gifts can do funny things in relationships to each other. So to give in such a way that the respect the person but not to denigrate the person anyway. The Buddha also talked about a variety of motivations for giving. There's a two sets of eight. One can give spontaneously. I'm not sure what that means, but maybe it just means without any thought. One can give out of fear to reciprocate a gift in the hope to receive a good In return by thinking it is good to give by thinking it's improper to deny food to a monastic, who has none in order to get a good reputation and because it enables the mind adorns the mind. So, the last category is kind of interesting. And this next list, some of it repeats, but the last one it's also interesting. When gives out of affection, when gives in anger, when gives out of stupidity, when gives out of fear, when gives to maintain a family tradition, when gives in order to have a favorable rebirth when give By giving by give but give is believing that by giving my heart will be glad. And happiness and joy will arise in me. When gives in order to ennoble the mind and adorn the mind. So the same last one and it's the tradition says this last one is the best reason to give which is kind of strange, you know, a little odd wise, why is that the best one shouldn't be better for the sake of the other person and why is this the best reason. They also say that when we enable or adorn the mind, we're preparing the mind to practice, insight and concentration. It's preparing the mind for to do something really good. And the idea adorning the mind is to create a mind that has no static

It's adorning the mind is to create a mind that is open and agitated, clear, available for the world kind of open. Maybe other ways. It's a beautiful thing liberated mind. So, when can give, as a practice, when can give for a variety of reasons. The third reason for giving is as an expression of generosity, or I like to think of it as an expression of our freedom. Buddhism puts a tremendous emphasis on the capacity to be unencumbered by attachments, by craving by compulsion, unencumbered by fear selfishness, stinginess. And this idea of being unencumbered to have cast off the shackles or the tightness or the restrictions that the heaviness the burdens that we can live under, creates a heart a mind. That's very open, very clear, very transparent, very free. And, and, and so, generosity is becomes an expression of that or a manifestation of that. And some Buddhist traditions say that when generosity is given in this kind of way as an expression or as a manifestation of our inner freedom. The idea that there is a giver or a receiver and gift kind of disappear in the process. The self consciousness of me being a giver, even though Jen Giving is happening me that it's about me myself in mind, this self consciousness kind of disappears just feels like this is the nature of reality that they're skipping going on here. It's just a flow. And the idea that the other person is a, you know, certainly we can respect the person but the idea that there's a receiver, there, the freedom of giving is something like, there's nothing being given. It's kind of like maybe in a family, right? In a family sometimes, you know, your family member might make supper for the rest of the family. It's an act of generosity. But are we doing it for the other or I'm doing it for the big we? Did, we just this is what we do for each other. It's not like an issue or it's not like a feeling of separation or something. It's just, you know, we're all in it together. This is just just as much yours as this mine. One of the formative experience I had in my life was when I was 17. And I had the occasion to bum around Europe with four friends with almost no money. And, and it was remarkable how we all just shared whatever we had was no sense of anybody had anything different. There was no no personal possessions it would like don't something belong to one person, not the other. And it was quite hard to go back to high school after that. And where my high school friends in America had no sense of this kind of idea that we're all kind of, you know, it's all kind of our shared, it's not belongs to anyone. And so, a liberated heart has the ability to give with a sense of giver, receiver and even the gift just kind of fall away and that freedom and that openness and that simplicity of just giving generosity. And that's a bit of an ideal to do it that way. But sometimes by giving, we're exercising that we might have some sense of freedom, some sense of inner goodness and what it's like to be generous or to let go and just kind of just to give in is kind of very open way. There's no giver or receiver and a gift.

Something is might know the joy of that or the rightness of that or the naturalness of that. And so sometimes it's helpful to act on that or stretch that go beyond just beyond what we're comfortable with, in order to stretch that or open it up or grow it or expand it. Challenge, you know, so we're more challenged. So our freedom, whatever degree of freedom we have, challenges us to stretch to expand it to become more and more what's here.

So, this idea of generosity, or that practice of generosity, the expression of generosity, for me kind of feels like a sacred part of life for our life, or certainly our practice. And I feel like it's benefited me tremendously and freed me tremendously and brought a tremendous joy and delight. As I go through my life and I live, I would be kind of my guess is I'd be feeling I'd be very bereft if it wasn't here, that capacity and that that aspect. So to be generous, to be giving. So what I'd like to do, since we have this tea today, and also because I think it'd be nice For each of you to have something to say about this topic, if you could share with one or two people next to you something is simple example, from your entire life of a situation person. We you learned something about the value of generosity. Did you have any lesson in the course of your lifetime about the benefits, the specialness, the wonderfulness of generosity, just you know, maybe, maybe share that simple thing with your friend here. And then maybe say hello and offer your name and welcome them here. And then in about probably 10 minutes or so, they'll be the tea and the snack and which has been generously offered by Sangha members. Thank you. And maybe you'll join with a snack where there's No giver, no receiver but just a snack. Thank you all.