

2019-11-04 Generosity

Tue, 8/11 8:04PM • 42:00

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

generosity, people, meditation, meditate, give, selfishness, monks, gift, food, joy, generous, benefit, bangkok, experiences, inspired, person, offer, confidence, money, healthy relationships

SPEAKERS

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Louder, a little bit louder. So let's see. Is that getting louder? Louder enough now? No one knows their heads I wonder if. Okay, good. So, talk about generosity. There is a saying that if you can't meditate, be generous. That's quite a significant thing to say. Kind of putting generosity as being maybe next best or equal to doing meditation. The and there's certainly an intimate relationship between meditation and generosity. We see it in language like giving attention. giving attention to your breathing is very different than saying you're paying attention to your breath. I try not to say pay attention. I didn't want to be expensive. But you can give attention. And, and it is an act of generosity, to use your awareness, your attention, and to attend to anything. If you attend to a friend, someone in distress, you attend to yourself. bring attention to yourself. It's a kind of food or kind of nourishment that supports us. And you know, the meditation practice, we do. Generally Peep has come down to us through people's generosity. So for me, I don't think I would have meditated except there were people who I encountered who think their generosity taught me to meditate. And I'm eternally grateful for having that opportunity. But where did they learn what they had to teach? Because they meditated. But how did they learn to meditate? Because someone taught them and where those people learn to have something to teach because they meditate and it goes back and back and back. So it's kind of like a chicken and egg thing. You know, where did it Where does it begin? does it begin with this warm hearted generosity and care that someone offer something and teach you something? Or does it begin with someone meditating and then from that comes the impulse to give and support others. The generosity is considered to be really a fundamental aspect of Buddhist practice and probably a good To be said that there would be no Buddhist practice without the practice of generosity. If you go to Thailand or Burma, it's one of the great experiences to be in, in the Buddhist culture there to experience the tremendous generosity of the people there. I was pretty blown away when I first went to practice in Thailand, and experienced so much support and so much generosity coming my way. It was kind of represented one day, and that kind of very little story but the story maybe because I was impressionable. I was meditating on retreat. I was young, I didn't have any much experience with generosity in my life before that, I you know, had ordinary stuff but nothing that really stood out as being somehow touched me so much. So I was I went to Thailand to to practice and I I meditated at a small monastery outside of Bangkok for 10 weeks. And when I showed up, the abbot gave me a, what's called a cootie k UTI, a little hut at the edge of the monastery that had was built on stilts because it was kind of on top of the swamp. And in order to get to the steps of this cootie there were all these planks of wood that kind of zigzag across the marsh. And so if you walked on the if you walked on the planks, you wouldn't sink in. And, and those planks led to the little steps three steps probably went up to a little, very little a deck and walk across little deck and they open the door you come to this one room, one room hut that had enough space for a bed for me and enough space for the door, I guess, or something was pretty, pretty small.

And I was to sit there and practice by myself. We're supposed to meditate every day and And I did walking meditation and somehow in that swamp nearby, we kind of got really close, maybe 10 feet away was someone's grave, I think, you know, it certainly looked like a grave. And but it was kind of the only cement kind of square thing that was long anywhere nearby. So I did my walking meditation back and forth there. And then that was my life for and I was not a monk, but the monks of the monastery went out every morning for alms round. And the meaning they went out with a bowl and they would walk the streets with a bowl with a lid off. And when the lid off, that means that they were available for people wanted to make food offerings to them, and they would come back with these bowls full of food, and they will take it to the so called kitchen and their main kitchen job was to reorganize all the food that have been given that morning and make a big buffet table and then one meal a day the lunch meal was made up of that food that they gathered. So the monks in the morning were out walking their alms round and I was meditating. And, and one day, early in the morning, maybe after the monks would come back from their alms rounds, I just happened to finish my morning meditation, I opened my door, and my eyes went up the cross, little three foot deck or something. And the at the top of the steps was a single apple. And then when I looked of my eyes went up further, then on the fourth plank of wood, going back to the solid land, there was this monk who was leaving, you know, walking away, so he'd left Apple there for me. And, and so there was nice to receive an apple, I can appreciate it. But what struck me the most In my small mind and background was that he wasn't staying long enough to get any thanks or to get any recognition. He was doing it without any need to be known as the person who was give give as the person who was giving me the apple. And this act of kind of, I don't know exactly, maybe it was selfless. But this act of generosity where he wasn't trying to get anything in return, it seemed like was just pure act of generosity just wanted to make make this gift and didn't want anything from me in return, was the kind of the lesson that I had, you know, I think was halfway through my 10 weeks. So I was my mind was pretty still and my heart was very open. And that just wow, the example of a little gift like that. And that monk had been the recipient every day of people's generosity. He knew generosity, that all the food that was available for him came from the generosity of the people around him. And then sometimes these monks, especially not so much in Bangkok, but in rural Thailand, sometimes they don't get much food and they, sometimes they have hungry days because most often because the people are too poor, or they are given food to give them a little bit of rice. And then if you're in Bangkok, you get a lot more and sometimes there's an abundance. And then, same thing, similar things happen in Burma when I was there. And it was just the outpouring of generosity. And it was very clear that the people who were generous there lay people were being generous because they wanted to support me and the other people who were meditating in the monastery. They really wanted to admit them. That's what they wanted to do support us. And I had the feeling I had the feeling kind of that the whole country was very supporting me meditating because of the amount of generosity my I was sitting one day just you know, very peacefully minding my own business, nothing was happening I was completely still very quiet and peaceful. And suddenly I was sitting there and a feeling fell out of my tooth into my mouth. I had moved I don't know maybe there was a you know, the temperature change or something I don't know what happened just kind of dropped. And so I mentioned it to someone and next thing I knew a dentist came to see me. I didn't make an appointment. The dentist came to take a look and tell me it's okay. There's still enough filling in there to protect the hole. And another time I was sick and doctor came from local medical hospital to take care of me.

It was particularly touching in Japan also had the same experience with people when I was there. I was a monk in Japan for a while and there are so the monks would sometimes go on alms rounds. In Japan, they often get people gave money in Thailand you're not allowed to give. monks are not allowed to receive money. And remember these, these old ladies who had the impression, however extremely poor, would come and give just a few yards, a little bit of money there to give it. And so when I was in Burma, and especially when I was in Burma, part of what fueled my practice there, there I practiced for

eight months, intensive meditation so all I did all day for eight months was meditate except sleep and eat. And, but I was inspired to do it and sustain my inspiration, in part because I wanted to, I wanted to be worthy of those gifts. And I think there was a healthy sense of healthy desire I had I wanted to kind of live up to all what people are doing to support me and helped me to go and, and so these experiences were very powerful for me and I began to appreciate how wonderful it is to be the recipient of generosity and inspired by the people who could be generous and inspiring me to start being generous. I discovered a number of things about generosity. Some of them I discovered myself, some of them I learned about from other people and, and I saw that they applied to me as well. And I learned for example, that generosity isn't always easy. Isn't it isn't easy to want to give. And I found that when I sometimes especially when I kind of had an idea of this be nice time to give and I didn't want to that turned out to be a wonderful time to take a good look at myself. What's going on in me? am I afraid of giving? Am I being stingy? I'm attached to something or am I close somehow what's happening with me when I don't want to give and I learned a lot about myself and my what was getting in the way of And as I got as I learned to notice those things, then it became easier to let go of them. It can be easier to be wiser about giving and to really give when I felt like I wanted to give. And as I started giving more, I learned how to let go. And there was a kind of letting go and giving up. And sometimes the things I wanted to give, I didn't want to give away and you know, something was important for me. But when they saw what meaningful it was for the other person, and then I started saying we know this letting go thing is pretty good. And so sometimes I gave because I wanted to give, always, always gave because I want to give, but sometimes the kind of primary motivation was really the gift to the person. But the other sometimes it was because it was felt so good to get to give. It was so good to let go of something I was holding on to to feel the release of the heart the release of my attachments. My fears in giving away and I could feel this kind of palpable of physical, releasing and opening sometimes as I know as I give the, and also giving is a is nourishing. If giving comes not from obligation, not from duty, not from fear not for an exchange, but we give from kind of from the heart. It's nourishing, it's inspiring or brings joy brings to light that brings happiness. There was a king who was talking with the Buddha and the king at some point, who should I give to? And, and the Buddha answered. And I'll give you some different translations and then I'll tell you what the dictionary says.

Give

Give where you have joy. What gives you joy? So that's nice. So that was the first first I first heard this little saying I heard it that way. And I thought, wow, give where there's joy. So that again not out of out of obligation, but that puts a different reference point for giving it you know, not so much because, you know, not not a heavy, difficult burden, something to do or an obligation to do. But I suppose to feel joy and giving is that that allowed I thought I was supposed to give because it was a duty, but to have this kind of delight and joy be nourished by that. So that's one translation of this word is to give. Another translation has been of what the Buddha said was give where you have confidence. So give where you have confidence. It's a good place to be If so, you know certainly you can give, you might give, you know money to a scoundrel, and it probably won't give joy, make bring you joy. And you probably don't have much confidence that the person is going to maybe do with useful, helpful beneficial things with the with the gift that you're given. And anyway we give we have confidence and what do we have confidence when we give mechanic confidence. So that was interesting to live with that for a while and practice with that and ask myself the question, what kind of confidence here what does it mean to have confidence? And then, but then, if you look in a dictionary, the word that's being translated as joy and confidence, literally means for the it says for the mind, what makes the mind bright. What makes the mind peaceful, calm, clear. peaceful, calm and clear. That's pretty cool. That that is the Buddha things that you can give gifts to people be generous, and it creates a sense of clarity and calm in the mind. So this idea that generosity, benefits the giver is, is one that's very common in the people who are involved

in karmic analysis. There's, they say sometimes there's two kinds of Buddhism or two kind of approach to Buddhist practice. One is people who are mostly interested in creating good karma and the people who are interested in liberation. And the people who want karma will give to build up good karma they get merit points, get karma points for a better rebirth or something. And, and for people who want liberation, that's not really the concern about karma points. There's a story folks tale of two people who could figure it out. They thought how to make a lot of good karma. They, every day had something had a little pile of money. And each day one of them will give it to the other. They give a back and forth. You know, making lots of good merit, lots of karma. And then the folktale goes, they died and they got reborn as wells with poisoned water next to each other, so the wells are poisoned each other. So this it was probably it wasn't really a good karma they created they were kind of poisoning each other with a certain kind of greed and, and selfishness is going to giving back and forth to themselves. So that, you know, there's karma side, but then there's the liberation side. And there is and that's why the saying that if you can't meditate, be generous, that generosity can benefit the giver tremendously. And, you know, as I've said, Now, you can learn about yourself, which we do in meditations to meditate and you it's a, it's a fantastic process of self understanding that comes up. People understand aspects of themselves that they haven't, they haven't never before is going to see depths of who we are. And so generosity also can be a great a great area of self education. Meditation is a place where we learn to let go, because you let go of your thoughts you let go of your preoccupation so you can be present. And so meditations a lot to do with learning to let go. Sometimes we do the letting go and sometimes we allow the letting go to happen.

meditations also place to feel the goodness of what happens when we're let we let go. generosity is a place where we learn to goodness, what it feels like let go, the clarity that comes the openness that comes the joy that can arise. The confidence that can come from that. There's a lot of benefits that can come from generosity that are comparable to the benefits that come from meditating itself. But generosity has does something for people that still think meditation usually doesn't do. And that is generosity is usually interpersonal. It's something we do in relationship to to other people or their beings or to the planet or something. And, and so, generosity is involves a relationship between the giver and the receiver. And if if Buddhist you know it's often said that generosity is really the foundation of Buddhist practice. And what's nice about that, it puts the foundation of Buddhist practice in the relational world, how we relate to others, or we live together with other people. When in the West, when people come to Buddhism, they often start with meditation. And meditation if you know can be, you know, somewhat self can be selfish or, you know, self concerned and just about me myself in mind. But if you start with generosity, then it's all about how you are in that relationship other people and developing healthy relationships and finding discovering how to have healthy relationships that can happen in the relationship to the world around you. The Buddha once said that, for the giver, it's upsetting like this, that if the giver hates someone if they give her gifts gift to the hated it reduces the hate so if you feel ill will for someone if you're stuck you know really feel ill will or resentment that's a time to give them a gift. You believe that I've given that advice to people that it's mostly has to do with in laws and people and you know they struggling with an in law and, and just going on for years sometimes and I suggested that they give the enlarged gift right every time you go see bring something something small to bake cookies, big bread, a cake or pie, bring something and a few of the times when I've given that advice, they've come back and said that made a difference that began began to ease or open up or soften the inlaw, who had some kind of fish issue around. It also can work for you. So if you feel some resentment, don't wait for them to give to you give to others. And unless you want to keep your resentment, unless you think it's a good idea to have ill will, or you're stubborn, or you feel justified, you know, then you don't have to give. But generally, it's hard to justify these things. And, and giving starts creating a healthy relationship. People have trouble with, if we get give something even if

we give them a smile or give them our attention as to how they are. They begin shifting the dynamics. And

the I've done that a number of times where I've had difficulties with people, and I've made sure to go find them and be in their presence woke up to them. And you know, it's clearly it was a lot of tension, but ask them how they are and the generosity in my Park was not in terms of giving them something, but rather giving them some, some friendly contact where I wasn't trying to resolve the issues or challenge the issues, I just tried to establish a little bit of a human contact with them. And I don't know how much I can't tell you confidently how much it changed them. But it did change me. Because I learned that when, when I have some kind of resentment or ill will towards someone, it's really it usually goes along with not having a clear, realistic idea of who the person is. I end up with a kind of like a caricature of the person, you know, the particular thing they did or it's not really realistic. And but if I'm in their presence, then I get the full person again. And then it's harder for me to be hold on to my resentment or my ill will. But if I don't mean the person that I'm living in this really abbreviated with this partial view of who they are. And so to go towards the people we have these feelings towards and be friendly, be generous, can be a powerful way of helping us overcome our house. I said, it's helped me change my views about people. At times I've done this, it hasn't softened or resolve the differences. But it allowed me to enter into the conversations to resolve those with much more goodwill, than if I did if I just call them up on the phone or something. I try to be in with them in person. So, generosity also helps establish healthy relationships. Especially if you think about try to understand their relationships and see what's going on and see what's happening in in their the Buddha said that Make, make offerings, make gifts. Making offering they can give, you should cleanse the mind and always, for the offer to offering helps abandon hatred.

If people knew, as I know, the fruits of sharing gifts, they would not enjoy their use without sharing them. Even if it were their last bite, their last morsel of food they would not enjoy us use without sharing it if there was someone else to share it with. It's kind of nice when I was in the Zen monasteries every meal that you eat The meditation hall, you make a, you're given this food and these bowls. And then you take a little piece of it, and you put it aside. So it can be gathered, and, and they are all the people's foods gets gathered together. And then it goes, it's taken someplace and offered someplace in the wilds for that fish or the animals or something. Because the idea is you always offer something back, you don't just take it for yourself and take it. And that was a powerful lesson in a Zen monastery is this idea that always you give, always even if it's just a little morsel. And

even if one

throws away the rinsing from a pot or a cup, into the village pool or a pond, wishing that the living beings there may feed on them. Even this would be a source of merit. Not To speak of giving a gift to human beings. So when you, you know when your food goes down the garbage disposal because you don't have pawns in there to throw your food in right? You know, you put your compost in, you know your food in the compost and to go off with recology drives it away. I suppose the equivalent would be well as like as I've send this off where it's going to go. I hope that something had benefits, some being some bacteria, some fun guy, something, I hope it brings some benefit. It seems pretty petty to have that kind of thought. You know, why bother? You might want to bother. If you suspect that. The other things you possibly thinking about when you turn on the garbage disposal or put To food the compost is not as good. If you know then keep stay with the good thoughts. But if you're just kind of like daydreaming and thinking about your resentments and thinking about, you know, you know, how to make you know how to keep more things for yourself or think about, you know, how, unfortunately you have to clean the dishes and you clean them too often and, and, and Wouldn't it be better for your slept

a pile of dishes on the sink rather than cleaning it all up? And I don't know what you think about. But if you have noble thoughts and wonderful thoughts all the time, don't bother with being generous as you throw your things in the garbage disposal. But what if you What if you don't have anything better than that to think about? How does that condition you how does that change you? How do you how do you benefit from beginning to have opening your heart or opening your mind to whole different perspective about how you to live this life? I think this is a crucial question. For many of us, I get the sense that I've been all over the world lived in many countries. And there's something that's beautiful and wonderful about people here that I encounter in the pin and so on. There are certain certain were nice things that I appreciate a lot about people here. And I get the sense that there's a fair amount of selfishness here as well. People don't you know, and you're not gonna go too far into the business world technology world to see a lot of selfishness, self absorption and money and wealth and status and all kinds of things. That I think is a symptom of a current kind of selfishness and then within it's contagious, You know, more things, more things, more things and more experiences, more things, all kinds of things. I want this, I want that. But to begin breaking the shell of selfishness is through generosity. I began to create a mind stream a thought, a habit of conditioning, of wanting to be generous and wanting to give and support this world and help this world and let the world begin with you and let it be itself this world right here. generosity is at the forefront. How can I give every day? What can I do to give so to give you if you're interested in a generosity exercise, or maybe you can experiment with or you know, or kind of, see if you can look at all these things for yourself. Look at your What to look at the resistance you have to look at what you're holding on to look at what it's like to give something away. See if you can give something to something and feel inspired and happy and good and calmer and more peaceful by it. Look to see if a given can do something you feel that helps others and maybe establishes a nice relationship with others. And here's the exercise. Take a \$50 bill. Keep it in your with you waiting, looking for

looking for some stranger that you can give it to And see what happens to you. Not that person nobody with \$50 You gotta be kidding, that's a lot of money. You know, I could buy a lot of coffee.

You know, I could have coffee every day for a few weeks. Or, you know, whatever. It \$50 may be big enough, some of you maybe it's not not a big deal. So for you, it should be at least \$100. And, and I've done that, and not exactly, not exactly you have done that. Sometimes I've been given \$100 or \$50 \$100 in dāna and you know, I teach and so sometimes I take that and I put it in my wallet, waiting Sometimes I wait a long time. I forget it's there. But, but then since Oh, somebody comes along, oh, I meet someone who's doing something or inspired and oh, here, okay, here. One of the first times that I did happen was many, many years ago when I went into San Quentin Prison. And there was a Native American men who had been who had met there and a beautiful man. And he's now he came out a few years ago, I think after he was there for 40 years. And, but this was maybe close to 20 years ago now. And 15 years ago, and I was told by the, by the people, the facilitator of this program I went to visit that he was a prepper Roll, but he really needed a lawyer to help him. And he had no money. And so I said, Oh, I have \$100 in my wallet. So I gave it to the facilitator, because I couldn't give the money to him. And, and so that was that felt good. And it didn't seem to work. He spent another 15 years and in the prison, but that felt good. It was a nice thing to do and so, generosity, the joy of generosity, the task is discover what that joy is for yourself. The task for Buddhist is discover how you benefit from the generosity. Sometimes it may be even more than you benefit the person that you give to to discover the tremendous benefit, self benefit and company generosity, tremendous benefit. When you learn to let go of your selfishness so benefiting yourself by giving up selfishness set a paradox. So, those are my thoughts. And we have a few minutes, six minutes or so if any if you have any questions, concerns, worries, protests or testimonials, about generosity like to share.

I work in downtown San Jose a few days a week and on my way down there, I always put 20 in my pocket. I look for someone homeless, and I just give them enough to feed them for the day. And when I found is that it doesn't matter how deranged they seem to be, usually when they realize that they're not going to be hungry. They come to this incredible presence and give me a blessing. And it's usually deeply religious and very warm. And sometimes it's the most intimate contact I have with someone all day. And I'm really sure that it's the

it's their moment of clarity. It's the most

clear moment that they have. Also Nice. Yeah,

I said, I gave here it's a quiet station, the shopping center nearby. I was going in with my young son to have get a burrito. And outside the burrito place there was a man Who was asked asked for some money. He said, You know I'm hungry and what's some food, you know, some money for the food? And I said, Oh, I'll buy you food. It's come with us to get a burrito. And so he went in and he ordered breeder so you could earn more I said, you know, whatever you want to know this enough. That's all he wanted to put one burrito. You know, little back on mind. I wonder a little bit. If I asked give off for him, you know anything on the menu? Is he gonna go for the like the most, you know, most expensive. But here's one one burrito. And I offered him to come to eat with us. You don't know. He said, he left and went outside. And so my son and I went outside and the sidewalk he was waiting for us. And he said I'm a poet. And then in it, you know, kind of in, in return for you're buying me lunch today. I want to read One of my poems, and he pulled out a tauren, brown paper bag pieces of ground paper bag torn, torn piece of paper. And we had written this poem, and it was a beautiful poem. So the question was, who gave the biggest gift that day that I gave? Was he giving a burrito? Or is he giving reading as pumped to me? And I think it was me getting the poem. That was a beautiful little exchange anymore. didn't push the button on the side. So it's green light comes on. I know.

For me, I'm wondering how, for me like selfishness was imbued in culture and parents Childhood even louder I can hear. And should I repeat that or? Yeah, please. Okay. So for me, selfishness was imbued in culture in childhood. And yeah, it's just so common nowadays, like in our society, and I'm wondering how, how we can kind of change that. I know that one answer is be more generous, like myself. And I'm curious if there's, I guess this goes with the dichotomy between self and other and like, not wanting to impose on others but also realizing change starts with myself. And I guess just your thoughts around that.

No, certainly change starts with yourself. So you know, it's a it's a deeply rooted thing, selfishness. So that's one of the one of the functions of meditation is to really get down to the roots of something like that and really understand it and somehow release it. So that's that. And then also, I think it's important not to make people feel like it's a crime to be selfish, because some of the some of the sources of selfishness are feeling of inadequacy feeling wrong feeling bad feeling. You know, it's easy to get and then then you know, if you shame people, they feel a bit more, more kind of closed into themselves and protective and all that. So I don't know how to change the society. But, but I think that if you could show the people you know, that there are better ways of living and not being selfish. Give them high quality experiences of one on one in community and take them for a walk in a park and show them that how much love and delight and joy there can be. That doesn't require getting something you know, or something kind of bright. Take them out. They're selfish concerns? I don't know. I mean, that's a great question. You know, you know, I hope that you can come and be a manager at IMC so that we have more programs and make sure it's what we have opened here. And so if more people can meditate and hopefully become a selfish, I don't I don't know. Good question. So thank you very, very much. And

whether you know it or not, you gave a gift to all the people who came today, the fact that you came here to meditate, because we've many of us come here to meditate and to receive the support of others. And so you received, you offered your presence, even if it's your first time meditating, was a support for other people to meditate here. And so, thank you for your gift.