

Friday Dharma Talk

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Yeah, so it's for me to talk a little bit about how this works with the Big Springs and IRC and all that. And some of you who have been to IRC will probably have noticed that we never talk about the financial systems. We never talk about *dāna* really there. And that's part of the culture that we have there. We have a very rich 35-year culture of generosity. When I started, I am seated. It existed before me as a small sitting group.

And I was invited to be the teacher 35 years ago. And there was a basket. And that basket was just for pay the rent to the church that we rented a room from. And after I taught for about a year, they noticed that there was \$100 in excess. And so the person who kept the money said, what do we do with this? And someone said, well, give it to Gil.

And so I was surprised. I wasn't expecting anything. And then nine months later, the same problem. And then at some point, I suggested there to be two baskets. One for a teacher and one for myself. One for myself as a teacher, and then one for the rent we had to pay.

And then, so I started teaching. And then teaching retreats a little bit and teaching around. But I was working as a TA for classes at university, and I came to this magic moment, because I didn't know it was going to be magic, but I came to this moment where of fear, interpretation, or inspiration, something there, a combination of all this, where I saw that if I was going to be to teach more, and I said, you know, don't retreats and teaching, I couldn't do that while I was still being a TA. And so, you know, so what do I do? I needed to be supported. So, but where do I get my support if I become, if I just teach more?

So I took that leap of faith and stopped being a TA at university and just trusted myself to the *Dhamma*. And lo and behold, at the end of the year, whatever amount of money that I had received from the university, that was met with *dāna* that I received. Just as kind of they kind

of, one filled in for the others. That was nice for me. And so since that time, all my livelihood for 99%, 96%, I don't know what it is, is *dāna*. *Dāna* that people offer for teaching.

And it's been a remarkable journey to do that, and really inspires me and fuels me in teaching because of how wonderful it is to receive that kind of generosity. And one of the forms of it that it takes for me or how I understood it growing up in Buddhism was never to ask. And so at some time point when we started IRC, we also never asked if you, if some of you have ever seen our fundraising, end-of-year fundraising letters, you'll see that it looks like a fundraising letter, it smells like one, you shake it, probably sounds like one, and it has a remit envelope, so it even looks more like a fundraising letter. But in the text, we never ask for money. We never ask for donations. And so it turned out that this really inspired people a lot.

And our capacity to have IRC, I felt I'm pretty confident that this very open-handed free way in which we offered the *Dhamma* was what people wanted to support, not just having a retreat center. And so when we started there, we never had it, we never gave a *dāna* talk. For a while, we, behind the back room, we called it what we did a non-*dāna* talk. But then after a while, for some years, at this, we shouldn't call it that. Let's just call it an IRC appreciation talk. And we don't ask. We just talk how wonderful IRC is.

And then last year or so, we were getting ready to graduate to a whole slew of, I think, 15 new teachers. We come to the place where we can now train our own teachers. And we had already had seven, eight, nine teachers. And how do we give them opportunities to teach? And so we started offering off-site retreats, meaning not that, because IRC doesn't have enough scheduling space to let them come each. And we wanted to do it in the same system, you know, just freely given. And everyone wanted that to happen.

And then for that first year, last year was an experiment. And it was interesting to see that we never, even, and we used to do retreats before. Before we had a retreat center, we rent facilities like this. And it was a wonderful business model because for every dollar we spent, we got 60 to 70 cents back. So you don't get an MBA with that model. But we were really happy with we thought about a lot as it's appropriate. And we said, this is actually given all the conditions, this is very appropriate. And I can tell you more if you ask me later.

But luckily, IMC always had... So we would, enough money that we would take a little bit of surplus, or the surplus we had every year, and devote it to supporting the retreats to fill in that gap. So that way we could do it. So every year we look at our budget and say, oh, this year we can do that many retreats. So that's how it worked. But now after all these years we're doing off-site retreat again, there was a big, this big difference between what different retreats, people donated for the retreat costs, and sometimes for the teachers as well.

And I was hoping for not quite 60 to 70 cents per dollar, because things have changed a lot and society has changed, all kinds of things have changed. Things are more expensive. But I was hoping, you know, something close to that. But it was interesting that there was a wide range. There were some retreats were 30 cents per dollar, and some were 70 cents per dollar. And so what I saw is that the really low returns didn't quite seem inspiring enough or healthy enough. Something didn't seem quite right. But maybe we don't do those kinds anymore. Because there's something about the reciprocity, something about the circle of giving and receiving, supporting, that we're kind of a, we're a community-supported tradition, or community-supported tradition, retreats. And we're all a part of the community, teachers who are doing it, teachers are offering, and teachers are practicing.

And that community supported is a really important part of it. We're all in it together. And so we're all supporting and making this possible. We're supporting it with our practice, by volunteering, by being here by offering financial support, whatever. People can do different things. And so how it works with... So we have this culture and field of generosity.

But now that we're doing it, it also felt like now that we're almost like starting over again, by these off-site retreats, it felt like, at least today, the first time I'm doing one of these, that I felt it was important to kind of name what's happening here, make it conscious for all of us, maybe also for me. So, Big Springs is part of this field of generosity. Sharon, who built this, kind of one of her primary wishes in building it, was to build it for us to come. Generically for people to do insight practice, to be able to come and practice here. That was her dream. But in particular for her teacher, John Travis, who has it sent her nearby, and coincidentally, for some reason, for me as well.

And so we're kind of fulfilling her dream to be here. And she is very, it's very meaningful for her. But she's participating in this field of generosity, because I talked to her, can we come and do the retreat here? She said, sure. We've got dates and all that. We never talked about money. We never signed a contract. We never, you know, there was never no, nothing was said explicitly about it at all.

So when we receive the retreat *dāna*, the so-called IRC retreat *dāna*, we'll use that and probably some more from IRC savings to feel like we're being generous back to her. So she feels that she is participating in this field, generosity and community that all circulates together and mutually supportive. So anyway, so we want... So when you make an IRC donation, that all of that will go for supporting or, I don't know, I want to avoid using the word paying for, but like paying for rent, it feels a little bit like it diminishes the richness of this relationship we have here with Dick Springs and Sharon. So that allows us to be generous to her. And so

that's the system we have here.

And then they always had the option to offer some of that, some *dāna* also to the teachers. And because the outside retreat, some of them also had very low teachers for the, *dāna* for the teachers. But we don't understand quite why. But some of the teachers, this is their livelihood. This is what allows them to keep teaching and doing what they do. And it's a beautiful system. They're also this reciprocity of a kind of community-supported teachers, when teachers are part of the community, but also supported by the community, and they support the community. And it's a wonderful feel, a wonderful feel that we're in.

And I think in one day, I mean, I hope that we can get back to the wonderfulness, the surprise, and the richness of never talking about it, because it's somehow implicit or understood. There's no sense of obligation, there's no sense that you have to, and no one's watching, and no one's asking. And it all has to do with everyone's inspiration. It's the teacher's inspiration to teach, it's the centers like this inspiration to offer themselves, and it's the people who come here, their inspiration too. Didn't someone yesterday make cookies? That was pretty cool. So that's how it kind of works here, the wider context for what happens here. And hopefully that's nice for you to hear, to be mindful of the bigger field of what we have. And you're hearing more about this, obviously, than you ever hear at IRC. But it felt like here at the inception of this, that it's appropriate to explain it at least. So that's the explanation.

So what would you like to do, Leanne? Would you like to give a talk or do a save it for tomorrow? Save it for tomorrow, but I'm curious, the Buddhist context for why? I don't know what to say about it. No, I want you to say it. The Buddhist context? Oh, it didn't just spring out of your mind. Yeah, so, so, yeah. in a certain kind of way, not too uncomfortable, but it's not exactly my wish to talk about this. Oh, but here Leanne is asking me more to say more. But she's asking me to say the Buddhist context for generosity. There's a number of ways that it works. But in the number of the Buddha's teachings...

Like, to describe the practice as kind of a journey, the journey begins with a person being generous, practicing generosity. And I think that's really brilliant. Many people in the West, they hear about Buddhism, they want to start with meditation right away. That's not how people start often in Buddhist Asia. They're kind of surprised sometimes that people start in America right by meditation. It's kind of lopsided meditation you do after you've done all the other steps, like getting your ethics in order, but also practicing generosity.

And it's brilliant, I think, because one of the characteristics of some areas of Buddhism, not just in the West, maybe we are a little bit more prone to this, is to do the practice with a lot of very individually, like individualism comes to meet meditation, comes to meet Buddhism.

It's my meditation, I'm going to meditate. I'm going to close my eyes, let everyone be quiet, because it's my meditation. It's all about my experience. And so it's very self-focused. Some of that is okay, not all, even though I'm kind of making fun of it a little bit, I want to respect it too, that approach. And I started that way, so it can't be too bad.

And the, but when you start with generosity, you start with your interpersonal relationships, your connection to others. And so what happens when we start offering to people, to our friends, to our neighbors, to the people we're having challenges with? all kinds of different situations. If there's a frequent practice of generosity, of being hosts for people and caring for people, it begins to rectify our relationships, it clarifies our relationships. We get to see ourselves, see where we're reluctant to give and what goes on, see maybe why we're reluctant, maybe it has to do with kind of an unhealthy way of viewing other people or being caught in conflict or something. But we get to kind of massage and work the whole field of relationships in a mode of, in the context of generosity.

And so in the process of that, our hearts begin to soften or open. We clarify something about how we live in relationship to other people. We begin establishing, for many of us, healthier relationships with other people. And so the practice begins there with a interpersonal world, rather than just first with meditation. And then it moves on to ethics. And that's also interpersonal. Most ethics has to do with how we treat other people or other beings.

And so there you're also kind of beginning to understand and look at and clarify and make healthy the relationships you have with people. And looking at what you do inside that is unhealthy around, you know, around giving because you don't give, or unhealthy around ethics. You're not an ethical person. You like rubbing bags and doing things like that for fun. And those kinds of things actually harm the person who does them. And the idea is to discover the joy and the opening and the support generosity and ethics gives to ourselves and to the world. It helps create this beautiful thing, I think, of creating a better self and a better world at the same time.

If the generosity is done well... if it's done without obligation, if it's done appropriately. Buddha's teachings around generosity is don't give in ways that harm you. Don't overgive. Do what's appropriate for you. And do it in a way that brings you joy. Where you can... A good part of Buddhism, believe it or not, is the expression to feast on joy. Maybe that's a little bit too grand. but nourish yourself with joy.

And so it's, and then finally I want to say the Buddhist context is that generosity is also a practice. So sometimes we don't want to give, so you don't have to maybe. But sometimes you use it as a practice, not so much to be generous, but you do it to kind of work on yourself.

Like, you know what? I don't want to give. Why don't you want to give? Well, I'm attached. I'm afraid. I'm this and that. And you get to see yourself. What's it like if I stretch myself? What happens to my relationship with someone else if I give them money?

And I know Jack Cornfield gave many years ago, 30 years ago, gave the exercise to people. Carry \$20. Carry \$20 bill with you. and give it to someone you don't know. I'm like, what? What an exercise? Who do you give 20 others to? You don't know them and who's appropriate and why? And so his idea is that you learn a lot about yourself and your preoccupations, your concerns, your fears. And that's a use of... Sometimes you practice generosity just as a practice, even if you're not generous.

But what we want, that IRC world, is we're trying to really nourish, nurture a field of generosity, a culture of generosity, so that it becomes integrated or integral to everything we do and every way we think and everywhere we go. Recently, there's two different situations where we offered retreats on *dāna*, really freely offered. But the retreat centers didn't know what it was. They just thought it meant, all it meant was you could give it away for free. And when I got there, I said, wait a minute, only then did I realize... That's not what it is. *Dāna* is a field of generosity, a culture. That's when I started talking about the culture of generosity. And this other center didn't know how to have that culture. And then it had to be built in all along everything we did into that kind of goodness or goodwill that comes along.

So nowadays I like to refer to what we have. It's a culture of generosity. I'm very grateful to Sharon, who's here at Big Springs, that she's sharing that. You don't see this, but she's behind the scenes just being generous, just doing and giving and wanting, supporting. And she just has a huge heart. And so she's kind of feeding this system we have while she's here. And now that I've told you more about this than I tell anyone publicly, I hope it feeds you. I hope it inspires you, that you get to be in contact with such a field and culture, and that you can participate in it in just whatever way is appropriate and inspiring for you. Nothing more than that, for sure, no obligation. So, is that what you had in mind?

No. So a little bit, I feel a little bit teeny bit sad that Leanne didn't get the chance to give her talk as she prepared. But we'll make sure she has time tomorrow to do it. And so we have two minutes to end. Does anyone have any questions at this point? Yes, Martina. We still get silence until we're clear. Oh, we go back into silence. So when I stop speaking, it's... So if you allow me, but anything else?

Can you say after tomorrow morning at 8.45 we meet here? 8.45 we meet in here. Can you say a little bit about what to expect of tomorrow's gathering? Tomorrow at 8.45 we'll come and reset the room in a circle like we did the opening evening. So I don't know how that will

happen, but maybe when we show up we'll do later something. Somehow it'll happen. And then, Leanne will give a talk. We'll talk a little bit about leaving. We'll go around the circle like we did last time. Everyone have a chance to speak briefly. And we'll do some other fun things.

And what time will you close? Oh, that way. The plan is to be finished at 10.15. So it's an hour and a half in here. Thank you. And then there's snacks. So then we can go to the kitchen and have snacks and fortify yourself for your journey and hang out and talk and socialize. How about you? The middle of the iPad is available. I believe it's available now. Yeah? Yeah? After this. Oh, it's that iPad. So as soon as they can carry it down there. Yes?

I really appreciated you sharing more about generosity. And yeah, if I'm wondering if there's any thought around expanding the talk at IRC, you know, we've come through so many different cultures and neurodivergence and all sorts, but we're not all on the same page around what it means to be generous. Yeah. Yeah, I'm thinking about a little bit. There's some conversation with other people a little bit. We changed what we say a little bit, the wording of it recently. And yeah, it's a very good question. It's a live question. I don't know how to have a good answer. One of my roles that I've taken on as kind of a leader for this community, leader for the vision of the community, is to be very conservative with the whole *dāna* model we have. And sometimes I'm too conservative. But I think it's better to be too conservative because there's tremendous amount of force from our society to morph into a different financial system. And the commercial systems we have are constantly coming and pushing in and people's mindset. So that's why I feel having a real... So even changing it, like doing what I did here today at IRC, I think that would mess the whole system up. But it doesn't mess it up here. I feel like I think here it actually supports it, I hope. But because it's all new and it's a new thing. And also somehow in speaking to you about this, it was kind of an experiment for me to see how to talk about it. And because we're still trying to figure out how to do these off-site retreats. We would like them to be successful. We'd like to do more off-site retreats. We have all these wonderful teachers who can teach and a lot of people who want to come to do our retreats. We would like to come back here. I'd love to do more retreats here. I think Sharon would love to have us back to do more. But how do we do it financially? How do we make it all work? And so how do we talk about it? Or how do we talk about it appropriately? When do we do it? And... Was I going to learn today that this didn't work? I shouldn't. Or learned that something was important to say something at this juncture of our development and growth. Yes?

For me, part of the culture of generosity is also service and volunteering. And could you say

something about that considered in the IRC culture? Yes. We're so lucky. how many volunteers we have. We have people who do small little things, and we have people who are like super volunteers. It's almost like that's their full-time job. They just love to do it, and they're engaged, and they can, and everything in between. And sometimes I think that the greatest wealth we have in our circles are their practitioners. Right. The second greatest wealth is the volunteers. And money is good. But I don't think of it as wealth. So volunteers are a really important part of our, kind of the richness and the spiritual wealth, the relational wealth that we have. And there also, it's a practice, it's a part way of people being part of the community and being knowing, getting friends in the community and, When you go and retreat and just come and go, you can develop a little bit of community, but when you volunteer, there's much more that web of relationships becomes much stronger. So anybody who's interested in volunteering, you're welcome to look into it. And I think you can look on the IRC's website about information about volunteering. So I'm done. I'm stretched. And so thank you all very much and it's time for supper.