

## Dharmette: Sources of Caregiving (2 of 5) Generosity

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So, hello and welcome to this second talk on the social emotions of goodwill, of care, the capacity for a certain kind of social attitudes, motivations, emotions by which we are inspired to care for others and for this world. And this week I'm suggesting five of them, which I gathered partly from the ancient teachings of the Buddha, what he emphasizes. So yesterday it was being ethical, which is understood as a dedication to non-harming. And today the topic is generosity. Generosity is an attitude, it's a disposition that we have. It's not the same thing as giving, because we can give without generosity.

And we can be generous without having much or anything to give. Generosity is a wonderful, positive human kind of emotion and attitude. What's really wonderful about these first two, all of these, but in particular, the dedication to ethical life, of non-harming and to generosity, is that they are clearly interrelational. The Buddhist practice traditionally begins with dedication to non-harming, which is dedication to care for the people around us, not to cause harm to anyone. And dedication to generosity, to have a positive disposition to others. So actually, not just avoid doing some things, avoiding doing harm, but doing things which are beneficial for others, to benefit others in the world.

Any kind of attempt to benefit others, instinct to benefit, is a kind of force of generosity. It's not a force of obligation. Generosity cannot be an obligation because then it's not generous. Obligation is a tension, is a pressure, is a force, a requirement that we feel we have to live by. And as far as I can understand from the teaching of the Buddha, there's very little or no sense of obligation around being ethical, around being generous. But there is a strong understanding that it's how good it is for us.

It comes out of our goodness and it nourishes and it's good for us to live this way. And so to live generously with generosity in such a way that we personally benefit from it. There's a

feeling of pleasure, a feeling of joy, well-being in the feeling of generosity and in the act of generosity. This positive feeling tone, the positive sense, sensations, the experience from which generosity flows, is a check-in balance. We can be careful that we're generous in such a way that we either overtly, or maybe privately within ourselves, that we're smiling. Something in our heart smiles to be able to offer and to give.

Here, please, take this, have this. I want to support you. I care about you. It just delights me to be able to offer you something. And we give in this way without any sense of being required to. As soon as we're required to, people don't feel quite the fullness of generosity.

Generosity is the giving that's not required, that's beyond what's required perhaps. So where does that instinct come from inside, this movement for generosity? The beginning answer to that, it comes from not being limited to a rational head that just thinks out rationally what a good idea it was going to be. It calculates why generosity is a good idea and why we get benefits in return or something. But rather, there's a deep inner disposition, deep inner, I kind of like think of it as an instinct that we have, when to care for others, to be generous, to want to do things for people to support them. Yeah.

The primary reference point for this is how an adult might care for, or even an older child, might lovingly care for a young child, a very young child, maybe a toddler or a baby. It'll do a lot for them out of a sense of generosity. Here, let me feed you. Let me make you a nice food. It can be done out of obligation for sure, but it could also be done tenderly and lovingly. Of course we want to support a young child or maybe a young pet or maybe a bird that's been injured slightly.

It went into the window of our house and is stunned. And so we protect it before the local cat gets it. That could be seen partly out of generosity. Or there's a neighbor who is somehow housebound because they're sick. Maybe they broke their leg. So out of generosity, it just feels good to be able to go shopping for them, bring food over and deliver it.

The whole thing just feels so good. I remember many years ago, a friend of mine who was staying with us, I was living in San Francisco. She was going to go back to Europe where she was from and was going to take a flight back. I offered to drive her to the airport. But this woman was quite self-effacing, didn't want anybody to be bothered. She said she didn't want to bother anyone.

It was very awkward for her to receive anything because she felt she didn't deserve it. But I was, you know, she was a friend, I delighted in her, and I was really happy with the idea of making her trip a little bit easier and driving her to the airport and being with her a little bit

more. It was kind of mostly a wonderful feeling of generosity that I felt. She said no a few times. So I then, you know, dropped the whole idea. But I felt a little bit sad because it felt so healthy and such a good thing for me to have these warm-hearted feelings of generosity that I felt that no, that she provided curtailed it, kind of prevented it, kind of ended it for me.

I thought, this is sad. It's such a healthy thing coming out of a person. Why couldn't this be allowed to flower in our society, in our world this way? So this idea of saying no to people's generosity, when generosity does a lot of good for the person who's generous. This I hope it does. That's the idea in Buddhism, is that we benefit from being generous.

It's a gift for others and a gift for ourselves. The check and balance in Buddhism is that you want to make sure that the generosity we do makes us feel happy. It gives us pleasure. It brings us delight. If it doesn't, then maybe it's not generosity. So this sense of pleasure and sweetness and delight is something which we access by being grounded and centered in our body.

The flow of hormones, the flow of wonderful... you know, nervous system that kind of comes into harmony and gets awakened with this wonderful generosity. The feedback loop is very much in the body. It's not from the neck up. So the more we can center ourselves in the body, be here in the body, feel ourselves in the body, the more we can maybe both benefit from generosity and be inspired to be generous. As I started saying earlier, you're caring for a young child, you know, maybe it's a neighbor's little kid and the first kid is happy and playing nicely.

So it's not a matter of compassion. It's not a matter of trying to care for them. But here, you know, I baked some cookies and here would you like one. You just know that they would be a delight for the kid to get a cookie and be delight for you to offer the cookie and feel the mutual delight and appreciation. So here... And I think this kind of instinct towards, why I like to emphasize young children or pets, I think this source of generosity like this is almost a mammalian instinct for being in relationships in a positive way.

If we are deeply at ease, deeply settled, and we feel safe, that can easily flow from us to be generous. When we live our lives anxiously, and we live our lives feeling hurt and betrayed and being a victim and feeling tense and from the head up kind of being on a screen all day, we're kind of short-changing ourselves for our full capacity of these wonderful caregiving instincts that we have, dispositions. We're also short-changing ourselves from being able to be whole. So much of the tension, the suffering we live under, many times for years, limits us, makes us narrower and a smaller segment of our life, coming alive and present for us. That's part of the added suffering, of suffering, that our life is going to become kind of narrowed, or

we don't have access to the full range of our wonderful mammalian dispositions that give rise to generosity, give rise to the idea of non-harming and so forth. So generosity is a wonderful, really wonderful thing that's celebrated and emphasized in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, which I'm teaching in that I love so much.

Generosity can also be, giving can be a practice. Generosity shouldn't be a practice, it's just an instinct. But giving can be a practice to evoke generosity, to explore the limitations and what keeps us back from being generous. So one of the things we do in our tradition is take on practices of giving. You might try today to find small ways, small acts of giving. Giving a smile, giving interest in how people are, maybe offering someone tea or maybe take them out for lunch, or do a variety of things that are giving, and see how close in, how close generosity is to that act of giving, to that practice of giving.

Can you tap into generosity? And as you do things with generosity, can you feel the goodness of that? Finally, if you do have an instinct to be generous, why don't you err on the side of acting on it today, rather than holding back. It's such a precious part of human life, our human capacity or generosity. I'd like to believe that much of our humanity, our social life, is fueled by generosity, from parents to taking care of us, to all kinds of people growing up who offer to care and right up until the day we die, I bet there's tremendous potential for generosity in all directions. See what you can do to be generous today so that you benefit from that. Thank you.