

## THE PRACTICAL WAY OF GENEROSITY (DANA) TO ACHIEVE REAL HAPPINESS IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

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### ABSTRACT

This qualitative research aims to analysis the Theravāda Buddhist ways of practice of generosity (dāna) to achieve real happiness of life in contemporary society. It consists of three objectives, namely: (1) to study the concept, types and practice of generosity (dāna) in Buddhist scriptures, (2) to study the components of dhamma practice to achieve real happiness of life in contemporary society and (3) present the Theravāda Buddhist practical ways of generosity (dāna) to achieve real happiness of life in contemporary society. This research methodology was a kind of qualitative research. In this research, the researcher presents benefits and obstructions according to modern ways and Pāḷi suttas and, and how to practice the generosity to achieve real happiness of life in contemporary society according to Theravāda Buddhist doctrines in Pāḷi canon. There are many Theravāda Buddhist practical ways of generosity (dāna) to achieve real happiness of life: the practice of generosity with social ethics, volition (cetanā), faith (saddhā), loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā) and morality (sīla).

## Introduction

The goal of *Theravāda* Buddhists is to attain final liberation (*nibbāna*). All Buddhist doctrines preached by the Enlightened One during forty-five years lead to liberation from suffering and attained final liberation (*nibbāna*). *Dāna* is a *Pāli* word that can be translated as giving, generosity, charity, or liberality. It occupies an important part in the Buddha's teaching, and it is the beginning of the path to liberation, or it is the first step towards eliminating the defilements of greed, hatred, and delusion. When the Buddha preaches to a new follower, he starts his graduated sermon with an exposition on the virtues of generosity. In *Puñṇakiriyavatthu sutta*, of the three bases for the performance of meritorious deeds (*puñṇakiriyavatthu*), giving is the first, the other two being a virtue and mental culture. It is also the first of ten *paramī* perfected by the Enlightened One.

Generosity is of prime importance in the Buddhist scheme of mental purification because it is the best weapon against greed (*lobha*), the first of the three unwholesome motivational roots (*akusalamūla*). Greed is covered by egoism and selfishness. The Enlightened One exhorted in *Devatāsāmyutta* that generosity is the solution to cure the illness of egoism and greed. It is difficult to exercise this virtue of generosity proportionate to the intensity of one's greed and selfishness. In *Jaḷaṅgadāna sutta*, the Enlightened One said that a noble giver is one who is happy before, during, and after giving. Before giving, he is happily anticipating the opportunity to exercise his generosity. While giving he is happy that he is making another happy by fulfilling a need. After giving he is satisfied that he has done a good deed.<sup>1</sup>

In modern society, the practice of giving is universally recognized as one of the most basic human virtues, a quality that testifies to the depth of one's humanity and one's capacity for self-transcendence. In the teaching of the Buddha also, the practice of giving claims a place of special eminence, one which singles it out as being in a sense the foundation and seed of spiritual development. Generosity associated with wisdom before, during, and after the act is the highest type of giving. The researcher decided to do the research work in order to show the *Theravāda* Buddhist ways of the practice of generosity (*dāna*) to achieve real happiness in life in contemporary society.

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<sup>1</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), 899.

## The Concept of Generosity (*Dāna*) in Buddhist Scriptures

*Dāna* is a *Pāli* word, which is translated as giving, generosity and charity. *Dā* as in *dadāti* to give and *dyāti* to deal out, thus: distribution. Especially a charitable gift to a *Bhikkhu* or to the community of *Bhikkhus*, the *saṅgha*. *Dāna* has a very important function in Buddhism as it is a very effective way to purify and protect the mind from defilements, especially greed (*lobha*) which is one of the roots of three unwholesome actions (*lobha, dosa, moha*). *Dāna*, which is generally translated as giving or generosity. Essentially *dāna* is a mental state, which instigated oneself to give. The *dāna* plays an important role in Buddhism. The concept of *dāna* is scattered all across the *pāli* cannon, some of the earliest text such as *Dhammapada*, *Udāna*, *Itivuttaka* has references to *Dāna*, the later texts such as *Jātaka*, and *Vimānavatthu* also contains myths and stories representing the importance of the practice of *dāna*.

*Dāna* plays a very important part in the life of a Buddhist. It is practiced regularly in the Buddhist countries in many ways. It is especially popular among the lay community as one of the means to gaining merit in their life and hopes for a better rebirth. The practice of *dāna* is more obvious among the *Theravāda* Buddhist countries. The layperson giving alms food to monks in the morning is a very common sight. This virtue of generosity is encouraged by the Buddha himself in several of the passages in which he says “Five blessings accrue to the giver of alms: the affection of many, noble association, good reputation, self-confidence, and heavenly rebirth”. The Lay community not only gives alms but builds temples and supports activities of *saṅgha* in serving the society in many ways. They provide the four necessities for leading of a celibate life as a monk.

Generosity (*dāna*) is extolled in the *Pali* Canon as a great virtue. It is, in fact, the beginning of the path to liberation. When the Buddha preaches to a new follower, he starts his graduated sermon with an exposition on the virtues of giving. Of the three bases for the performance of meritorious deeds (*puñṇakiriyaṅvatthu*), giving is the first, the other two being virtue and mental culture. It is also the first of the ten *pāramitā* perfected by a Buddha.<sup>2</sup> Therefore on the march towards liberation as an Arahant or a Buddha, one initially has to practice *dāna*.

In *Uttaraupāsika Vatthu* of *Dhammapada*, Buddha has described four types of victories:

1. Anger conquered by love

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<sup>2</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, *A Treatise on the Pāramīs*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1996), 2.

2. Bad conquered by good
3. Miserliness conquered by generosity, and
4. Lying conquered by truth.<sup>3</sup>

Generosity (*dāna*) is one of the most important qualities in the doctrinal teachings found in *Pāli* cannon, this is especial the case while following the heart of Buddha's teaching which is the purification of mind. The *dāna* helps to reduce the greed and helps to improve the positive state of mind, it also acts as quality that brings harmony in society. The key focus of giving is the monastic *saṃgha*, or community, whose 'homeless' way of life depends for its material support on the laity, to encourage their humility and to ensure that they do not become isolated from the laity.<sup>4</sup> This supportive relationship is not a one-sided one, however, for while the laity provide the *saṃgha* with such items as alms-food, robes, medicine, and monasteries to live in, the monks and nuns, by their teaching and example, return a greater one, for The gift of *dhamma* excels all gifts.<sup>5</sup>

Generosity (*dāna*) helps people to be free from selfishness. Generosity (*dāna*) in the Buddhist context encompasses a very vast dimension. It extends from helping others who are deserving with material requisites, up to the sharing of knowledge that leads to material and spiritual achievements. The Buddha gives much importance to speech for kindly speech (*piyavācā*) about because speech is the first step for producing harmony and friendship. It is the nature of the man that he delights with pleasant speech and gets angry with unpleasant speech. Buddhism recommends pleasant speech to be cultivated under the fourth of the five precepts which are considered to be the foundation practice of lay people. As unpleasant speech arouses anger of the listeners, it is certainly harmful to harmony and peace among people. On the contrary, pleasant speech is conducive to harmony and peace which are basic characteristics of social integrity.

### **The Practice of Generosity (*Dāna*) in Contemporary Society**

In the current world, an analytical observation will clarify the fact that people living in the present world need more spiritual advancement than economic advancement. Staring at the

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<sup>3</sup> Acharya Buddhārakkhita, *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1985), 58.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethic*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 62.

<sup>5</sup> Acharya Buddhārakkhita, *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*, 77.

flow of the modern world anyone will perceive that the entire world is running towards economic development, ignoring spirituality, one of the prime necessities in the modern world to make it a better place. This circumstance has opened for an unbalanced society to emerge in the world. In recent days, rich people are enjoying all the comforts using all the available facilities in this world of which most of them are not necessary. On the other hand, the poor are suffering of hunger, starvation, and sickness by not getting their sufficient daily needs to survive.

The reason behind the emergence of this huge problem is greed which prevents people from sharing their belongings with other people. Being victims of this unwholesome mental factor people collect properties even beyond necessities. The Buddha noticed this problem in society, with his enlightened wisdom, and re-introduced the concept of generosity or charity (*dāna*) to the people as he realized. The Buddha certainly encouraged people to cultivate activities that are favorable for themselves and at the same time beneficial for others too. Giving with an open heart certainly brings joy to himself and directly benefits others. The researcher continues to present the generosity (*dāna*) made in Buddhist traditional festivals and ceremonies.

Most of Buddhists always interest to do the merit in the traditional festivals and ceremonies. Different countries have different Buddhist celebrations. For example, in Japan, Buddhists celebrate the flower festival, or Hana Matsuri, to honor Buddha's birthday. Temples are decorated with cherry blossoms and children pour scented tea over statues of the baby Buddha. In India, Buddhists celebrate the Festival of the Sacred Tooth in honor of Buddha's first teaching. One of Buddha's teeth is paraded around in the streets as an expression of this celebration.

Buddhists use to donate the foods, flowers, candles, water, robes, medicine and money to the monks, monasteries and pagodas in every Buddhist festival. Next, they give foods to others as the commemoration of Buddhist festivals. Then, they give foods to animals and also set birds or fish free. As mentioned above, generosity (*dāna*) is the most important practice for all Buddhists in every traditional festival although they cannot practice meditation. Generosity (*dāna*) is the traditional practice of all Buddhists not only in Buddhist festivals but also various social ceremonies.

Every Buddhist use to practice generosity (*dāna*) in their whole life, even if they cannot practice morality (*sīla*) and meditation (*bhāvanā*) in their daily life. They practice generosity (*dāna*) not

only in Buddhist festivals and social ceremonies but also in memorable days: the anniversary of a wedding, birthday, the anniversary of the death of relatives, the commemoration of the success of life, and the opening ceremony of a business. Generally, they use to offer special foods in commemorating ceremonies. They invite their friends, relatives, and neighbors and offer special foods to them in birthday, wedding, and funeral ceremonies. Similarly, the guests, who join the ceremonies, give back the special gift and money to those who celebrate the ceremonies. This is the practice of generosity (*dāna*) of Buddhists in traditional festivals and ceremonies.

The position and treatment of animals in Buddhism is important for the light it sheds on Buddhists' perception of their own relation to the natural world, on Buddhist humanitarian concerns in general, and on the relationship between Buddhist theory and Buddhist practice. The first of the five precepts forbids the taking of life. As most narrowly interpreted, it applies primarily to the killing of human beings; however, the broader interpretation is that it applies to all sentient beings, which includes those in the animal realm in its broadest sense, that is not just mammals, but all animal including insects, and invertebrates. From the beginning of Buddhism, there were regulations intended to prevent the harming of sentient beings in the animal realm for various reasons.

There are many social welfare foundations for education, health, and livelihood in modern society. Especially, the researcher presents about social welfare foundations of Myanmar in this sub-title. Generally, social welfare foundations depend on the generosity or sharing of supporters in order to help the poor and weak people. The role of generosity is very important and very great in the performance of the social welfare foundations because they can do social welfare by depending on the supporters. In recent days, there are many social welfare foundations for education, health, and livelihood in the whole world. All communities and foundations are based upon the practice of generosity of supporters in all societies and all religions.

Online generosity and mobile banking are very useful and important for the practice of generosity in contemporary society. Disasters are things like war, hurricanes, floods, wildfires, or tornados. Even when they happen far away, we feel for the people who are going through them. It can be more stressful if a disaster happens close to home or affects people. here are things that everyone can do to help those who need it. Even small actions and small donations make a difference. Depending on the situation, a relief group may need donations of food,

water, or other supplies. They may need volunteers for a clean-up project, or to set up homes for refugees, or to pack boxes of food or supplies. Often, raising money helps the most. Giving is good for all.

Buddhism is a way of life, which in essence is the way of the heart. The style of Buddhism practiced here encourages the development of the heart through giving and taking care of others, and the removal of mental obstacles to freedom through meditation and active practice of the *dhamma*. *Dhamma* means teaching on the nature of reality regarded as a universal truth taught by the Buddha. It is the essential philosophy that all may attain peace and joy because fundamentally that is our true nature. The Buddhist faith emphasizes the principle of *kamma*, or the good or bad actions a person takes during a lifetime. Good actions include serving others by means of generosity and compassionate help, while bad actions include lying, stealing or killing.

The Buddha said that it is wise to support monks and to dedicate the gift to the local gods so that they will look with favor on the donor.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, Theravāda donations to monks often conclude with a verse sharing the karmic fruitfulness of the gift to gods. These are seen as having less opportunity to do auspicious deeds themselves, but can benefit from shared karmic fruitfulness, which helps maintain them in their divine rebirth; in return, it is hoped that they will use whatever powers they have to aid and protect Buddhism, and the person making the donation. A boy being ordained as a novice or full monk will also share the karmic fruitfulness of this act with his mother, though she also generates this herself by giving up her son to the monkhood.<sup>7</sup>

All Buddhists believe the action (*kamma*) and its result according to *Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta*. In this sutta, the Lord Buddha said that sentient beings are the owners of their deeds and heir to their deeds. Deeds are their womb, their relative, and their refuge. It is deeds that divide beings into inferior and superior when the Brahmnin Subha asked the Buddha that what is the cause and reason what people are seen who are short-lived and long-lived, sickly and healthy,

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<sup>6</sup> Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 1987), 237.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 66.



ugly and beautiful, insignificant and illustrious, poor and rich, from low and eminent families, witless and wise.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Practical Ways of Generosity (*Dāna*) to Achieve Real Happiness in Theravāda Buddhism**

According to the Buddha, the ideal conditions of giving are to give a pure gift, with pure intentions to a pure recipient. A pure gift would be giving a gift that is proper: meaning proper for the time, person, circumstance, and is earned by honest means. To give with pure intentions means to give with compassion, conviction, attentively, and without negatively affecting others. A pure recipient would be a virtuous person who would be worthy of a gift. Another factor of generosity that the Buddha mentions is the state of mind when giving, namely, feeling joyous before, during, and after the act of giving.

Basically, social ethic in Buddhism is practicable only in relation to society. The three factors of the path, right thought, right speech and right action, which come under the aggregate of morality have a direct influence on society. These ethical practices connect with individual and society together. In other words, ethical and moral behavior recommended in these factors becomes meaningful only in the context of society.<sup>9</sup> If someone will make merit by practicing the generosity, he is necessary to be right thought, right speech and right action in his mind in order to help others to be happy.

According to *Abhidhammā*, the volition of the donor before, during and after the act of generosity is the most important in the practice of generosity.<sup>10</sup> In *Cetanā Sutta*, volition is the first seed that arises in the mind before a mental, verbal, or physical action is impelled.<sup>11</sup> Volition is one of the fifty-two mental states which arise together with consciousness. Volition belongs to the aggregate of formations. The aggregate of formations is mental, and just as other mental states, it lasts only a very short moment. It comes into being, stays only a little bit of time, and then passes away.

<sup>8</sup> Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995), 1053.

<sup>9</sup> Pategama Gnanarama, *Essentials of Buddhism*, (Singapore: Buddha Dhamma Education Association Inc., 2000), 89.

<sup>10</sup> Ashin Janakābhivamsa, *Abhidhamma in Daily Life*, (Myanmar: New Burma Press, 1999), 147.

<sup>11</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, (USA: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 576.



Then, the practical way of generosity (*dāna*) with faith (*saddhā*) is important. With regard to the working of *kamma*, faith refers to a conviction that deeds have effects, good deeds having positive effects, and wrong deeds negative. Thus, faith gives guidance in leading a life of charity, morality and religious qualities. Faith also covers ideas such as the nature of existence, its impermanence and conditioned nature, and finally, the Buddha's enlightenment or *nibbāna* and the path of practice leading up to *nibbāna*. Faith entails a belief that there are people who have attained *nibbāna* and are able to teach it.

Next, there are certain wholesome and positive virtues inherent in the human mind which can give rise to positive emotional health, happiness, rewarding social relationships and contribute to spiritual development when they are developed and maintained. In fact, Buddhist generosity is derived from the Buddhist concept of *brahmavihāras*: loving kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), empathic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Buddhist generosity refers to acts of compassion of giving something of value to humans as well as animals, to friends as well as to strangers.

In contemporary society, morality (*sīla*) contributes to harmonious and peaceful coexistence among community members and consequently helps to promote social growth and development. In a society where morality prevails and members are conscious of their roles, there will be general security, mutual trust, and cooperation, in turn leading to greater progress and prosperity. Without morality, there will be corruption and disturbance, and all members of society are adversely affected. Most of the problems that society experiences today are directly or indirectly connected with a lack of good morality.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, when someone practices generosity (*dāna*), the donor should be happy, mindful, and bear wholesome volitions, or *cetanā*, during the preparatory period until the act of giving (*pubba cetanā*), during the act of giving (*munca cetanā*) and following the act of giving whenever it is remembered and reflected (*apara cetanā*). When someone practices generosity (*dāna*), faith gives guidance in leading a life of charity, morality and religious qualities. And Buddhist generosity mediated the relationship between loving kindness, compassion and happiness. Similarity, generosity accompanied by morality (*sīla*) is abundantly fruitful and beneficial.

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<sup>12</sup> Phattharachai Uthaphun, "A Comparative Study of Sīla (Five Precepts) in Theravāda Buddhism and Jainism," *Journal of MCU Buddhism Review* 1 (2017): 116-126.

## Benefits of Practice of Generosity (Dāna) in Pāli Canon

Many suttas enumerate the various benefits of generosity. Generosity promotes social cohesion and solidarity. It is the best means of bridging the psychological gap, much more than the material economic gap, that exists between haves and have-nots. The *Māgha Sutta* maintains that hates get eliminated when one is established in generosity. In *Sīha Sutta*, the one with a generous heart earns the love of others and many associate with him.<sup>13</sup> Generosity also cements friendships.<sup>14</sup>

There are many sutta about generosity and benefits of the practice of generosity in Pāli Canon. The researcher shows benefits of the practice of generosity in some sutta in this sub-title. In *Upajjhatthana Sutta*, the Buddha enumerated a number of this-worldly benefits of giving. The generous person, and not the miser, wins the sympathy of others. Arahants approach him, accept alms and preach to him first. A good reputation spread about him. He can attend any assembly with confidence and dignity. He is reborn in a state of happiness after death.<sup>15</sup>

Generosity alone is not sufficient for one to make an end of suffering. *Anāthapiṇḍika*, who was pronounced by the Buddha as the foremost among almsgivers, became only a stream-enterer. It is specifically said that *dāna* has to be fortified by *sīla*, morality, if it is to produce good results. Though *Anāthapiṇḍika* practiced unblemished virtue, it is nowhere stated that he practiced mental culture or meditation (*bhāvanā*). Therefore, in spite of all his magnanimous munificence, he had to remain a stream-enterer.<sup>16</sup>

Buddhism teaches a gradual process of emptying oneself. It starts with giving away one's external possessions. When the generous dispositional trait sets in and is fortified by the deepening insight into the real nature of things, one grows disenchanted with sense pleasures (*nibbindati*). At this stage one gives up household life and seeks ordination. Next comes the

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<sup>13</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, 660.

<sup>14</sup> Sn 187.

<sup>15</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, 685.

<sup>16</sup> Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*, 1109.

emptying of sensory inputs by guarding the sense doors. Through meditation (*bhāvanā*) one empties oneself of deep-seated defilements and fills oneself with positive noble qualities. But this whole process of bailing out negativities starts with *dāna*, the practice of giving.

## Conclusion

Actually, there are many benefits in the practice of generosity (*dāna*) according to Theravāda Buddhist perspective. Firstly, it is important to understand the benefits of the practice of generosity practically when we make the merits in contemporary society. Then, there are some obstructions and limitations to practice generosity (*dāna*) when we make the merits in society. It is more important to overcome these obstructions and limitations of the practice of generosity by understanding the nature of the mind. After we understand the benefits of the practice of generosity and the obstructions and limitations of the practice of generosity, we can practice generosity systematically according to the practical ways.

The layperson giving alms food to monks in the morning is a very common sight. This virtue of generosity is encouraged by the Buddha himself in several of the passages in which he says “Five blessings accrue to the giver of alms: the affection of many, noble association, good reputation, self-confidence, and heavenly rebirth”. Lay community not only gives alms but builds temples and supports activities of *saṃgha* in serving society in many ways. Generosity (*dāna*) is the quality of being generous the quality of being kind, understanding, and not selfish: the quality of being generous especially, willing to give money and other valuable things to others. *Generosity (dāna)* is the spirit and action of freely and frequently giving to others.

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