

Dana

Guy Mokuho Mercier

Part of the comments on the Pârâmitâ in the previous letters to the members of Tenbôrin come from the Treatise on the Great Virtue of Wisdom, the Mahâ Prajnâpâramitâ Sutra of Nâgârjuna (2nd-3rd century), translated from Chinese to French by Etienne Lamotte and published in 1970 by the University of Louvain (Belgium).



Few people own these books which are otherwise rare and expensive, which gives these extracts a special value. They have been chosen from many pages dealing with the subject of Pârâmitâs. They reflect certain Buddhist ideas that are really important in helping the daily practice of the disciples and constitute a basis for reflection and practice for those who have chosen to deepen the Way of the Buddha, through these practices of perfection.

Those who wish to prioritise Buddhist values in their lives, immanent qualities of the human being, will be able to deepen all these references on a daily basis, mainly the indivisible unity of the donor, of what is given and of that which receives, a central theme of the teachings of the Buddha, signifying the interdependence of all things, all ultimately being emptiness.

Dana: giving, considered as the first paramita - Guy Mokuho Mercier

Definition:

Dana means gift; it is an intention associated with thought (therefore mental), and from this "good" intention is born an "action -after-having-intention", physical (the gesture that ends in material gift) or vocal (teaching the Good Law) which is also called dana. The gift is therefore threefold: mental, physical and vocal.

When there is a donor, a field of merit (the recipient) and a given object, a thought of Dharma-of-abandonment occurs, capable of destroying greed and this is what is called dana.

In Theravada Buddhism, dana is the alms given to monks in saffron robes who beg for food in the streets. For the layman who offers food, dana is a source of merit.

Various kinds of donations:

1. The gift belonging to the world of desire, to the material world and that which does not belong to any world.

2. The pure gift and the impure gift:

- The impure gift is motivated by interest, insolence, aversion, fear, the desire to seduce others, the fear of death, teasing, the desire to look like the rich, rivalry, jealousy, pride and the desire to rise, the desire for

fame, the incantation, the concern to avoid evil and acquire an advantage, the desire to seduce an assembly, or the gift made lightly and disrespectfully ...

• Pure giving allows us to practice what is not an impure gift. It is made for the purpose of the Path to Nirvana, not seeking happiness from below or from beyond. It is done with respect and compassion. The pure gift spans countless generations, it is like a contract that never lets its maturity pass, it bears its fruit when the conditions are met and the favorable time has come, like the tree which, when the season comes, produces its leaves, flowers and fruits.

Giving promotes the liberation and the destruction of obstacles (Nirvana) because each feeling that we experience and with which we practice dana, can give birth to the pure spirit of the bodhisattvas. The following list needs to be thought through to become effective in our life:

by sacrificing the thing we give, we fight greed;

by honoring the recipient of the gift, we fight covetousness;

by giving with righteous thoughts, we fight hypocrisy;

by giving with resolution, we fight dissipation;

by giving after careful consideration, we fight regret;

by appreciating the qualities of the beneficiary, we combat the lack of respect;

by collecting our own thought, we fight disrespect;

by recognizing the beautiful qualities that beings have, we combat cynicism and arrogance;

by detaching oneself from material goods we fight grasping;

by having pity on the beneficiary, we fight anger;

by paying homage to the beneficiary, we are fighting pride;

by knowing how to practice good Dharma, we fight ignorance;

by believing without being attached to the existence of merits, we fight against the wrong view;

by knowing the inevitability of retribution, we fight doubt ...

All kinds of bad passions diminish when we practice giving, and all kinds of good Dharmas are acquired. When we practice giving, we purify the six sense organs and what we desire becomes benevolent. Faith is consolidated, body and mind are softened, joy is born and with it the unique thought by which perfect Wisdom (Awakening) can appear.

In addition, by practicing the gift, thought achieves a kind of Eightfold Path:

by believing in the fruit of the gift, we obtain right vision;

because the reflection inherent in this right vision is not disturbed, we obtain right perception;

because the words are purified, we obtain right speech

because we purify physical exercises, we obtain right action;

because we don't seek rewards, we get right livelihood;

because we give with zeal, we obtain right effort;

because we are not distracted in thinking of the gift, we obtain right attention;

because the quality of attention of thought is not disturbed, we obtain right concentration;

When one practices giving in this way, many good Dharmas occur in our thoughts. It is also the cause of the appearance on the body of the 32 physical marks which characterize and validate the quality of a Buddha.

Donations must be made at the right time, this is an important point.

The Buddha says: "Give to the one who goes far, give to the one who comes from far, give to a sick person, give to a nurse, give during bad wind or cold periods, these are the gifts made at the appropriate time "

So it is also when we give in times of famine, when we give to someone who comes from far away, when we give without interruption, when at the right time we never stop thinking about giving.

The merits of giving appear when it is made at the right time, and the resulting merit increases:

according to the needs of the region, in the desert.
constantly and relentlessly;
according to the wishes of the beggar;
when we give things of value;
when good people are given monasteries, gardens or ponds;
when we give to the sangha;
when the donor and the beneficiary are equally virtuous;
when the recipient is honored with all kinds of marks of respect;
when we give rare things;
when we give absolutely everything we have ...



The internal gift consists in giving one's life for others with no regret.

The gift of the Law is that which the monk or nun makes by preaching the good Law to beings :
It consists in all well-spoken words and all useful words. It is necessary to teach with a pure thought so that the gift is authentic. The material gift is not meritorious either if it is not inspired by a good intention and a good thought.

The preaching of the true gift of the Law must concern the Three Treasures, the four Noble Truths, and all that constitutes the Eightfold Path. It must not become a source of torment for beings,

and must allow them to perceive the true Emptiness of dharmas (phenomena).

Good preaching gives great renown, beauty, happiness, marks of respect, a majestic radiance like that of the sun, the affection of all, the art of speaking, the possession of great knowledge, disappearance of all ties, the destruction of pain.

The bodhisattva must make an effort in the practice of the Great Wisdom if he wants, by one and the same ball of food or by one and the same object (clothing, flower, perfume, necklace, powder, ointment, incense, lamp, banner, parasol, house, etc.) fill and honor all the Buddhas and their disciples with a single offering.

Although food and all these things are already gifts (made by life), why do we still have to give them? It is at the moment when these foods and other things are given that the Dharma of abandonment, as opposed to the thought of greed arises in the mind of the donor and also the merit of the gift arises. Intention combined with an attitude of abandonment produces the act of giving.

The merit of the offering lies in the intention and not in the thing offered. Whether far or near, the Buddhas see this offering and accept it. Religious people who do not have the omniscience of the Buddhas do not always see the offering as a gift, and yet the donor of the offering acquires merit. So when it comes to benevolence, although nothing is given to sentient beings, whoever practices it receives immense merit.

In addition, the bodhisattva are endowed with immense and unalterable qualities and when they offer a single ball of food to all the Buddhas and members of the sangha, the latter are satisfied, and yet the food does not run out, like an abundant spring, whose flow never dries up. So when Manjusri offered a bowl of small cakes to 84,000 monks, all were satisfied, but the cakes did not run out.

For the bodhisattva, the first gateway to meritorious practices is above all the gift.

By the acuity of his wisdom, the bodhisattva can make distinctions between the merits of giving.

1. For the same given object, the value of merit depends on the goodness or the malice of the intention. So Sâriputra once offered a bowl of cooked rice to the Buddha. The Buddha immediately gave it to a dog and asked Sâriputra: "Who of us has acquired the greatest merit?" Sâriputra replied: "If I understand the meaning of Your teaching well, the Buddha by giving to the dog has gained much more merit than I have."

2. It is not the beneficiary that matters but the intention "because thought is the internal master while the beneficiary is only an external thing."

3. In the highest of the great merits, three things are present: the intention of the donor, the thing given and the field of merit (the beneficiary).

4. The donation must be free from any attachment in respect of the donor, the thing given and the beneficiary. It is only in this way that the bodhisattva achieves the perfection of giving.

Giving is a karma, an action carried out from a pure intention, which therefore also contains its consequence, its merits, and according to the intention generates a rebirth in a world more or less favorable for the donor.

It is the quality of our intentions that produces effects that will be reversed, we must deeply understand this point. Gifts for the intention of benefitting in our present life go against purity. Pure giving is that which purifies thought and enables it to turn towards the supreme goal (to access Nirvana) and to discern what is favorable to end suffering.

For Zen, giving means the renunciation of any idea of personal profit as much as karmic retribution. We remember the response of Bodhidharma to the Emperor Wu-ti who asked him what merits he had acquired by building temples and propagating the Buddhist Doctrine: "No merit" because the essence and the truth of the Law, is "an unfathomable emptiness and nothing sacred". An invitation to understand that this unfathomable emptiness is the authentic source of giving.

The renunciation of selfishness and the desire for appropriation is the foundation of an altruism which can then be experienced as a natural component of the human being. Of course, this implies that difficult surrender of the ego which must "forget itself" in the service it renders to others. This is what the fundamental principles of Mahayana Buddhism encourage, an access to this fundamental Truth: "Me and the other are One" (and also are the One, emptiness).

The gift and the service to the others are true only when they are lived in the spontaneity of the heart and the Presence. It is this disposition which permeates all the actions of the bodhisattva's daily life, ours!

Master Deshimaru said that by practicing zazen, one practices all the *paramitas*. This can only be true if zazen is freed from the desire to obtain special merit or a state of consciousness, and is generously given and performed for sentient beings.

Practicing zazen, as well as any other action, in a disinterested spirit is the practice that the Buddhas and Patriarchs of Zen transmit.

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