

Week 3 - Generosity

Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Ethics

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Some nice treats to give people!

Cards for roleplay exercise or generosity audit worksheets

LEARNING OUTCOMES

See dana as most basic & do-able of precepts

Identify the reasons for developing generosity in terms of loosening grasping

Maybe have a hint of the possibility of dana paramita.

Realise some of gross & subtle ways of taking the not-given, beyond money/objects

Identify some practical ways in which individuals can practice this precept in daily life.

NOTES

It will probably become clear that the line between generosity & kindness is very fine: generosity is akin to love / kindness in action.

The discussion may well get caught up around the area of mixed motives with being generous – there's a payback to being generous, even if it's just feeling good about oneself. This is a great opportunity to clear up wrong views about altruistic motive. One definition of altruism is "Regard for others as a principle of action." There's nothing wrong with getting a payback – the point is you were primarily motivated by the concern for others. It would even be an impossibility under karma to gain no benefit from skilful action such as generosity.

MEDITATION (15 MINS)

Variant of Metta Bhavana – Dana bhavana as per Kulananda & Houlder, p 125

After settling in:

S1 – think of what you've received from others – friends, parents, society, etc. realise how much benefit you've received from others

S2 – think of a good friend – imagine giving to them: gifts, money, sending letters, helping them out with time & affection. Imagine giving whatever you think they'd like, with no hinderence

S3 – think of a neutral person. Imagine again as for s2.

S4 – difficult person. Again imagine giving without hinderence or regret. What can you give that they'd like?

S5 – in some way, open up heart to all beings, imagine that generous impulse flowing out.

INTRODUCTION TO SESSION (20 MINS)

Positive form: "With deeds of loving kindness I purify my body"

Negative form: "I undertake the training principle of not taking the not-given"

Pali: Addinadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

Looking at 2nd precept – not taking not given, or the principle of generosity (DANA)

Looking at ways we might take the not given, and ways we can practice not doing so, and ways of positively cultivating generosity.

Generosity seen as the fundamental Buddhist quality, or the most basic practice. You can always be generous, no matter how busy or poor you are. We'll be looking at how.

But it's also ultimately one of the most sublime acts of the most advanced beings – the pinnacle of the path. A complete sharing of oneself.

Home practice review

Did people do it? If so, get in 3s to discuss what you attempted to do and how you got on. Did you notice times when you could have acted with more kindness? How did it feel? Did you succeed?

Previous class Review

Debate about vegetarianism – what did you learn about ethical discussion based on Buddhist principles?

Love mode & power mode.

FUNDAMENTAL BUDDHIST VIRTUE (15 MINS) – 8.05 – 8.20PM

As with all the precepts there are the negative expressions – what to move away from (in this case taking the not given - *adinadana*) and then the positive expression, what to move towards (generosity - *dana*)

Generosity - dana in Pali and Sanskrit - has been called the fundamental Buddhist virtue.

Start off with the positive expression of the precept – generosity.

Brainstorm: why is dana the fundamental Buddhist virtue?

- Trains us in relaxing our tight self-centred orientation – shows us our attachment & limits of generosity
- Undermines poverty mentality
- Reveals our connectedness to others & enables us to experience it.
- Can always practice it (when with others) - practical
- Expresses & deepens empathy
- Creates sense of community and Sangha

Train our generosity muscles

Giving to others is a direct way of opening up our tight, painful focus on our own desires, and it can be practiced by people whose lives leave them little time for more formal practices like retreats or meditation. For these reasons many traditional Buddhist schools see cultivating generosity as the essential first stage of the path. But at the same time generosity is also in a sense the culmination of the whole spiritual life - the Enlightened person is spontaneously generous, because they don't see the world in terms of self and other, but instead act from a deep sense of interconnectedness with other beings. As our spiritual life develops, our actions gradually come to express more and more of this self-transcending spirit of generosity.

The practice of generosity attacks our deluded worldview from two directions. On the one hand it undermines our neurotic attachment to possessions - and the anxious poverty mentality this gives rise to. At the same time it expresses and deepens our empathy for others.

Generosity is also the basis on which we build the spiritual community - it allows us to relate to each other on the basis of metta rather than economics, from the 'love mode' rather than the 'power mode'. And generosity is highly contagious - when we are generous this releases generosity in others, which in turn releases generosity in an ever-widening circle. This is one of the most important ways we create the Sangha, the spiritual community.

Vadanya, Mitra Foundation Course (Pt II Wk3)

[Reflecting on dana paramita

Have said it represents the culmination of the path as well as practice.

A Bodhisattva (ideal Buddhist) is said to practice dana paramita – perfection of generosity – in which gift, giver and receiver are all seen through as not ultimately separate. Wisdom perspective – seems very lofty.

But maybe we've got experiences of giving to a loved one – child, lover, family member – in which responding to their needs does not seem different to responding to our own needs. In fact:

BHANTE QUOTE

But now back down to earth; the negative form of the precept]

NOT TAKING THE NOT-GIVEN (ADINADANA) (10 MINS) – 8.20-8.30

If we are to be really honest with ourselves, we may well find that our basic impulse a lot of the time is to take rather than give, or to keep rather than give away.

Abhaya

What does the double-negative suggest?

To me, more subtle, broad principle. Make sure that what you take really is given to you willingly.

How can we take the not-given?

Brainstorm: Ways in which we can take the not-given

Write up ways, clustered into unlabelled boxes

NB keep emphasis on us, ie. Probably not bank robbery etc

Fare evasion, tax fiddling, being "forgetful" with benefits claims, erring rather too high with insurance claims, making personal phone calls from work (if not allowed), being over-generous with company expenses & claims, being late with payments	Money
Shoplifting, permanently "borrowing" library books, friends' CDs etc, taking stationery from work, copying copyright material (eg music)	Objects
Not doing share of household chores, being a "psychic vampire", manipulating people to help you,	Energy

Get people to work out what the headings should be. Any more examples?

GENEROSITY – DANA

Giving is the natural, unforced interchange of one's energy with that of others. In this sense real giving is receiving.

-Sangharaksita

Image of glittering ball of precious metal that glitters brighter when people throw it to each other, but dulls when someone holds onto it - Abhaya

We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.

-Sir Winston Churchill

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can."

-John Wesley

Brainstorm: What can you give? (15 mins) – 8.30-8.45

So far we've got three things we can take, so presumably can give them:

- Money
- Objects
- Energy.

Anything else can be generous with? Traditionally additional ones (will probably need to supply most of them):

- Knowledge
- Fearlessness
- Life & Limb
- Dharma

Brainstorm examples of how you can give in these ways

Money	Increasing value →	
Objects		Small tokens of thanks (cards etc), spontaneous gifts
Energy		Putting self out for people; occasional visits to lonely relatives;
Knowledge		Not withholding knowledge to maintain advantage; willingly sharing experience
Fearlessness		Encouraging words, give appreciation, being "a rock" for someone
Life & Limb		
Dharma		Being realistic with people; having meaningful conversations where possible; not being afraid to talk Dharma where there's interest.

Exercise: Recollecting generosity (10 min) – 8.45-8.55

In 3s: Can you think of occasions when you've experienced someone being generous to you or you have been generous in any of the above ways. See especially if you can find any examples from the last 4.

Plenary

TEA BREAK

Option A - Exercise: Giving, taking, receiving (15 mins) – 9.15-9.30

[For groups who know each other well]

In pairs, A & B:

We'll be role-playing a simple conversation about what you did on the weekend (or any time really) – put yourself into the role as far as you can, though some will feel easier than others – note how they feel.

1. A asks B something they did over the weekend. Both people role play the instructions on their card, stage 1.
2. After 1 –2 min, ring bell, people smoothly change to the next stage, next role.
3. Keep going for stages 1-4.
4. For stage 5, swop over, B asks
5. Debrief in pairs, what did each stage feel like, did you feel like you were giving or receiving more.

Stage	Person A	Person B
1	You see B is a bit shy and lonely, so gently keep drawing them out [Giving]	You're very shy, and find it very difficult to talk about yourself, but you like A [Receiving]
2	You forgot how much B goes on, and wish you'd never asked, but can't find any way to escape [Taken from]	You are desperate for human contact, and can't stop talking about yourself. You don't really notice A [Taking]
3	You want to make contact with B and are desperate to draw them out [Taking]	You've got things on your mind, and don't really want to engage with A [Taken from / withholding]
4	You'd like to know A better, but you are a bit shy and find it difficult to know the right thing to ask. [Receiving]	You can see A is a bit shy and trying to make a connection with you; so try to offer up quite a bit of yourself to them by talking quite freely and relaxedly. [giving]
5	You enjoy B's company, and feel relaxed	You enjoy A's company and feel relaxed

Plenary

Draw out any lessons. Obvious fact that you can give or receive in communication, whether you're asking or being asked. And maybe in s5, have sense of giving & receiving, so smooth flow of connectedness ideally. Both parties give and both come away feeling richer for doing so.

Option B: Generosity Audit

Handout worksheets & get people to fill them in on their own (15mins)

Get into groups to discuss what you've learnt about yourself. In particular:

Have you identified areas people or circumstances in which you feel inhibited in your generosity?

Have you found internal factors that inhibit generosity?

Plenary:

Including: What prevents us giving?

Fear of rejection

Sense of own "poverty" (real or imagined) – don't have the resources

Can we give too much??

DANA RELATIONSHIP AT CB CENTRE (5 MINS)

Maybe now it makes some sense of why we have the so-called “dana relationship” – why we stop charging for most regular classes once people in certain relationship to CBC.

Don't want to operate in reciprocal relationship – just want to give the Dharma.

But Centre needs to be given to in order to be able to do so. So part of job of Centre is to communicate its needs.

Danger in being asked for help – especially monetary – is that you don't feel free to refuse, maybe we're used to being manipulated through guilt.

If there's true asking, then there can be true, clean giving or not giving.

SUMMARY (5 MINS)

- Looked at the precept in it's negative form – not taking the not given
- Thought of some of the ways of “breaking” the precept in this form [point to flipchart list]
- Thought of some of the ways to practice the positive form in terms of generosity [“”]
- Looked at why it's seen as such a basic Buddhist virtue, and maybe even had a taste of how it could be the pinnacle of the path.
- Now let's try to take it very concretely into our lives...

PRACTISING THE PRECEPT (10 MINS)

Exercise: finding practical ways to practise

In 3s: Can you think of specific ways to practise the precepts? Pick something small & do-able, maybe even with specific people or in specific situations. If you're listening to others, maybe help them make it concrete, definite.

But, if you want to start avoiding adinadana in some way, make sure it's a way that you feel connected with as a subtle (or gross) unskillfulness – don't just take it on because “Vajrapriya says ripping a friend's CD is bad”.

HOME PRACTICE

You may want to continue with your generosity audit, to see if anything else occurs to you.

In class you thought of specific ways to practise the precept - Pick something small & do-able, maybe even with specific people or in specific situations. Each morning and evening, remind yourself of your intention to be prepared to respond with generosity, or avoid taking the not-given, in the situations you've decided. Try to connect with that intention. Then try to do it!

FURTHER READING

Dana, Selected Essays from Theravadin perspective (I haven't read them)

<http://accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/various/wheel367.html>

FEEDBACK

The generosity audit worked well – needs plenty of time. Most people found it easy to select home practice precept afterwards.