

Ethics – the Four Samgrahavastus

Firstly, giving or generosity is the way in which we connect, in the most practical manner, with others. We let go of our tight grip on what belongs to us, whether material goods, money, time, or energy. That which expresses our possessiveness is transformed into a means of expressing its complete opposite. No doubt the recipient is pleased to receive what we give, but more important is the sense of care and concern that any such gesture communicates. Above all, we give the Dharma. We don't distinguish between our personal practice of the Dharma and our communication of it to others.

The second of the samgrahavastus is affectionate speech. As we shall later see in greater detail, right speech is greatly emphasized in Buddhism. It is not just a matter of the content of our communication; much of our communication is conveyed in our tone of voice, which often reflects our true feelings much more accurately than does what we are actually saying. At the same time, it is more difficult to monitor this feature of our speech, because it is much closer to a true communication of ourselves. By the same token, however, if we consciously cultivate affectionate speech, this can change us at quite a deep level.

The third means of unification is beneficial activity. This is not just a matter of helping others; it is also a matter of knowing what would be of most benefit to them as well as understanding how best to employ one's energy. After all, there is a lot to be done, and one's energy is limited. What would benefit people most of all, at the deepest level, is helping them to access their own energy, by sparking them off, getting them going, inspiring them in some way.

The fourth samgrahavastu is exemplification, or practising what one preaches. The Dharma is a teaching that has to be realized in daily life, and it is in this way that it is truly communicated. Do we exemplify the qualities that we are asking others to develop? If not, and if there is a discrepancy between the way we are and the way we aspire to be, clearly something is lacking. What is lacking is not so much the ability to be other than we are at present but the courage to be honest about where we really stand. If we can do this, even though it is quite difficult or humiliating to admit our deficiencies - to ourselves, let alone to others - then we are already making great progress. After all, reality is not a comfortable experience for the ego.

In the Precious Garland, the samgrahavastus are part of Nagarjuna's guidance to a king, not a Bodhisattva, and in fact these practices are relevant at every stage of one's spiritual development. They embody the fundamental virtues of generosity, gentleness, helpfulness, and authenticity, and they can be cultivated in all sorts of ordinary ways.

Sangharakshita, *Living Ethically*, p. 28-9

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