

BENEFITS OF GENEROCITY by KALANA DISSANAYAKE

As worldlings, our thoughts, words and deeds are colored by greed, anger and lack of clear understanding. Therefore we are prone to engage in unskillful activities. The teachings of the Buddha explain how desire increases our inborn greed, anger and lack of clear understanding. He further stated that form, feeling, contact, formations and consciousness are all affected by desire which in turn, prolongs the process of emancipation from the Samsaric [repeated rebirth] cycle.

The process is clearly explained in the paticcasamutpada [Dependent Origination]. In his infinite kindness, the Buddha has shown us a way out. Through practicing generosity, morality and mental culture we could overcome greed, anger and our inability to see the true nature of things.

Generosity is extolled because, as you practice giving loving kindness and compassion could be developed – thereby weakening the roots of greed and anger. Generosity in its momentum encourages morality. Further, it discourages the ego concepts of 'I' and 'Me'. These 'I' and 'Me' concepts are nurtured by greed and makes things appear as if what we experience through our senses are real. We see that generosity not only weakens greed but also it helps us to control our anger and helps us understand the true nature of things.

Not all giving can be considered 'generous' We often give something away and expect much more in return. Such giving could not be considered 'skillful' action. When giving something in the form of a donation, we must also let go of our mental hold on such items, totally without any expectation in return. The Buddha has explained the process in his exposition of the Four Frames of Reference [sathipatthana], when explaining the nature and control of the mind.

Often, people are under the misconception that one must be rich to be generous. One need not be rich to be able to give away what one is able to. One could express one's generosity in three ways: material gifts, gift of life without fear to those who are in danger of losing it and offering the gift of Dhamma [Truth]. Things like food, clothing and shelter come under material gifts. Any act that helps sustain life is considered a gift of life. Any activity which encourages the development of morality and helps in the grasping of the Four Noble Truths is considered a Gift of Dhamma [Truth].

Further, if the act of giving is to be one that is worthy, the Dana [giving] has to fulfill the following conditions.

- * Clean and wholesome items should be used in the Dana;
- * Tasty foods should be offered as Dana;
- * The offerings have to be done at suitable times;
- * The offerings should be dedicated/ consecrated;
- * The offerings should be carefully examined;
- * The offerings should be on a regular basis;

- * The offerings should be done in a pleasant frame of mind;
- * The donor should feel content and happy as a result of his offerings;
- * Both the giver and the receiver should be of good moral stand.

Offering of

Dana has been categorized in the following way as per Dana Visuddhi:

- A person of good moral standing offering dana to one who is of questionable moral standing;
- A person of questionable moral standing offering dana to one of unimpeachable morals;
- A person of weak morals offering dana to a similar one of weak morals;
- A person of good moral standing offering dana to one of excellent morals.

The Buddha has observed that offering dana to a community of Bhikkhus is commendable. His observation includes how and to whom offerings should be made.

- + To a community of Bhikkhus headed by the thathagatha [one who has gone beyond];
- + If the thathagatha has attained parinibbana and is no longer with the living, dana to the sangha on the occasion of The Great Passing Away; of the Buddha.
- + Offering of dana to a community of Bhikkhus;
- + Offering of dana to a community of Bhikkhunis [nuns];
- + Offering of dana to the Bhikkhus according to one's ability;
- + Offering of dana to bhikkhunis according to one's ability.

Generosity should be constantly practiced. It would be a meritorious deed if one wishes that thrown away left-over foods become meals to some animal, bird or fish.

Thus, the offering of dana has to be preceded by good intentions. Such offerings would enable the giver to make further offerings as merits acquired through ones initial offering would give one long life, praise, comfort and power.