

Introduction to Generosity

Visakha, Buddha's chief patroness, said something like this about the fruits of generosity: When I remember my acts of generosity, I shall be glad. When I am glad, I am happy. When I am happy, my body will be tranquil, and when my body is tranquil I will feel pleasure. When I feel pleasure I will be concentrated. And when I am concentrated that will bring about the Seven Spiritual Factors of Awakening.

The first Parami, Generosity, is to open the heart. "When you go (die), you have to abandon it all. Going to the world beyond, you cannot have your own possessions!" This is about crossing the flood of our ignorant selfishness. Develop your own heart, live with integrity, have good spiritual friends, listen to the teaching, and you will be a gift to others.

(Many of the following reflections come from the teachings of Kamala Masters.)

The quality of Generosity is the first on many lists. It opens the heart toward the path, to finding true peace and happiness. The Buddha said, "There are two kinds of precious beings in the world---those who are generous and those who are grateful." When the Buddha was invited to speak, he began with talking about generosity. When that was received and understood, he moved on to virtue, the value of a life in harmony; and then meditation. Generosity is the beginning practice to diminish the force of suffering. However, to fully realize this pillar of happiness, we need to understand the other two pillars, virtue and wisdom. All three pillars are needed to make a strong stool. Wisdom, knowing that we are letting go of our attachment through our generosity, gives generosity a stronger and deeper intention, and in turn makes the letting go more powerful.

Generosity cultivates all the brahmaviharas---lovingkindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. And it is abundant, because when we reflect on our act of generosity we feel the joy over and over again, as well as the lovingkindness, compassion---and the equanimity that is present in the non attachment. There is not only happiness in the moment of giving, but long term happiness, ease and joy in reflecting on it.

In generosity there is metta, which lets go of aversion.

We let go of delusion by being conscious of our giving. Giving out of habit, what is expected, being nice, or doing the right thing is positive, but the benefit is much greater when we see how the giving weakens our powerful clinging tendencies that cause us so much suffering. The good karma is strongest when we understand the benefits of giving, that by giving we are loosening our attachments to our clinging, not just to the object but to our sense of self. When we understand the far reaching implications in our giving, we are seeing how it is conducive to our own liberation. The three root torments are abandoned.

There are many ways to give. We can give our time, our energy, material things, our heart, just sitting still while someone is talking. The opportunities around us are vast. We just need to open our eyes and look for them.

Gratitude completes generosity. We can receive others' generosity with our own generosity, by being grateful. Our gratitude at receiving makes their generosity stronger for them and you. We can do this simply by being present, engaged, when receiving a gift. We don't have to do anything special, just receive and respond with full presence. If you have an event coming up, like a birthday, where there will be gifts to you, think about this beforehand, your intention to be present with gratitude.

The Dalai Lama said, "We are visitors on this planet. We are here for 90, 100 years at most. During that time, we must try to do something good, something useful with our lives. Try to be at peace with yourself and help others share that peace. If you contribute to other people's happiness you will find the true goal, the true meaning of life.

Here are some ways to practice with generosity in the coming month(s):

- 1) Notice when others are generous to you, small kindnesses like a smile, a greeting, a holding of a door, sharing something with you; or bigger ones, like someone offering you empathy and kind words.
- 2) Look back at the end of the day and notice when the element of generosity was present in little things you did or refrained from doing.
- 3) When you feel the spark of generosity, act on it wholeheartedly

Reflection:

Our attitudes toward generosity are often conditioned by how generosity was viewed and practiced in the family and culture we grew up in. Spend some time considering how you may have been influenced by this conditioning. What beliefs do you have as a result that interfere with being generous and what beliefs support you in being generous?