
THE SPIRITUAL SIDE TO GIVING

(By Bhikkhu Dhammānanda)



Whenever we give something, whenever we sacrifice something from whatever material goods we possess, or from our time, ...we are going against the stream of the world. We are going against the worship of matter. And we make spiritual things more important than material things.

And whenever we make spiritual things more important in our life, or, to put it in more Buddhist terms, whenever we make the Dhamma more important in our life, ...something happens within ourselves. If it is true giving and not just the outer act of giving, if it is true giving, with a giving heart, ...then, what happens, is that our heart opens. We become instantly spiritualised. We feel like some

burden is removed from us. We feel like we have grown from a small person, from a narrow person, to a greater person.

Our worldly burden, of going after money, of having to follow the laws of the world, or of having to strive in the world in order to be successful; opens up to another set of laws, to another reality. We make real another world for us. We make real another set of laws for us. Such as are more just. That are more beautiful. That are more hopeful or more hope giving. A world wherein, not what people say is important. Not what we are in the world is important. But wherein what we are as a person is important. Wherein our character is important, and wherein our sincerity and the beauty of our heart is important.

Of course it is true, that not everyone who gives, will instantly notice these changes within himself. But still, even if a gift is given without the right mindset. It will not be forgotten. It will become part of you. It has entered your subconscious mind and there will do its work. In the first instant, quite involuntarily it will have come under the law of association of ideas. Which means, for example that, if you have given some food to somebody, not only have you given food, but you also have given strength, you also have given health. And thus by the law of association of ideas, whenever you see food or are recollecting your health, or strength, or perhaps more importantly, the absence thereof, something in you also remembers some selfless or spiritual connection therewith.

Thus, as a first benefit, on such occasions a thought will arise within you, that you do not hope to suppress. That is a very important benefit... Because it is precisely because of this, that in Buddhist

practice, the practice of giving or sacrificing stands at the very beginning of its path of mental training. Why that is so, is perhaps obvious enough. Because evidently, if only thoughts arise within you, which you wish to immediately suppress, you are not likely to get very far with your training of mind. Hence, the practice of giving, like virtue is an important preparation for the cultivation of the mind and also for learning to extend one's consciousness beyond its narrow scope of "I only", at will.

But there are other benefits to it:

If, when becoming aware of your own bad health, or lack of strength; you remember your act of giving food, (and thus also of strength and health), that good thought will produce a sense of relief. And that sense of relief in turn will, at the very least for a moment, balances also your internal bodily processes. And of course, the more there is to reflect upon, or the longer you can keep going that wholesome train of thoughts, the greater the sense of relief, and consequently also the greater the benefit also for the body's health and strength. That is the psycho-physical effect of giving.

Which in turn will make evident a yet other very important fact regarding giving, or for that matter, regarding all wholesome acts. And that is, that right knowledge, such as knowledge regarding the workings of karma, can actually infinitely magnify the benefit of a deed like giving. Precisely because the more you know the longer you can reflect, as a general rule. Of course, that will also be true with a bad deed done, or the omission of a chance for a good deed. Although in that case we will evidently not talk of a "benefit".

But then, having said that much regarding karma, it may be helpful to the reader, if we vaguely indicate some specifics regarding how

to make use of that law most efficiently to procure specifically desired benefits. The proper working out of desired karma making, is of course also a matter of one's individual associations. But here some natural association lines that are in accordance with Buddhist teachings:

As we have already stated, food gives strength and health. That is one natural association line. And a similar thing will actually also be true about medicine, with perhaps an addendum of the curing of disease, and the giving of longevity. Clothing may give comfort and beauty, and depending on the kind of clothing given, we may add, also social benefits. While giving lodging will give lasting protection and comfort.

These four are the most fundamentally needed items for a human being. And in Buddhism they are also the four primary items, that bind a Buddhist monk to the Buddhist laity. Because, as a monk is neither supposed to work, nor allowed to possess money, being dependent on the generosity of others, only he who has given much of these in the past, it is believed, will find it possible to live a monks life.

Nevertheless, of course not only these four, but all things will have their natural associations. So will a gift of money be the best donation for one hoping to receive wealth in the future. Donations of books may bring wisdom as a reward. While the donation of a lamp is said to be the right item for one seeking vision.

Yet, not only what is given is important, but also to whom you give. If you give food to an animal, the karmic result, or we might say, the magical significance, is rather little, although it should not be despised. On the other hand, if you give to a monk, or a holy person,

because such being is a symbol for spiritual things as such, the potency of the gift is infinitely larger. "All things proceed from the spirit" goes a saying, and thus in Buddhism the order of monks, are actually thought of as a field of infinite merit for the world. Because there the act of giving is purified and ennobled by the one who receives.

Although here we may add, that at times the word "Sangha", which is the Buddhist word for the order of monks, is at times extended to include any person that is somewhere on the path of holiness.

Nonetheless, as we have already indicated in the beginning of this exposition, an act of giving too can be purified and ennobled, by the giver, independent of who the recipient may be.

If you give with joy and readiness, from an inner inspiration, that kind of giving will not just bring material benefits in the future, but will equally also give an inner condition of joy and inspiration. And when qualities as these, are becoming firmly established in a persons character, they make that person a divine being even here and now, and the hereafter will follow what established itself in the here and now. And what is a divine being, either here or hereafter? It is a being whose life is easy. It is a being to whom what is needed comes of its own accord, a being who more or less only needs to wish in order to get.

Yet, perhaps as a conclusion, I too want to state again, that there are benefits to be derived from giving, even if the mindset is not perfect, either at the time of giving, or before, or after.

Because the subconscious mind will remember the deed and the gift. But it may well be that the result of such giving will be, that you yourself will receive one day, but you yet will not be able to enjoy what you received. Some people are very rich, but they can never enjoy their wealth. When they give, they hope for something, and when they receive, they hope for yet more. Such is some people's condition. But, of course, how we feel and think when giving is a matter both of inspiration and of habit. If we never have been educated about any benefits for ourselves to be derived by the practice of giving, then, even if we would somehow be prompted to give something, either by somebody or by some outside circumstance, we will not feel any pleasure therein. On the other hand side if we have heard of the benefits, but are not yet entirely convinced, ...if we try anyhow to be generous at times, just to make sure, so to say, we may find, that with repetition and habit, as inner resistances are gradually overcome, we equally gradually find the inner benefits and the appropriate inner mind states accrue. And thus we may little by little learn to make use of this most ancient form of magic. The magic of giving.