

Spécial Flash News

Part of the comments on the Pârâmitâ in the previous letters to the members of Tenbôrin come from the Treatise on the Great Virtue of Wisdom, the Mahâ Prajnâpâramitâ Sutra of Nâgârjuna (2nd-3rd century), translated from Chinese to French by Etienne Lamotte and published in 1970 by the University of Louvain (Belgium).



Few people own these books which are otherwise rare and expensive, which gives these extracts a special value. They have been chosen from many pages dealing with the subject of Pârâmitâs. They reflect certain Buddhist ideas that are really important in helping the daily practice of the disciples and constitute a basis for reflection and practice for those who have chosen to deepen the Way of the Buddha, through these practices of perfection.

Those who wish to prioritise Buddhist values in their lives, immanent qualities of the human being, will be able to deepen all these references on a daily basis, mainly the

indivisible unity of the donor, of what is given and of that which receives, a central theme of the teachings of the Buddha, signifying the interdependence of all things, all ultimately being emptiness.

Dana: giving, considered as the first paramita - Guy Mokuho Mercier

Definition:

Dana means gift; it is an intention associated with thought (therefore mental), and from this "good" intention is born an "action -after-having-intention", physical (the gesture that ends in material gift) or vocal (teaching the Good Law) which is also called dana. The gift is therefore threefold: mental, physical and vocal.

When there is a donor, a field of merit (the recipient) and a given object, a thought of Dharma-of-abandonment occurs, capable of destroying greed and this is what is called dana.

In Theravada Buddhism, dana is the alms given to monks in saffron robes who beg for food in the streets. For the layman who offers food, dana is a source of merit.

Various kinds of donations:

1. The gift belonging to the world of desire, to the material world and that which does not belong to any world.

2. The pure gift and the impure gift:

- The impure gift is motivated by interest, insolence, aversion, fear, the desire to seduce others, the fear of death, teasing, the desire to look like the rich, rivalry, jealousy, pride and the desire to rise, the desire for

fame, the incantation, the concern to avoid evil and acquire an advantage, the desire to seduce an assembly, or the gift made lightly and disrespectfully ...

• Pure giving allows us to practice what is not an impure gift. It is made for the purpose of the Path to Nirvana, not seeking happiness from below or from beyond. It is done with respect and compassion. The pure gift spans countless generations, it is like a contract that never lets its maturity pass, it bears its fruit when the conditions are met and the favorable time has come, like the tree which, when the season comes, produces its leaves, flowers and fruits.

Giving promotes the liberation and the destruction of obstacles (Nirvana) because each feeling that we experience and with which we practice dana, can give birth to the pure spirit of the bodhisattvas. The following list needs to be thought through to become effective in our life:

by sacrificing the thing we give, we fight greed;

by honoring the recipient of the gift, we fight covetousness;

by giving with righteous thoughts, we fight hypocrisy;

by giving with resolution, we fight dissipation;

by giving after careful consideration, we fight regret;

by appreciating the qualities of the beneficiary, we combat the lack of respect;

by collecting our own thought, we fight disrespect;

by recognizing the beautiful qualities that beings have, we combat cynicism and arrogance;

by detaching oneself from material goods we fight grasping:

by having pity on the beneficiary, we fight anger;

by paying homage to the beneficiary, we are fighting pride;

by knowing how to practice good Dharma, we fight ignorance;

by believing without being attached to the existence of merits, we fight against the wrong view;

by knowing the inevitability of retribution, we fight doubt ...

All kinds of bad passions diminish when we practice giving, and all kinds of good Dharmas are acquired. When we practice giving, we purify the six sense organs and what we desire becomes benevolent. Faith is consolidated, body and mind are softened, joy is born and with it the unique thought by which perfect Wisdom (Awakening) can appear.

In addition, by practicing the gift, thought achieves a kind of Eightfold Path:

by believing in the fruit of the gift, we obtain right vision;

because the reflection inherent in this right vision is not disturbed, we obtain right perception;

because the words are purified, we obtain right speech

because we purify physical exercises, we obtain right action;

because we don't seek rewards, we get right livelihood;

because we give with zeal, we obtain right effort;

because we are not distracted in thinking of the gift, we obtain right attention;

because the quality of attention of thought is not disturbed, we obtain right concentration;

When one practices giving in this way, many good Dharmas occur in our thoughts. It is also the cause of the appearance on the body of the 32 physical marks which characterize and validate the quality of a Buddha.

Donations must be made at the right time, this is an important point.

The Buddha says: "Give to the one who goes far, give to the one who comes from far, give to a sick person, give to a nurse, give during bad wind or cold periods, these are the gifts made at the appropriate time "

So it is also when we give in times of famine, when we give to someone who comes from far away, when we give without interruption, when at the right time we never stop thinking about giving.

The merits of giving appear when it is made at the right time, and the resulting merit increases:

according to the needs of the region, in the desert.
constantly and relentlessly;
according to the wishes of the beggar;
when we give things of value;
when good people are given monasteries, gardens or ponds;
when we give to the sangha;
when the donor and the beneficiary are equally virtuous;
when the recipient is honored with all kinds of marks of respect;
when we give rare things;
when we give absolutely everything we have ...



The internal gift consists in giving one's life for others with no regret.

The gift of the Law is that which the monk or nun makes by preaching the good Law to beings : It consists in all well-spoken words and all useful words. It is necessary to teach with a pure thought so that the gift is authentic. The material gift is not meritorious either if it is not inspired by a good intention and a good thought.

The preaching of the true gift of the Law must concern the Three Treasures, the four Noble Truths, and all that constitutes the Eightfold Path. It must not become a source of torment for beings,

and must allow them to perceive the true Emptiness of dharmas (phenomena).

Good preaching gives great renown, beauty, happiness, marks of respect, a majestic radiance like that of the sun, the affection of all, the art of speaking, the possession of great knowledge, disappearance of all ties, the destruction of pain.

The bodhisattva must make an effort in the practice of the Great Wisdom if he wants, by one and the same ball of food or by one and the same object (clothing, flower, perfume, necklace, powder, ointment, incense, lamp, banner, parasol, house, etc.) fill and honor all the Buddhas and their disciples with a single offering.

Although food and all these things are already gifts (made by life), why do we still have to give them? It is at the moment when these foods and other things are given that the Dharma of abandonment, as opposed to the thought of greed arises in the mind of the donor and also the merit of the gift arises. Intention combined with an attitude of abandonment produces the act of giving.

The merit of the offering lies in the intention and not in the thing offered. Whether far or near, the Buddhas see this offering and accept it. Religious people who do not have the omniscience of the Buddhas do not always see the offering as a gift, and yet the donor of the offering acquires merit. So when it comes to benevolence, although nothing is given to sentient beings, whoever practices it receives immense merit.

In addition, the bodhisattva are endowed with immense and unalterable qualities and when they offer a single ball of food to all the Buddhas and members of the sangha, the latter are satisfied, and yet the food does not run out, like an abundant spring, whose flow never dries up. So when Manjusri offered a bowl of small cakes to 84,000 monks, all were satisfied, but the cakes did not run out.

For the bodhisattva, the first gateway to meritorious practices is above all the gift.

By the acuity of his wisdom, the bodhisattva can make distinctions between the merits of giving.

1. For the same given object, the value of merit depends on the goodness or the malice of the intention. So Sâriputra once offered a bowl of cooked rice to the Buddha. The Buddha immediately gave it to a dog and asked Sâriputra: "Who of us has acquired the greatest merit?" Sâriputra replied: "If I understand the meaning of Your teaching well, the Buddha by giving to the dog has gained much more merit than I have."

2. It is not the beneficiary that matters but the intention "because thought is the internal master while the beneficiary is only an external thing."

3. In the highest of the great merits, three things are present: the intention of the donor, the thing given and the field of merit (the beneficiary).

4. The donation must be free from any attachment in respect of the donor, the thing given and the beneficiary. It is only in this way that the bodhisattva achieves the perfection of giving.

Giving is a karma, an action carried out from a pure intention, which therefore also contains its consequence, its merits, and according to the intention generates a rebirth in a world more or less favorable for the donor.

It is the quality of our intentions that produces effects that will be reversed, we must deeply understand this point. Gifts for the intention of benefitting in our present life go against purity. Pure giving is that which purifies thought and enables it to turn towards the supreme goal (to access Nirvana) and to discern what is favorable to end suffering.

For Zen, giving means the renunciation of any idea of personal profit as much as karmic retribution. We remember the response of Bodhidharma to the Emperor Wu-ti who asked him what merits he had acquired by building temples and propagating the Buddhist Doctrine: "No merit" because the essence and the truth of the Law, is "an unfathomable emptiness and nothing sacred". An invitation to understand that this unfathomable emptiness is the authentic source of giving.

The renunciation of selfishness and the desire for appropriation is the foundation of an altruism which can then be experienced as a natural component of the human being. Of course, this implies that difficult surrender of the ego which must "forget itself" in the service it renders to others. This is what the fundamental principles of Mahayana Buddhism encourage, an access to this fundamental Truth: "Me and the other are One" (and also are the One, emptiness).

The gift and the service to the others are true only when they are lived in the spontaneity of the heart and the Presence. It is this disposition which permeates all the actions of the bodhisattva's daily life, ours!

Master Deshimaru said that by practicing zazen, one practices all the *paramitas*. This can only be true if zazen is freed from the desire to obtain special merit or a state of consciousness, and is generously given and performed for sentient beings.

Practicing zazen, as well as any other action, in a disinterested spirit is the practice that the Buddhas and Patriarchs of Zen transmit.

Guy Mokuhô

Isolation kills more people than Covid 19 does. Evelyne Yumei Tournier

I'd like to tell you about the lonely one ; the one who is separated, dismissed, isolated, alone, abandoned. Where about am I talking to you ? from my position as a nun and as a nurse ; they meet in my commitment and proceed from the same line of action : giving and taking care.

I work as a psychiatric nun ; we do not only accept schizophreniac ! far from it !

We accept all the UNhappy, people who are depressed, destitute, damaged by the authorities or by their work, the sexually abused, the victims of alcohol or other drugs, the bereaved, inmates from the near-by prison ..



So many injured souls, everybody, all the misery in the world .

Maybe you are part of those, or you could be, every one of us could be.

From this experience on site, we have learnt as caregivers that the disease of the century is not backpain, but the immense suffering of solitary confinement.

Whoever is the person, whatever his health condition, it is this pain that appears in the relationship. All those we try to help will tell you : « this is what is the most difficult » and they add these words in tears « I am nothing .. for nobody »

For many years now I have stopped asking people « Do you have children, parents, relatives ? it's so cruel to hear ; if they exist those we call close

relatives, they are so far away.

Caregivers understand this despair, out of empathy of course mais also because we go through it on a personal level ; a large majority of caregivers are alone (single, divorced..). Some suffer from other exclusions ; all of us in the psychiatry ward are not praised and admired for the noble work of the respirator technicians.

And yet, we revive and give breath with all the energy we can.

We are no heroes, just people doing their job.

I know many of us phone our families more frequently, go shopping for an old lady, send donations to *la Fondation de France*, clap hands for cashiers, garbage collectors and hospital staff from our windows at night, and practice with Zoom..

It's worthy and generous !

However I believe that as people on the Way, we are required to do MORE ; every day, we re-affirm our vow to « save all beings ».

Most of us do not live in a monastery, one's faith vibrating to fulfil this vow : such an admirable position – but most of us live in mudane society, with duties as citizens ... and responsibilities as practioners : put this vow in action.

Let's us each of us adopt an isolated person ; there are plenty of them, in our neighbourhood and in our sangha !

We just have to break away from our self-centeredness to take care of those left behind : send personalized messages, offer one who does not even have a balcony to spend some time in our garden, open the doors of the dojo to the one who does not have one, let's just share.

We can be creative and give more than ordinary generosity !

Let's give time, attention, words, some space in our heart and in the world.

I wrote those lines a few weeks ago ; I believe they are still relevant today ;

Even if the sanitary crisis is ebbing away we all know that everything has more sharpness during and after a crisis for those who were already affected or fragile before. Isolation is no exception.

I don't want to teach lessons to anyone ; I am just trying to give sense to our beautiful vow everyday. I admit having been myself in this position of waiting ; and I have received !

It may not be what I had put on my list ; perhaps, it sounds commonplace but i was filled with joy : mokuho's teachings, being invited in a zoom-dojō everyday, a sutra I didn't know, some nice messages, unknown neighbours offering small things, the plumber who comes for free...

Thanks so much !

Thanks ; this is the most beautiful word in our language and in our practise.

Evelyne Yumei

The Regional Hospital, Bourg-en -Bresse – Paul Hugot.

The ICU at the hospital wasn't too busy.

For my part, I should have left for Japan for the whole of April. So I had worked until the end of March in a fairly relaxed atmosphere, since in fact outside emergencies, resuscitation, respiratory and infectious diseases which were a bit crowded, the other services in the hospital and clinics had reduced activity as we had postponed any non-urgent cases until a later date.



We experienced a great harmony and solidarity across all the services. People who weren't too busy made themselves available to the services that had a lot of patients (doctors, nurses, administrative personnel). This solidarity is something we have observed for a long time in our jobs, where we are often confronted with real life, suffering and death. It is obvious that we didn't need to wait for the government to tell us to apply sensible barriers, but also to show our solidarity.

There was a magnificent mobilisation of individuals at all levels, who did not spare their time, carrying on when fatigued and at great personal risk.

How many amongst them and humans in general will have lost their lives from the incompetence of others, a lack of information or from involvement with others...

In short, we have all been shocked by the contradictory statements of scientists, or pseudo scientists who were not actually present on the ground. A lack of honest information, such as not needing masks, when the actual problem was a lack of funds. I could enumerate other examples.

It isn't time for controversies, but for action!

In speaking about all this, the whole population has exhibited great acts of solidarity and terrible acts of selfishness at every level. Just like in wartime.

I have no idea if the world will really change after this pandemic! I think it was De Gaulle who said "Events don't change politics and politics doesn't change people."

But we can always hope that these events will change people towards greater solidarity and compassion. Another problem : a lot of consultations and surgeries have been indefinitely postponed, which makes me think there will be a huge overload when we start up again. Also, a lot of sick people haven't sought medical help, as they are frightened of being contaminated, so we are all afraid of seeing a rise in pathologies of greater or lesser severity and a rise in deaths apart from COVID.

We hope that all our politicians will finally hear the cries of alarm from our nurses and our emergency and intensive care services.

Take care of yourselves

Paul Hugot

Teaching music during the lockdown - Guillaume Lenoble

The first days of confinement were rather chaotic. We needed to find new routines, change our habits. We both teach music and we'd hear that people had tried to give lessons over Skype here and there, but we were baffled. Also, working in these conditions posed a question from the outset : our teaching is very specific, and for many people we don't have the same importance as national education. In short, is it really essential at this time to continue music? Wouldn't it be better to give a bit of a respite to students who are already very anxious in this period where everyone has been upset?

Eventually we got down to it, even if at the beginning it was rather grudgingly. We recorded video lessons, we learnt how to use video conferencing tools. Our first attempts were long and tiring. In the absence of suitable equipment, the sound was often poor and often didn't allow us to make a precise diagnosis.

As to the possibility of working on the sensory level, we were very quickly limited. So we had to ask ourselves, should we leave certain skills which seemed to us essential for the progression of our classes, whilst at the same time trying to transmit them as best we could. This meant a permanent adaptation, to become ever more flexible in creating new pathways, and to bring in new teaching resources.

It could have been discouraging. But taking into account the benefits to those who received it, we continue. Dialogue starts up, warmer connections develop, we sense that these shared moments were very comforting for the parents who had often been overwhelmed by the events. Sometimes we could give comfort simply by being there to listen. It became stimulating, we wanted to profit from the time we were saving by no longer trying to find new teaching methods and new tools. We almost became zealots, doing too much, in order to be sure that we were fulfilling our role. There too, we need to find the right balance, to find what the pupil really needs, not what is just helping us to feel that we are useful.

So little by little we find the balance. We look back and can finally say it was a good experience. An experience rich in awareness for sure, but above all a beautiful human adventure.

Guillaume Lenoble



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