

BASED ON THE TALK

## Giving What?

Edited by

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## Giving What?

There are two kinds of actions performed by worldly people: Good actions and bad actions. Good actions give good results while bad actions give bad results. Whether good or bad, one day all actions produce their results. We should, therefore, carefully consider the possible results of our actions before we act.

When we look around us we see disparity. Some people are rich; some are poor. Some are beautiful; some are ugly. Some live long, but some die young. Some are famous; most are ordinary. Some are powerful; others are weak. These inequalities do not appear by chance. It is not someone's good luck that they are healthy, or another's bad luck that they are unhealthy. All such inequalities among human beings result from our own intentions and actions. Each person reaps the fruit of his own actions.

On one occasion, the Buddha was asked, "What are the causes and conditions why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior? For people are seen to be short-lived and long-lived, sickly and

healthy, ugly and beautiful, uninfluential and influential, poor and wealthy, low-born and high-born, stupid and wise. What are the causes and conditions, Master Gotama, why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior?"

The Buddha answered, "Beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions, they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is actions that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior."

The Buddha explained the meaning.

One who kills living beings will himself lead a short life; one who abstains from killing living beings will himself lead a long life.

One who injures living beings will be a sickly person, whilst one who abstains from injuring living beings will lead a healthy life.

Display of anger, hatred and bitterness will lead to ugliness; the absence of such negative emotions will be rewarded with beauty.

One who feels envious of the gains, honor, respect and veneration being received by others will be deprived of companions; one who rejoices at the esteem and honor bestowed upon others will be blessed with a multitude of companions.

Not giving food, clothing, carriages, garlands, scents, beds, dwelling and lamps to recluses or brahmins leads to poverty; giving such requisites to them leads to wealth.

One who does not honor those worthy of honor will be low-born, whilst one who honors those to whom honor is due will be high-born.

Not visiting a recluse or brahmin and asking questions such as, “Venerable sir, what is wholesome? What is unwholesome? What is blameable? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What kinds of action will lead to my harm and suffering for a long time? What kinds of actions will lead to my welfare and happiness for a long time? Not visiting and asking such questions leads to stupidity; visiting a recluse or brahmin and asking such questions leads to wisdom.

Every result has its own cause. Different causes generate different results. These are experienced in our surroundings, and are the result of our previous actions. External beings are not responsible for the conditions of our life. It is our own past deeds that condition our lives.

It is through our own intentions and actions that we cast a mold for our life. What we do today will bear fruit tomorrow, not only in this life but also in future lives.

Just as a skillful artist has the ability to produce a masterpiece, in the same way, a skillful person has the ability to act in ways that will bring into being a future life masterpiece. On the other hand, unskillful actions will cause the opposite effect.

We need the right knowledge and skill to produce a masterpiece.

This knowledge can be gained through learning the Lord Buddha’s teaching. The Itivuttaka said:

“There are these three grounds for meritorious activity. Which three? The ground for meritorious activity made of giving, the ground for meritorious activity made of virtue, and the ground for meritorious activity made of development [meditation]. These are the three grounds for meritorious activity.”

Among the three, let us give priority tonight to exploring the ground for meritorious activity made of giving. Through the act of giving, people create a better mold for a better life.

The Buddha said:

“If beings knew, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would the stain of selfishness overcome their minds. Even if it were their last bite, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared, if there were someone to receive their gift. But because beings do not know, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they eat without having given. The stain of selfishness overcomes their minds.”

Because of not knowing the results of giving and sharing as the Buddha knows, stinginess overcomes our minds. That’s why the Buddha said:

“Giving seems like a battle.

Through stinginess and negligence

A gift is not given.”

I am going to speak to you tonight about the benefit of giving and sharing.

This talk is based on a sutta from the Devatā Saü yutta in the Sagātha Vagga Saü yutta that points out the importance of knowing what to give. The title of the sutta is *Kindada* which means ‘**Giving what?**’

Before I begin, let me first explain the difference between the resultant experience of those who give alms – in contrast to those who don’t, by quoting a sutta called ‘**the Benefits of Alms-giving**’. It is from the Aṅguttara Nikāya, chapter five. Therein we read:

On one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. At that time Princess Sumana, with a following of five hundred court ladies in five hundred chariots, came to see the Blessed One. Having arrived, she paid homage to the Blessed One, sat down to one side, and said:

“Buddha, suppose there are two disciples of the Buddha who are equal in faith, equal in virtue and equal in wisdom. But one is an alms-giver and the other is not. Then these two, after death, would be reborn in a happy state, in a heavenly world. Having thus become devas, Buddha, would there be any distinction or difference between them?”

“There would be, Sumana,” said the Blessed One. “The one who has given alms, having become a deva, will surpass the non-giver in five ways: in divine life-span, divine beauty, divine happiness, divine fame and divine power.”

“But if these two, Buddha, pass away from there and return to this world here, would there still be

some distinction or difference between them when they become humans again?”

“There would be, Sumana,” said the Blessed One. “The one who has given alms, having become a human being, will surpass the non-giver in five ways: in human life-span, human beauty, human happiness, human fame and human power.”

“But if these two, Buddha, should go forth from home into the homeless life of monkhood, will there still be any distinction or difference between them when they are monks?”

“There would be, Sumana,” said the Blessed One. “The one who has given alms, having become a monk, will surpass the non-giver in five ways: he is often asked to accept robes, and it is rare that he is not asked; he is often asked to accept almsfood, and it is rare that he is not asked; he is often asked to accept a dwelling, and it is rare that he is not asked; he is often asked to accept medicine, and it is rare that he is not asked. Further, his fellow monks are usually friendly towards him in deeds, words and thoughts; it is rare that they are unfriendly. The gifts they bring him are mostly pleasing, and it is rare that they are not.”

“But, Buddha, if both attain arahantship, would there still be some distinction or difference between them?”

“In that case, Sumana, I declare, there will not be any difference between one liberation and the other.”

“It is wonderful, Buddha, it is marvellous! One has, indeed, good reason to give alms, good reason to do meritorious deeds, if they will be of help to one as a deva, of help as a human, of help as a monk.”

Moreover, the Aṅguttara Nikāya says:

“Monks, in giving a meal, a giver gives five things to a receiver. What five?

He gives life, beauty, ease, strength and wisdom; but in giving these he becomes a partaker in each quality, in heaven and among men.

Our body is composed of four types of materiality: they are kamma produced materiality, consciousness produced-materiality, nutriment produced-materiality and temperature produced materiality.

Past kamma conditioned its materiality; consciousness and temperature also condition their respective materiality while the food we eat conditions nutriment produced-materiality. Food is one of the four causes which sustains our life. We cannot live without it.

That’s why giving alms is, in truth, giving life.

Food is a requisite that is essential for our survival and well-being. Health and human beauty depend on nourishment from food. If we go without food for only a few days, we begin to feel weak, our strength wanes and we quickly run out of the energy to do even simple everyday activities. We discover that our contemplative response diminishes and our rational ability is reduced. This is due to the active relationship between mind and body.

When we are hungry we suffer. If we are hungry for

long, we suffer a lot. We all know that this is a fact of life. On the other hand, once we have eaten we feel at ease and experience an immediate sense of well-being. With the return of our strength and energy, we are able to once again devote our lives to more than just our mere survival.

The Buddha said:

“Bhikkhus, there are these five timely gifts. What five?

“One gives to the guest; to the traveller; to the sick; when food is hard to get; and the first-fruits of the field he sets before the virtuous.”

“Bhikkhus, these are the five timely gifts.”

If we need a better life, we need to give the five timely gifts. Why?

Let us reflect on our own life experience.

We need food to eat, clothes to wear, places to live and medicine to prevent and cure diseases. Can we get them when we need them?

There may be many who go without. It is because of not having given the five timely gifts.”

That’s why the Lord Buddha further instructed:

“Bhikkhus, do not fear meritorious deeds [offering *dāna*, keeping precepts, practicing meditation]. This is an expression denoting happiness, what is desirable, wished for, dear and agreeable, that is, ‘meritorious deeds.’ For I know full well, bhikkhus, that for a long time I experienced desirable, wished for, dear and agreeable results from performing

meritorious deeds.”

How can we experience desirable results by accumulating wholesome deeds?

To consider that question, we need to investigate the real meaning of meritorious giving. Let us begin by seeking guidance from the sutta named “**Giving What?**”

“On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Then, when the night had advanced, a certain devata of stunning beauty, illuminating the entire Jeta’s Monastery, approached the Blessed One. Having approached, he paid homage to the Blessed One, stood to one side, and said to him:

“Giving what does one give strength?

Giving what does one give beauty?

Giving what does one give ease?

Giving what does one give sight?

Who is the giver of all?

Being asked, please explain to me.”

The Blessed One stated:

“Giving food, one gives strength;

Giving clothes, one gives beauty;

Giving a vehicle, one gives ease;

Giving a lamp, one gives sight.

“The one who gives a residence

Is the giver of all.

But the one who teaches the Dhamma

Is the giver of the Deathless.”

The first question is:

Buddha, “Giving what does one give strength?”

Our Buddha answers, “Giving food, one gives strength.”

The commentary explains:

What if a strong person were to go without food for two or three days? Even he would find it difficult to stand. On the other hand, if a weak person is nourished with meals, he soon recovers his strength. Therefore the Buddha said, “Giving food, one gives strength.”

The second question is:

Buddha, “Giving what, does one give beauty?”

The Buddha answers, “Giving clothes, one gives beauty.”

Everybody wants to be beautiful. Nowadays, in developed countries around the world, men and women both undergo plastic surgery on a regular basis. They are all hoping that they will wake up after their surgeries with new and beautiful faces. Naively, they believe that cosmetic surgery will make them happy. In fact, what they really end up with is not happiness but rather unforeseen trouble and worry. Even the most skilled plastic surgeon can not put a stop to the natural aging process. In order to maintain their skin, after their surgery, they become dependent on expensive lotions and creams. Even so, sooner or later their face-lifts need redoing and it is back

to the plastic surgeon's office over and over again. They become slaves to their own foolish vanity. In the end, it is futile and only leads to dukkha.

The Buddha cautions that hatred is for ugliness; non-hatred is for beauty and that those who want beauty should never get angry. So, don't ever get angry with anybody – then you won't need a plastic surgeon.

What actions mark anger? Harsh speech, angry looks, arguing, inappropriate criticism, dissatisfaction, complaining, finger pointing and ill-will are some of the marks of anger. If we, ourselves, want to be beautiful, we must avoid giving in to anger and to the causes of anger.

These are bodily wrong action and verbal wrong action. In order to avoid doing these wrong actions, we must be skillful in reading the habits of our own mind. Please remember the words of the Buddha that I referred to in my second talk **“A Life of True Security”**.

“Bhikkhus, if you are not skillful in reading the habit of others' minds, be skillful in reading the habit of one's own mind.”

There is a tale from the Jātaka Stories about this. In that story we meet a woman who lacked skill in reading the habits of her own mind. One day while irritated, she stared upon an Undeclared Enlightened One (*paccekabuddha*) with an angry look and spoke to him using harsh speech. This action made her become extremely ugly.

Once upon a time, in this story, a king of Benares, Baka by name, ruled his country righteously. At that time, a certain poor man who lived by the eastern gate of Benares

had a daughter named Pañcapapa.

It is said that in a former existence, as a poor man's daughter, this woman was kneading clay and plastering a wall.

At that time a *paccekabuddha* thought, “Where am I to get clay to make this mountain cave neat and trim?” He knew that he could get it in Benares. So, putting on his robes and with bowl in hand he went into the city and took his stand not far from this woman. As it happened, she was angry, and when she looked at the *paccekabuddha* she thought, “In his wicked heart he is begging for clay as well as alms.” The *paccekabuddha* stood without moving. Finally, when she saw that he remained motionless she had a change of heart and, looking at him once more she said “Monk, you have not got any clay.” After that she took a big lump of clay and put it in his bowl, and with this clay he was able to make things neat in the mountain cave.

In her subsequent life, as a result of having given the *paccekabuddha* that lump of clay, her body was soft to the touch. However, because of her angry look her hands, feet, mouth, eyes and nose were extremely ugly. In that life, she was known by the name of *Pañcapapa* (The Five Defects).

Is a woman beautiful when she's angry? As we all know, when a woman is angry she looks ugly, and when that kamma ripens she will be ugly. If we wish for beauty and other good rewards, we must avoid anger and be clever and skillful with our thoughts, words and deeds. The kammās we bring into being give rise to different results. Some actions have serious results while the outcome of

others is small and insignificant.

Should we happen to hurt, harm or destroy small beings, in general, the results of that action (*kamma*) will be relatively minor. But, on the other hand, if we hurt, harm or destroy large beings, the results will be the opposite other extreme.

In the same way, if we harm or destroy or insult a man of virtue, the results will be different than if we harm or destroy or insult a man of no virtue. When we are with the virtuous, we need to be mindful and attentive at all times and be especially on guard against doing anything unwholesome.

A person like a *paccakabuddha* is a Supreme One. Even if the action directed towards him is fairly weak or minor, the kammic results turn out to be heavy.

If we grow a sweet fruit tree in a fertile field, it will bear fruits that are sweet and delicious. If we sow a bitter seed in the same fertile field, the taste of the fruit will be bitter. We must always be adept when performing bodily and verbal actions. It is through them that we construct the conditions that influence and mold our lives.

Returning to the sutta, the deva's third question is: "Giving what does one give ease?"

The Buddha answers, "Giving a vehicle, one gives ease (a gift of well-being)."

It is explained in the commentary that a vehicle means anything which can make travel possible, convenient or comfortable. This could be a horse or an elephant, etc. Bhikkhus, however, are not permitted to accept vehicles such as horses and elephants. It is not suitable to offer

such things to bhikkhus. On the other hand, umbrellas, slippers, walking-sticks, accessories in travel and other types of vehicles not powered by man or animals are examples of vehicles that are allowable for bhikkhus. They can be offered. Giving these is also called giving vehicles. In the same way, a person is offering a vehicle (*i.e.*, anything which can make travel possible, convenient or comfortable) when he repairs roads, builds stairs and bridges, or arranges car, bus, boat, ship or air tickets for travel. So, we see that by giving a vehicle one gives ease.

The deva's fourth question is: "Giving what does one give sight?"

The Buddha answers, "Giving a lamp, one gives sight."

Even those with good eyes cannot see things in the dark. However, when given a lamp to light up the dark, one can see things as they are. So the Buddha said that by giving a lamp, one gives sight to those who need sight. Therefore, by giving candles, torch lights, electric lights and other lights which make things visible for those who need light, one is giving sight.

The deva's fifth question is: "Who is the giver of all?"

Our Buddha answered: "The one who gives a residence is the giver of all."

Why? Because after going for alms, one feels tired and weak. But when they return, take a drink of water, have a shower and enter a building where they can take rest, they feel safe, as well as fresh and strong. So, by giving a residence, one gives strength.



‘*Rupatīti Rūpan*’ These are the words from the *Visud-dhimagga*. They mean our body is always changing because of heat or cold. For instance, when we go outside we are exposed to the elements. Our appearance can be blemished by blistering sunlight or by dusty, windy weather. After coming back inside, however, we can clean up, take rest and quickly regain our appearance and complexion. So, by giving a residence, one also gives beauty.

Moreover, for those of us who wander outside or for anyone who walks outside, the bites of mosquitoes, snakes, scorpions, centipedes and other dangerous insects is an ever-present threat. We are at risk of coming down with malaria or other painful diseases if we are bitten. We also face the on-going problem of protecting our feet from thorns growing on the roadways and pathways that we wander along. By dwelling in buildings or residences, though, we are freed from all these different types of danger. We are safe and at ease and have a place to study, learn or teach without having to worry about somewhere to live. So we can see that by giving a residence, one truly gives a gift of ease and well-being.

In the same way, when we travel or go somewhere and it’s hot and dusty outside, we often feel eye strain or eye irritation which is a stinging uncomfortable sensation. But by entering and resting in the protection of a dwelling, our eyes soon get back to normal and our sight clears up. So, by giving a residence, we also see how one is giving the gift of sight.

Furthermore, when practicing serenity and insight meditation while sitting safely inside buildings and residences, meditators can penetrate the dhamma as they re-

ally are and to see Nibbāna. So, through the act of giving a residence, one is also providing a safe and clean environment in which to practice serenity and insight meditation, in order to know and see the dhamma as they really are and to see Nibbāna.

Before concluding my talk, I will quote a Velāma sutta from Aṅguttara Nikāya, chapter nine.

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvathī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. At that time Anāthapiṇḍika came to see the Blessed One. Having arrived, he paid homage to the Blessed One, sat down to one side, and the Blessed One asked him thus:

“Is alms given in your family, householder?” “Yes, Buddha, it is given in my family. But it consists of a coarse mess of broken rice grains together with sour gruel.”

“Householder, whether one gives coarse alms or choice, if one gives casually, without thought or interest, not with one’s own hand, but gives as if throwing and with no view to kamma and its result in the future; then when that giving bears fruit, the alms-giver’s mind will not turn to the enjoyment of excellent food, of fine clothing, of rich carriages, or to the enjoyment of the five senses; and one’s sons and one’s daughters, one’s slaves, servants and workfolk will have no desire to listen to one, no desire to lend an ear, nor bring understanding to bear on what one says. And for what reason? Such is the result, householder, of deeds done casually.”

Now we see one cause for taking little enjoyment in excellent food or fine clothing. We also see why sons, daughters, servants and others refuse to be obedient. This is kamma and its result.

The Buddha continued:

“But whether one gives coarse alms or choice, householder, if one gives respectfully and considerately, after taking thought, with one’s own hand, gives not like throwing and with view to kamma and its result in the future; then when that giving bears fruit, the alms-giver’s mind will turn to the enjoyment of excellent food, of fine clothing, of valuable carriages, to the enjoyment of the excellence of the five senses; and one’s sons and one’s daughters, one’s slaves, servants and workfolk will have the desire to listen to one, will lend an ear and bring understanding to bear on what one says. And for what reason? Such is the result, householder, of deeds done respectfully and considerately.”

For even more clarity concerning beneficial ways of giving, the Buddha stated:

“Long ago, there lived a brahmin called Velāma. He gave very rich gifts, such as these: He gave eighty four thousand golden bowls filled with silver; he gave eighty four thousand silver bowls filled with gold; he gave eighty four thousand copper bowls filled with treasure, and many other valuable things.

Perhaps, householder, you may think thus: ‘Maybe Velāma, the brahmin, who made that very rich gift, was someone else.’ But think not so, for it

was I, who at that time was Velāma, the brahmin. It was I who made that very rich gift.

But when the gift was given, householder, there was no one worthy to receive the gift; there was none to sanctify that gift. For, though brahman Velāma gave that very rich gift, greater would have been the fruit of that, had he fed one person of right view, a Stream-enterer (*Sotāpanna*).

Though he gave that very rich gift, or though he fed a hundred persons of right view, Stream-enterers, greater would have been the fruit of that, had he fed one Once-returned (*Saghāthāgāmi*).

Though he gave that very rich gift, or though he fed a hundred Once-returned, greater would have been the fruit of that, had he fed one Non-returned (*Anāgāmi*).

Though he gave that very rich gift, or though he fed a hundred Non-returned, greater would have been the fruit of that, had he fed one Arahant.

Though he gave that very rich gift, or though he fed a hundred Arahants, greater would have been the fruit of that, had he fed an Undeclared Enlightened One (*paccekabuddha*).

Though he gave that very rich gift, or though he fed a hundred *Paccekabuddhas*, greater would have been the fruit of that, had he fed one *Tathāgata*, Arahant, Fully Awakened One.”

We now know about the importance of how to give and something about the results of giving. In finishing

my talk tonight, I want to recount how the Buddha concluded his talk. These are the last words of the Buddha in the sutta, the apex of the teaching: “But the one who teaches the Dhamma is the giver of the Deathless.”

In the commentary it is explained:

The one who gives Dhamma talks, who explains the meaning of the commentaries, who teaches the Pāli texts, who answers questions related to the Dhamma, and who teaches meditation practice is one who teaches the way that leads to Nibbāna. He is the giver of the Deathless. Because he teaches this supreme teaching he will himself, in the end, attain Nibbāna, the Deathless.

In the Itivuttaka it also says:

“There are these two kinds of giving: The giving of material things and the giving of the Dhamma. Of these two kinds of giving, this is supreme: The giving of the Dhamma. There are these two kinds of sharing: The sharing of material things and the sharing of the Dhamma. Of these two kinds of sharing, this is supreme: The sharing of the Dhamma. There are these two kinds of help: help with material things and help with the Dhamma. Of the two, this is supreme: Help with the Dhamma.”

That’s why our Buddha said in the Dhammapada:

“Sabbadānaü dhammadānaü jināti,  
 sabbarasaü dhammaraso jināti;  
 sabbaratiü dhammarati jināti,  
 taṇhakkhaya sabbadukkhāü jināti”ti.

This means:

The gift of Dhamma excels all gifts;

The taste of Dhamma excels all tastes;

The delight in Dhamma excels all delights.

Freedom from craving vanquishes all suffering.

May you all be able to give the excellent gifts.

May you all be able to taste the excellent tastes.

May you all be able to delight in the excellent delights.

May you all be able to vanquish all suffering.

May you all be the giver of the Deathless, Nibbāna.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!