



THE ART OF GIVING OR DĀNA – GENEROSITY IN THE CONCEPT OF THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

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ABSTRACT

The art of giving is the Buddha's way of living for everyone and it becomes the practice of giving or sharing anything to others properly from our won properties. If a person has willingness to give something to someone and he should think of making happiness for others because if he sees others' happiness or smile on their faces he also feels the same. But most of people do not understand the art of giving or Dāna and its power to help the world.



That is why to be a successful giving or sharing the one should dedicate in two ways for the welfare and happiness of the world and for the development of wisdom through effort, concentration and mindfulness. Therefore Dāna is introduced in different texts with different names in Buddhist literature and the complement of Dāna can be done either by giving material-help (Āmisadāna) or by giving spiritual-help (Dhammadāna).

KEYWORDS: *The art of giving or Dāna.*

INTRODUCTION

The *Dhamma* taught by the lord Buddha gives us the correct path that leads to ultimate peace. Actually, the art of giving or *Dāna* is the basic requirement teaching to practice for every Buddhist in our daily life. There is a saying in Myanmar which is giving is winning and it is absolutely right in our present society. In every part of society we can associate by giving anything what they need and in return we can win or get what we want to be.

On the other hand, the art of giving means the key of success in the world why because everyone likes to get any gift from anyone. That is the nature of human beings. That is why if we understand clearly and practice the art of giving or *Dāna* then we can attain what we need in our lives. But we should avoid from bribery and we need to follow according to the teaching of the Buddha when we practice the art of giving or *Dāna* to get perfect benefit.

The meaning of *Dāna* or the art of giving

Firstly, I would like to express the term of *Dāna* and its definition in the concept of Theravāda Buddhism. And then why is *Dāna*-generosity become as a part of an important teaching in Buddhist's society? And how is it important to be a good Buddhist or a good human being concerning with *Dāna*-

generosity? It is very important for everyone to understand clearly in the concept of Theravāda Buddhism.

Actually, *Dāna* is a *Pāḷi* word that can be translated in English language as giving, generosity, charity, offering and liberality so on. In the present day, the world is full of suffering for poor people and some of the people are homeless and even hopeless in every country we have seen. And how can we help for those insufficient poor people? We are human beings and we need to help each other that to maintain our humanity. *Dāna*-generosity means giving something to others who needed for livings, foods, cloths, medicines and education so on. That is why *Dāna* is very important thing or habit to help our insufficient and full of suffering world and to maintain humanity in the present day. Certainly, *Dāna*-generosity is an important part in the Buddha's teaching and it is the first step towards eliminating the defilement greed, hatred and delusion.

For example, monastery, food, robe, medicine or some material donations are some forms of *Dāna*-generosity. There are three types of *Dāna*-generosity and it is one of the ten perfections that they complete in the process of becoming fully enlightened ones. The virtue of *Dāna*-generosity can be cultivated in the following three successive stages:

Dāna Pārami- It is giving with the sole intention to be detached from attachment. With boundless love and compassion, one gives away material wealth, services, knowledge sharing or whatever they can offer for the well-being and happiness of the others without expecting anything in return.

Dāna Upapārami- It is giving away a part of one's body for well-being and happiness of others. These include organ donations of kidneys, liver, bone marrow, cornea or any part of the body for the benefits of others.

Dāna ParamatthaPārami- Bodhisattvas are those who selflessly offer their lives for a good purpose. If it can bring happiness and well-being of other beings, they do not hesitate to sacrifice their own precious lives. That is why *Dāna*-generosity is very important attitude while build up to become a peaceful, beautiful human society in the world.

The Classifications of *Dāna* (generosity)

The practise of *dāna* can be done either by giving material-help (*Āmisadāna*) or by giving spiritual-help (*Dhammadāna*). Therefore, these two ways constitute two kinds of *dāna*. Offering of material things such as offering of table, chair, book, pen, etc., is known as *Āmisadāna*. Teaching of the Buddha's *Dhamma* in the form of talks, lectures etc., or sharing of knowledge or technique is known as *Dhammadāna* (giving the gift of *Dhamma*). '*Dhammadāna* is the noblest and highest form of *dāna*' said the Buddha.

It is clearly noted that any giving or offering or sharing which does not concern with any knowledge is called *Āmisadāna*. The giving or offering or sharing which concerning with knowledge is known as *dhammadāna*. The *Dānas* (*Dhammadāna* or *Āmisadāna*) can be categorized into three levels, the level of inferior (*Hīna*), the level of superior (*Paṇīta*), and the level of medium, between the inferior and the superior (*Majjhima*). When the action of *dāna* is motivated by desire for fame or acclaim, it is of inferior level, when the action of *dāna* is motivated by desire for happiness, it is of medium, when the action is motivated by desire for being of noble persons (Ariyas), it is the action of superior level.

The *Dāna* (offering) of one's own person, such as eye, ear, nose, kidney, lungs, liver etc and including one's life are given the name as (*Ajjhattika-dāna*). The offerings of external properties such as table, chair, book, pen, etc are called the name as *Bāhira-dāna* or *Vatthu-dāna*). The granting of safety or security with respect to life (i.e. giving of fearlessness or giving of protection to beings) is named as (*Abhaya-dāna*). The offering with the feeling of hesitation or being urging from someone as '*Sasaṅkhārika-dāna*', the spontaneous offering (without being urging) is termed as '*Asaṅkhārika-dāna*'.

The offering of property earned in accordance with honest, moral and blameless job (livelihood) is termed as *Dhammiya-dāna*, the offering of property earned by immoral means such as stealing, killing, robbing, as *Adhammiya-dāna*. The offering made while one is in a joyful mood with a happy frame of mind which is termed as *Somanassa-dāna*, the offering made with a balanced state of mind

neither is joyous nor sorrowful but equipoise as ‘*Upekkhā-dāna*’, the offering made in the hope of future worldly wealth and pleasures as ‘*Vaṭṭanissita-dāna* or *Dāsa-dāna*’, the offering made in aspirations for nibbāna which is free from the suffering of rebirth as ‘*Vivaṭṭanissita-dāna* or *Bhujissatā-dāna*’, the offering made with one’s own hands as *Sahatthika-dāna*, the offering made by agents on one’s behalf or made by other one’s instruction as *Āṇattika-dāna*.

Again the offering associated with wisdom is given the name as ‘*Ñānasampayutta-dāna*’, the offering unassociated with wisdom as ‘*Ñāavippayutta-dāna*’, the offering of things of permanent, immovable nature such as pagodas, temples, monasteries, rest houses and digging wells, tanks etc., as ‘*Thāvara-dāna*’, the offerings of movable nature, meant for temporary use such as food, robes etc., movable gifts as ‘*Athāvara-dāna*’, the offering made with accompaniment of supplementary materials that usually go along with such on offering as ‘*Saparivāra-dāna*’, the offering besides the main item of robes, it is a gift without accompanying things as ‘*Aparivāra-dāna*’, the offering made constantly or regularly as ‘*Nibaddhadāna*’, the offering made not constantly, not on a regular basis but only occasionally as ‘*Anibaddha-dāna*’, the offering made with what is left over as ‘*Ucchitṭha-dāna*’, the offering made with what is not left over (fresh offering) as ‘*Anucchitṭha-dāna*’.

The offering which is meant to become effective after one’s death: ‘I give such of my property to such and such a person. Let him take possession of them after my death and make use of them’ where a recipient is supposed to take possession after the death of a donor then such a giving is called as ‘*Accaya-dāna*’, the offering made to one or two separate, individual persons as ‘*Puggalika-dāna*’, and the offering made to the whole Order of monks, (the *Samgha*) as ‘*Samghikadāna*’.

If one offers or makes a gift of materials which are poorer in quality than the quality uses by oneself, the gift is of inferior type (*dāna-dāsa* - fit for a servant). If one offers or makes a material gift which is the same quality as he used then the gift is said to be of medium type (*dāna-sahāya* - fit for a friend). If one makes or offers present of gifts which are superior of things better in quality than those enjoyed by one self then the gift is said to be of superior order (*dāna-sāmi* - fit for a master).

Dāna should be done to those who really need it at the right time or at an appropriate time. It is also warned by the Buddha in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* that a *dāna* should be done to a visitor, to one starting on a journey, to one who is ill, at the time of scarcity, and to those endowed with virtue with their newly harvested grains and crops etc.

The Art of giving-Dāna and its Benefits

According to the natural law of cause and effect, or *kaṃma*, an act of giving can bring happiness and other positive benefits in this life and in future lives. As *kaṃma* has been defined by the Buddha as the volition “*chetanaham bhikkhawe kaṃmam vadami*,” an act of giving associated with wholesome volition, or *cetana*, will naturally increase the benefits one receives as a result.

In Buddhism, spiritual development towards liberation from all suffering and the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsara*) has been described in a graduated and step-by-step manner beginning with the practice of giving - *dāna*. The practice of giving and letting go will facilitate the development of moral conduct (*sīla*) followed by mental development (*bhavanā*) consisting of concentration meditation (*samatha bhavanā*) and insight meditation (*vipassanā bhavanā*). In the *Sīha Sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the following five benefits of the practice of giving that can be experienced here and now have been described:

1. A donor will enjoy the affection of many people,
2. People of integrity admire a generous person,
3. A fine reputation will spread far and wide,
4. Self-confident with no sense of embarrassment in an assembly of people and
5. Following death, one will be reborn in a heavenly world. Giving in the form of food is said to bring five particular benefits to the recipient including long life, good appearance, well being, strength and intelligence. It is believed that, as a result of the act of giving food, the donor will also experience similarly benefits in future lives.

Dāna is not merely a volitional state of a man but contribution of loving-kindness, compassion and enjoyment to beings materially or spiritually. Today, people in the world are needed to be sharing or helping each other who are suffering from natural disasters such as storm, earthquake, volcano, tsunami, etc. Nature is just nature because no one can create it. But actually the world, including things and beings, itself is a state of nature. Nature never makes beings or things suffer to which they belong.

Therefore, beings are a part of nature and have to accept anything positively or objectively so that they do not get the feeling of suffering with the right reasoning upon the nature. Within the state of nature, if beings could live with the nature, they would live happily. In order to get a state of happiness, one has to accept the world, which is a state of nature, with beautiful and earthly thinking of sharing one's own spiritually or materially. Then the other being feels peace and happy with one's materially support and may get the art of beautifully living in the world with the help of one's spiritually support. That is why, *dāna* is vitally important for one's own happiness and peace as well as for the others.

On the other hand, the state of sharing of one's own (spiritually or materially) is called as the fulfilment of *Dānapāramī*. An analytical study of *dāna* has been found in *Tipiṭaka* literature that *Dāna* has the quality of making the mind and heart pliable. When someone makes a generous offer of some gift, the very act of giving serves as a decisive support to make the mind more pliable and ready for observance of precepts, for cultivation of concentration and for development of insight wisdom through practice of *Vipassanā* meditation (insight meditation). There are five elements that strengthen to be powerful (wealthy) *dāna*. It means that these five elements should accompany the *dāna* to be of greatest purity and benefit. They are as follow:

- (1) The donor observes the precepts and is of good moral conduct,
- (2) The recipient is also morally virtuous,
- (3) The material things which offered to recipient is must be pure, justly and rightly,
- (4) The offering is made is with happiness before with pure satisfaction and delight during and with rejoicing after making the offer,
- (5) The donor has complete confidence in the law of cause and effect.

In the *MilindapañhāPāli* and *Aṭṭhasālinī* commentary, confidence is compared to the crown jewel ruby of a Universal Monarch. The ruby has the property or ability of instantly purifying and clearing the water in which it is put, no matter how dirty the water is. In a similar manner, confidence dispels instantly all that is defiling the mind and makes it pure and clear at once. If the mind is filled with confidence, there is no room in it for defilements such as grief, worry, etc. As regards having confidence in the law of cause and effect, according to *Tipiṭaka* literature, one should reflect thus: ' I will have spent a certain amount of my wealth by offering this *dāna*, But it will not be spent in vain.

Through this act of *dāna*, I will have developed volitions which are much more precious than the wealth I will have spent. My wealth is liable to be destroyed by five kinds of enemies, but this mental action of volition is indestructible and will follow me through rounds of existence till I attain Nibbāna. Because of this mental action of volition, I will reap beneficial results throughout the rounds of existences there is no doubt about it'. Ability to keep the mind clear and pure in this manner is having faith in the law of cause and effect.

Thus, it is important to develop, through reflecting on the law of cause and effect, confidence that is conducive to purity of mind. In order to be of greatest purity and benefit of *dāna*, a donor side is important, yet the side of a recipient also essentially important. The above text says, if both of them are morally virtuous then the act of *dāna* would be highly beneficial. Thus the art of offering (*dāna-pāramī*) is very helpful for oneself as well as for others and it can make the mind and the heart pliable too. It is also ready for observance of precepts (*sīla*), for cultivation of concentration (*samādhi*) and for development of insight wisdom (*paññā*) through practice of *Vipassanā* meditation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, according to Buddha's philosophy, this is not our first life and will not be our last as well. As long as our ignorance remains, we will be born again and again in the round of *Samsāra*. The *kammic* energy we produce in the here and now will go with us beyond death. We are our own creators

and till the day we become enlightened we will remain in this circle of repeated existence. *Dāna* produces wholesome *Kammic* energy which will bring abundant wealth, prosperity and favourable births in human and divine realms.

That is why, in *Itivuttaka*, a collection of Buddha's sayings, when referring to the value of *dāna* Buddha has stated that: "Bhikkhus, if beings knew, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would they allow the stain of meanness to obsess them and take root in their minds. Even if it were their last morsel, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared it, if there were someone to share it with. But, bhikkhus, as beings do not know, as I know, the result of giving and sharing, they eat without having given,, and the stain of meanness obsesses them and takes root in their minds." From this point of view, I think that everyone should practice the art of giving for the welfare of all living beings and for ourselves in future life.

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