

Dāna Pāramitā

IV. CHAPTER 4: THE PERFECTION OF GIVING

A. THREE KINDS OF BENEFIT AND PATH ADORNMENT ARISING FROM GIVING

How does the bodhisattva go about cultivating giving? If giving is cultivated for the sake of bringing about self-benefit, benefit of others, and the combined benefit of both, one becomes able thereby to adorn the path to bodhi.

1. RIGHT MOTIVATION IN THE PRACTICE OF GIVING

In his cultivation of giving, the bodhisattva is motivated by a wish to so train and discipline beings that they are caused to abandon suffering and affliction.

One who cultivates the practice of giving constantly brings forth the motivation to relinquish his own material wealth to whosoever might come and seek to obtain it. In doing so, he brings forth a mind of veneration and esteem comparable to the thoughts he would bring forth in relation to his father, mother, teachers, elders, or good spiritual guide.

Even towards those who are poverty-stricken and of the most lowly social station, he brings forth thoughts of pity comparable to those he would have towards his only son. He gives whatever is needed with a delighted and respectful mind. This is what qualifies as the mind of giving as initially cultivated by the bodhisattva.

2. SELF-BENEFIT

On account of cultivating the practice of giving, one's fine reputation spreads all about and, no matter where one is reborn, one's wealth and jewels become luxuriously abundant. This is what is meant by "self-benefit."

3. BENEFIT OF OTHERS

Where one is able to cause the minds of beings to become satisfied, where one is able to transform them through teaching, and where one is able to train and discipline them in a way whereby they are caused to become free of miserliness, this is what is meant by "benefit of others."

4. COMBINED BENEFIT

On the basis of that signless great giving¹² which one has cultivated, one teaches beings, thus causing them to gain benefit identical to one's own. This is what is meant by "combined benefit."

5. ADORNING THE PATH OF BODHI THROUGH GIVING

On account of cultivating giving, one gains the throne of the wheel-turning king, draws in all of the incalculably many beings, and becomes able even to gain the inexhaustible Dharma treasury of the Buddha. This is what is meant by “adorning the path to bodhi.”

B. THE THREE TYPES OF GIVING

Giving is of three types. The first is Dharma giving. The second is the giving of fearlessness. The third is giving of material wealth.

1. THE GIVING OF DHARMA

As for the giving of Dharma, one encourages people to take on the precepts and to cultivate the mind of those who have left the home life. For the sake of destroying erroneous views, one explains the faults and perils inherent in the manifold evils flowing from annihilationism, eternalism, and the four inverted views. One distinguishes and explains the meaning of ultimate truth. One praises the meritorious qualities of vigor, explaining the faults and evils inherent in negligence. This is what is meant by the giving of Dharma.

2. THE GIVING OF FEARLESSNESS

In an instance where the bodhisattva observes beings beset by fear of representatives of the King, lions, tigers, wolves, floods, fire, bandits, or insurgents, he is able then to rescue and protect them. This is what is meant by the giving of fearlessness.

3. THE DEFINITION AND SCOPE OF THE GIVING OF MATERIAL WEALTH

Where one gives material wealth and remains free of miserliness, even where such giving extends up to jewels, elephants, horses, carriages, silks, grains, clothing, food and drink, and even where such giving extends down to a scoop of fried flour or a strand of thread—and where one matches the aims of the supplicants by bestowing on them whatsoever they may need, no matter whether it be much or whether it be little—this is what is meant by the giving of material wealth.

1) FIVE SUBCATEGORIES OF THE GIVING OF MATERIAL WEALTH

The giving of material wealth is itself possessed of five additional categories:

- First, giving done with an ultimately sincere mind;
- Second, giving done based on faith;
- Third, giving which is appropriate to the time;
- Fourth, giving which is done with one's very own hands;
- Fifth, giving which accords with Dharma.

2) FIVE CATEGORIES OF WRONG GIVING

That which should not be given is itself also possessed of five additional categories:

1. Items of material wealth obtained in an unprincipled manner should not be given to people because such items do not qualify as pure [gifts].
2. Intoxicants and toxic herbs are such as one does not give to people because they instill confusion in other beings.
3. Snares, traps, and animal nets are such as one does not give to people because they torment beings.
4. Swords, cudgels, bows, and arrows are such as one does not give to people because they injure beings.
5. Music and sensual encounters with women are such as one does not give to people because they bring about destruction of the pure mind.

3) SUMMARY OF WRONG AND RIGHT GIVING

To sum up the essentials, whatever does not accord with Dharma or whatever torments or confuses beings should not be given to people. Whatever else one possesses which may cause beings to experience happiness qualifies as gifts which accord with Dharma.

C. FIVE ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF DELIGHTING IN GIVING

People who delight in giving gain five additional kinds of renown and wholesome benefit:

First, they always succeed in drawing personally close to all of the Bhadras and the Āryas.

Second, they become such as all beings are happy to see.

Third, when they enter the Great Assembly, they are revered by others.

Fourth, their fine name and good reputation flow everywhere and become renowned throughout the ten directions.

Fifth, they are thereby able to create superior and marvelous causes for the realization of bodhi.

D. UNIVERSALITY IN GIVING, THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC OF A BODHISATTVA

One who is a bodhisattva is defined by being one who is universal in his giving. Being one who is universal in his giving does not refer to a circumstance involving an abundance of material wealth but rather refers instead to possessing a mind inclined toward giving.

Where one takes up material wealth sought out in accordance with Dharma and uses it in giving, this accords with universality in giving.

Where one uses a pure mind free of deception in one's giving, this accords with universality in giving.

Where one observes those who are poverty-stricken and, with a mind inclined towards pity, proceeds to give to them, this accords with universality in giving.

Where one observes those who are ensconced in hardship and suffering and, with a mind of kindness and compassion, proceeds to give to them, this accords with universality in giving.

Where one abides in poverty and possesses but little material wealth, yet one is nonetheless able to give something useful, this accords with universality in giving.

Where one loves and esteems precious things, but then is able to free up his mind and give them as gifts, this accords with universality in giving.

Where one disregards whether the recipient is one who upholds the precepts or breaks the precepts and also disregards whether the recipient constitutes a field of blessings or does not qualify as a field of blessings, this accords with universality in giving.

Where one does not give out of a desire to acquire the marvelously fine bliss available in human or celestial rebirths, this accords with universality in giving.

Where one gives in the course of seeking to realize the unsurpassed bodhi, this accords with universality in giving.

Where one experiences no regrets when one is about to give, when one is actually giving, and also after one has given, this accords with universality in giving.

E. TYPES OF GIVING AS BASES FOR CORRESPONDING KARMIC FRUITS

In a case where one gives flowers, it contributes to the causal bases for obtaining the flowers of the *dhāraṇīs* and the seven limbs of bodhi.

In a case where one gives incenses, it contributes to the causal bases for [the incense-like fragrances of] moral virtue, meditative concentration, and wisdom imbuing and applying themselves to one's own person.

In a case where one gives fruit, it contributes to the causal bases for perfecting the fruits [of the Path] which are free of outflow-impurities.

In a case where one gives food, it contributes to the causal bases for possessing long life, eloquence, fine appearance, physical strength, and happiness.

In a case where one gives clothing, it contributes to the causal bases for gaining a pure physical form and for ridding oneself of any absence of a sense of shame or sense of blame.

In a case where one gives the light of lamps, it contributes to the causal bases for gaining the buddha eye's complete illumination of the nature of all dharmas.

In a case where one gives conveyances drawn by elephants or horses, it contributes to the causal bases for gaining the unsurpassed vehicle and for perfecting the spiritual superknowledges.

In a case where one gives [prayer-bead] necklaces, this giving contributes to the causal bases for gaining the eighty subsidiary characteristics.

In a case where one gives precious jewels, it contributes to the causal basis for gaining the thirty-two major marks of a great man.

In a case where one gives muscle power or provides servants, it contributes to the causal bases for gaining the ten powers and four fearlessnesses of a buddha.

F. SUMMATION ON THE BODHISATTVA'S CULTIVATION OF GIVING

To sum up the essentials, one may even go so far as to give up one's country, city, wife, sons, head, eyes, hands, feet, or entire body, giving them with a mind free of miserliness or self-cherishing, all for the sake of realizing the unsurpassed bodhi and bringing beings across to liberation.

G. THE ESSENCE OF THE BODHISATTVA'S PERFECTION OF GIVING

When the bodhisattva, *mahāsattva* cultivates giving, he does not perceive the existence of any material wealth, of any benefactor, or of any recipient. This is because they are devoid of any [inherently-existent] characteristic signs. If one cultivates in this manner, he will then succeed in perfecting *dāna pāramitā*.