

## Generosity

What is generosity?  
Can generosity make us happy?  
How can we become more giving?

Because Buddhists place great importance on generosity, they have many words to describe it. Two of these words are “dana” and “caga”. Dana translates as distribution of gifts.” Caga translates as “a heart bent on giving.” Dana, or giving, is intimately tied to karma, or cause and effect. Caga describes the state of mind of the generous giver, or the desire to give. It is caga that creates a rich soil for our meditation. (Jacqueline Kramer, “Generosity in Buddhism”)

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As long as we are sorting ourselves into givers and receivers, we are still falling short of dana paramita. Wisdom teaches us that there is giving and receiving, but there are no givers and no receivers. In a sense, giving and receiving are one. If giving is “good,” then receiving is equally good. There is something unbalanced and uncomfortable about the person who is so busy giving to others that they can never receive anything themselves. (Barbara O’Brien, “The Perfection of Giving”)

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Alaya is a Sanskrit word meaning “basis,” or sometimes “abode” or “home” . . . It is the fundamental state of consciousness, before it is divided into “I” and “other,” . . . In order to rest in the nature of alaya, you need to go beyond your poverty attitude and realize that your alaya is as good as anybody else’s alaya. You have a sense of richness and self-sufficiency. You can do it, and you can afford to give out as well. (Chogyam Trungpa, Training the Mind)

Generosity trusts the emptiness that runs through things, even ungenerous or ungainly things – it links to the clarity that underlies all our madness . . . to find a remedy, I don’t have to improve my thoughts, just be generous with them. Then freedom seems to appear automatically. (Sallie Jiko Tisdale, Dharma Rain Center)

In an abundant heart, our sense of welfare expands. The Iowa corn farmer whose corn always took first prize at the state fair had the habit of sharing the best seed corn with all the farmers in the neighborhood. When asked why, he said, “It’s really a matter of self-interest. The wind picks up the pollen and carries it from field to field. So if my neighbors grow inferior corn, the cross-pollination brings down the quality of my own corn. That is why I am concerned that they plant only the very best. (Jack Kornfield, The Wise Heart)

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“As for generosity, the most precious thing we have is our own deeply lived life experience, and whichever way we can share that is a gift, according to our capacities.” (Roger Housden)

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Buddhism is primarily concerned about our state of mind. Hence, motivation and intention is of utmost importance when we give. Generosity can mask an abundance of intentions that have nothing to do with generosity. Impure motivations include giving in order to harm others; giving with a desire for fame or to impress others; giving with an expectation or an agenda.

Once I was young and poor – and generous. I shared an old house with several people and slept on the porch and owned nothing more valuable than my bicycle. . . . Now I have a house and a car and a savings account, and I am not so generous. Sometimes I want a nicer house, a newer car. I wonder if I have enough money saved. I want more time to myself. I have many more things now, and that means I have more things to lose. (Sallie Jiko Tisdale, Dharma Rain Center)

Just because you give something away does not mean you are necessarily being generous. Perhaps you are giving with a clear intention to get something in return. Hence, whether a gesture is truly generous or not is a function of the context of the giver's choice. If you give with an impure motivation, it only reinforces the mode of being organized around a sense of self. Ultimately, generosity is about non-attachment and loving kindness. It is through giving with a kind, loving heart that we develop our capacity to let go. As we let go we become freer, lighter, and happier. (Jacqueline Kramer)

Going above and beyond doesn't mean the recipient will appreciate or even be able to perceive just how generous you have been. Perhaps you have felt unappreciated or even taken advantage of, when your commitment was to be generous. Maybe feeling unappreciated is a sign that it was not an act of generosity at all, but rather an act with emotional strings attached. Perhaps there have been times when you have been given something, seemingly in the spirit of generosity, yet been left feeling manipulated. (Susan Mazza, "Genuine Generosity")

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Adapted from the sources by Cathy Rooney & Diane Hayes

### Generosity Quotes

"This is the true joy of life, the being used up for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can."

*George Bernard Shaw*

"It is the heart that gives, the fingers just let go."

*African proverb*

You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give."

*Winston Churchill*

"Generosity is giving more than you can, and pride is taking less than you need."

*Khalil Gibran*

"It takes generosity to discover the whole through others. If you realize you are only a violin, you can open yourself up to the world by playing your role in the concert."

*Jacques Yves Cousteau*

"Too many have dispensed with generosity in order to practice charity."

*Albert Camus*

"What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and world remains and is immortal."

*Albert Pike*

"Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared."

*Buddha quotes*

"Real generosity is doing something nice for someone who will never find out."

*Frank A. Clark*