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Dāna Maha-p,phala Sutta

The Discourse on Giving That is of Great Fruit | A 7.49/4:59-63

Theme: On the best motivation for giving

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003; rev 2010

Introduction

This discourse given to Sāriputta and the laymen of Campā mentions seven good reasons for giving, and they are rated in an ascending order according to the results that arise after death. The best reason for giving is the seventh one, that is, as “an adornment for the mind, a support for the mind” [§9-10]. The seven kinds of giving fit nicely into the seven levels of heavens that the giver is reborn in after death. The Commentary notes that the highest motivation for giving, unsoiled by lower motivations and leading to non-return, need some level of mastery in calm [“adornment”] and insight [“support”] so that one cultivates a genuine motivation for giving.

This Sutta should be studied with the following Suttas that also discuss giving, the first two of which shares many common points with the Dāna Mahapphala Sutta:¹

(Aṭṭha) Dāna Sutta 1 & 2 (on the motive behind giving) (A 8.31-32),²

Dāna Vatthu Sutta (on the grounds for giving) (A 8.33),³

(Dāna) Vacchagotta Sutta (on the benefits of giving to those freed from the mental hindrances) (A 3.57),⁴

Suppavāsa Sutta (on the four blessing that accrue from giving of food) (A 4.57),⁵

Sumanā Rāja,kumārī Sutta (on the various levels of benefits the giver obtains) (A 5.31),⁶ and

Sappurisa Dāna Sutta (the true individual⁷ gives out of faith, respectfully, at the right time, with a generous heart, without belittling anyone) (A 5.148).⁸

For an interesting study on how giving helps the giver through the active compassion of recipient, see Liz Wilson’s “Beggars can be choosers: Mahākassapa as selective eater of offerings” (2003).⁹

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¹ See esp **Aputtaka S 2** (S 3.20/1:91-93) = SD 22.5 Intro (2).

² See A 8.31-32/4:236 = SD 6.6 (6a & 6b).

³ See A 8.33/4:236 f = SD 6.6 (6c).

⁴ See A 3.57/1:160-162 = SD 22.12.

⁵ See A 4.57/2:62 f = SD 22.13.

⁶ See A 5.31/3:32-34 = SD 22.14.

⁷ “True individual” (*sappurisa*), also “good person, ideal individual.” The qualities of a *sappurisa* are given at D 33.2.2(6)/3:252, 34.1.8(7)/3:283; M 113; A 7.64/4:113, 8.38/4:144 f & M 110.14-24/3:23 f.

⁸ See A 5.148/3:172 f = SD 22.15.

⁹ In J C Holt, J N Kinnard & J S Walters (eds), *Constituting Communities: Theravada Buddhism and the religious cultures of South and Southeast Asia*. Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2003:57-70 (ch 3)

The Discourse on the Giving That is of Great Fruit

A 7.49/4:59-63

Some laymen desire to hear the Dharma

1a At one time the Blessed One was staying on the shore of Gaggarā Lake in Campā. Then a large number of laymen disciples from Campā went to the venerable Sāriputta and, having saluted him, sat down at one side. As they were sitting there at one side, they said to the venerable Sāriputta:

“It has been a long time, bhante, since we have heard a Dharma talk in the Blessed One’s presence. It would be good if we could listen to a Dharma talk in the Blessed One’s presence.”

“In that case, brothers, come again on this uposatha day [observance day],¹⁰ and perhaps you will get to hear a Dharma talk in the Blessed One’s presence.”

“As you say, bhante,” the laymen from Campā said to the venerable Sāriputta. Then rising from their seats, saluted him, and then circling him rightwise, they left.

Gifts that bear great fruit and those that do not

1b On that uposatha day, the laymen from Campā went to the venerable Sāriputta and, having saluted him, stood at one side. Then the venerable Sāriputta, together with the laymen from Campā, went to the Blessed One and, having saluted him, sat down at one side.

Seated thus at one side, the venerable Sāriputta said this to the Blessed One: **[60]**

2 “Bhante, might there be the case where a gift that is given in a certain manner does *not* bear great fruit nor great benefit for a certain person? And, yet might there a gift that is given in a certain manner *does* bear great fruit, great benefit for a certain person?”

“There might be the case, Sāriputta, where a gift that is given in a certain manner does *not* bear great fruit nor great benefit for a certain person. And yet there might be the case, Sāriputta, where a gift that is given in a certain manner *does* bear great fruit, great benefit for a certain person.”

Motivations for giving

3 “What, bhante, is the cause, the reason, why such a gift that is given in a certain manner does *not* bear great fruit nor great benefit for a certain person? And what, bhante, is the cause, the reason, why such a gift that is given in a certain manner *does* bear great fruit, great benefit for a certain person?”

(1) FOR THE SAKE OF REBIRTH. “Here, Sāriputta, there is the case where a person makes a gift seeking his own profit, with a mind attached (to the reward), seeking to store them up for himself, thinking, ‘**I’ll enjoy this after death.**’

He makes his gift—food or drink; cloth, vehicle; garland, perfume or ointment; bedding, shelter or lighting accessories¹¹—to a brahmin or a recluse.

What do you think, Sāriputta? Might a person make such a gift as this?”

“He might, bhante.”

“Now, Sāriputta, having made this gift seeking his own profit, with a mind attached (to the reward), seeking to store them up for himself, thinking, ‘I’ll enjoy this after death,’ with the body’s breaking up, after death, he reappears in the host of the Four Great Kings.

Then, **[61]** having exhausted that karma, that power, that status, that sovereignty, he is a returner, coming back to this world.

4 (2) ON ACCOUNT OF ETHICS. Then there is here the case of a person who makes a gift, *not* seeking his own profit, nor with a mind attached (to the reward), nor seeking to store up for himself, nor thinking, ‘I’ll enjoy this after death.’

¹⁰ “On this uposatha day,” *tad-ah’upasathe*. Cf (Tad-ah’) Uposatha S (A 3.70/1:205-215) = SD 4.18.

¹¹ “Lighting accessories,” *padīpeyya*, “that which is connected with lamps.”

Instead, he makes a gift, thinking, ‘**Giving is good!**’

He makes his gift—food or drink; cloth, vehicle; garland, perfume or ointment; bedding, shelter or lighting accessories—to a brahmin or a recluse.

What do you think, Sāriputta? Might a person make such a gift as this?”

“He might, bhante.”

“Now, Sāriputta, having made this gift, thinking, ‘Giving is good!’ with the body’s breaking up, after death, he reappears in the host of the devas of the Thirty-three.

Then, having exhausted that karma, that power, that status, that sovereignty, he is a returner, coming back to this world.

5 (3) FOR THE SAKE OF TRADITION. Or, instead of thinking, ‘Giving is good!’

he makes a gift, thinking, ‘This was given in the past, done in the past, by my father and my father’s father. **It would not be right for me to let this old family custom die!**’

He makes his gift—food or drink; cloth, vehicle; garland, perfume or ointment; bedding, shelter or lighting accessories—to a brahmin or a recluse.

What do you think, Sāriputta? Might a person make such a gift as this?”

“He might, bhante.”

“Now, Sāriputta, having made this gift, thinking, ‘This was given in the past, done in the past, by my father and my father’s father. It would not be right for me to let this old family custom die!’ with the body’s breaking up, after death, he reappears in the company of the devas of Yama.

Then, having exhausted that karma, that power, that status, that sovereignty, he is a returner, coming back to this world.

6 (4) OUT OF COMPASSION. Or, instead of thinking, ‘This was given in the past, done in the past, by my father and my father’s father. It would not be right for me to let this old family custom die!’

he makes a gift, thinking, ‘**I cook, but they (being recluses) do not cook [do not keep house].** It would not be proper for me when I do cook not to give to those who do not.’¹²

He makes his gift—food or drink; cloth, vehicle; garland, perfume or ointment; bedding, shelter or lighting accessories—to a brahmin or a recluse.

What do you think, Sāriputta? Might a person make such a gift as this?”

“He might, bhante.”

“Now, Sāriputta, having made this gift thinking, ‘I cook, but they (being recluses) do not cook [do not keep house]. It would not be proper for me when I do cook not to give to those who do not,’

with the body’s breaking up, after death, he reappears in the company of the Tusita devas.

Then, having exhausted that karma, that power, that status, that sovereignty, he is a returner, coming back to this world.

7 (5) FOR THE SAKE OF ONE’S RELIGION. Or, instead of thinking, ‘I cook, but they (being recluses) do not cook [do not keep house]. It would not be proper for me when I do cook not to give to those who do not,’

he makes a gift, thinking, ‘**Just as there were the great sacrifices of the sages of the past**—Aṭṭhaka, Vāmaka, Vāma,deva, Vessā,mitta, Yamat-aggi, Aṅgī,rasa, Bhāradvāja, Vāsetṭha, Kassapa, and Bhagu¹³—in the same way, I will distribute my gifts.’

¹² “He makes a gift, thinking...etc.” *aham pacāmi, ime na pacanti, na arahāmi pacanto apacantānam dānam adātun ti dānam deti: Dāna Maha-p,phala S* (A 7.49.4(4)/4:61,14-15) = SD 2.3; (**Aṭṭha**) **Dāna S = Dāna S 1** (A 8.31/4:236) = SD 6.6. Here, a wordplay on *pacāmi, pacanti*, etc. Cf *apaca* (as in *anāgāre pabbajite apace brahma, -cārayo*, “a homeless renunciant who cooks not, a celibate” (A 8.38/4:245.6*), where it means lit “not cooking,” and fig “who does not keep house.” Cf **Bhikkhā Parampara J** v285: *Na pacāmi na pācemi, na chindāmi na chedaye, tam mam akiñcanam ṇatvā, sabba,pāpehi āratam*, “I cook, he cooks not: I have wealth, he nothing: I’m bound tight to worldly things but he is free: the food is his by right” (J 496/4:372* = v285). (CPD: ¹apaca).

¹³ The list of names of ancient Vedic rishis—**Aṭṭhaka, Vāmaka, Vāma,deva, Vessā,mitta, Yamat-aggi, Aṅgī,rasa, Bhāra,dvāja, Vāsetṭha, Kassapa, and Bhagu**—is stock: **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3/1:104 ×2); **Te,vijja S** (D 13/1:-238, 239, 241-243); **Caṅkī S** (M 95/2:169, 170); **Subha S** (M 99/2:200 ×2); **Doṇa Brāhmaṇa S** (A 5.192/3:224, 229); **Dāna Maha-p,phala S** (A 7.49.7/4:61); V 1:245,20; DA 1:273; VvA 265.15. Skt cognates: **Aṣṭaka** (son of

He makes his gift—food or drink; cloth, vehicle; garland, perfume or ointment; bedding, shelter or lighting accessories—to a brahmin or a recluse.

What do you think, Sāriputta? Might a person make such a gift as this?”

“He might, bhante.”

“Now, Sāriputta, having made this gift thinking, ‘Just as there were the great sacrifices of the sages of the past—Aṣṭaka, Vāmaka, Vāma,deva, Viśvā,mitra, Yamad-agni, Aṅgī,rasa, Bhāra,dvāja, Vāsiṣṭha, Kāśyapa, and Bhṛgu—in the same way, I will distribute my gifts,’

with the body’s breaking up, after death, he reappears in the company of the Nimmāṇa,ratī devas [who delight in creation]. Then, having exhausted that karma, that power, that status, that sovereignty, he is a returner, coming back to this world.

8 (6) FOR THE SAKE OF MENTAL CALM. Or, instead of thinking, ‘Just as there were the great sacrifices of the sages of the past—Aṣṭaka, Vāmaka, Vāma,deva, Viśvā,mitra, Yamad-agni, Aṅgī,rasa, Bhāra,dvāja, Vāsiṣṭha, Kāśyapa, and Bhṛgu—in the same way, I will distribute my gifts,’

he makes a gift, thinking, **[62]** ‘When this gift of mine is given, **it calms my mind**. Satisfaction and joy arise.’

He makes his gift—food or drink; cloth, vehicle; garland, perfume or ointment; bedding, shelter or lighting accessories—to a brahmin or a recluse.

What do you think, Sāriputta? Might a person make such a gift as this?”

“He might, bhante.”

“Now, Sāriputta, having made this gift thinking, ‘When this gift of mine is given, it calms my mind. Satisfaction and joy arise,’

with the body’s breaking up, after death, he reappears in the company of the Para,nimmita,vasavattī devas [who lord over the creations of others]. Then, having exhausted that karma, that power, that status, that sovereignty, he is a returner, coming back to this world.

9 (7) THE BEST WAY TO GIVE. Or, instead of thinking, ‘When this gift of mine is given, it calms my mind. Satisfaction and joy arise,’ he makes a gift, thinking, ‘**This is an adornment for the mind, a support for the mind.**’¹⁴

He makes his gift—food or drink; cloth, vehicle; garland, perfume or ointment; bedding, shelter or lighting accessories—to a brahmin or a recluse.

What do you think, Sāriputta? Might a person make such a gift as this?”

“He might, bhante.”

“In this case, Sāriputta, this person, having made his gifts not seeking his own profit, nor with a mind attached (to the reward), nor seeking to store them up for himself,

nor thinking, ‘I’ll enjoy this after death,’

nor thinking, ‘Giving is good,’

nor thinking, ‘This was given in the past, done in the past, by my father and father’s father. It would not be right for me to let this old family custom die.’

Viśvā,mitra & author of Rg,veda 10.104), **Vāmaka** (cf RV 10.99), **Vāma,deva** (author of RV 4.1-41, 45-48), **Viśvā,mitra** (RV 3.33; author of most of RV 3 & 9.67.13-15, 10.137.5, 167), **Jamad-agni** (descendent of Bhṛgu, son of Bhārgava, and father of Paraśu,rāma; often named with Viśvā,mitra as adversary of Vasiṣṭha; RV 3.62.18, 8.101.8, 9.62.24, 62.25), **Aṅgī,rasa** (one of the 7 great rishis, author of RV 9), **Bhāra,dvāja** (a son of Brhaspati), **Vasiṣṭha** (one of the 7 great rishis, author of RV 7, adversary of Viśvā,mitra), **Kāśyapa** (one of the 7 great rishis and priest of Paraśu,rāma and Rāma,candra; cf RV 9.114.2), and **Bhṛgu** (one of the 7 great rishis). See *Vinaya Texts* (tr Rhys Davids & Oldenberg) 2:130 n3 & V:H 4:337 nn5-9.

¹⁴ *Cittālaṅkāraṃ citta,parikkhār’attham*. The meaning is that recollecting on charity (*cāgānussati*) is helpful in our meditation: see **Sambādh’okāsa S** (A 6.26/3:314 f) = SD 15.6. In other words, the giving is part of our cultivation of moral virtue as a support for mental cultivation. With abundant moral virtue, it is easier if we are to cultivate the mind. Conversely, if we find difficulty in meditating then we should examine our moral conduct and rectify any unwholesome habits or resolve negative thoughts. Comy glosses this as ref to “calm and insight” (*samatha,vipassanā*) (AA 4:123). However, it should be noted here that these 2 terms are *not* types of meditation, but rather *aspects* of meditation that we need to cultivate for a proper practice: see **Refuge 2** = SD 3.2 (4.2) & **Bhāvanā** = SD 15.1 (4).

nor thinking, ‘I cook, but they (being recluses) do not cook [do not keep house]. It would not be proper for me when I do cook not to give to those who do not,’

nor thinking, ‘Just as there were the great sacrifices of the sages of the past—Aṣṭaka, Vāmaka, Vāma-deva, Viśvāmitra, Yamad-agni, Aṅgī, rasa, Bhāra, dvāja, Vāsiṣṭha, Kāśyapa, and Bhrgu—in the same way, I will distribute my gifts,’

nor thinking, ‘When this gift of mine is given, it makes the mind serene. Satisfaction and joy arise,’

10 —but, he makes a gift, thinking, ‘**This is an adornment for the mind, a support for the mind**’—

with the body’s breaking up, after death, he reappears in the company of Brahma’s Retinue. Then, [63] having exhausted that karma, that power, that status, that sovereignty, *he is a non-returner*.¹⁵ He does not come back to this world.

11 This, Sāriputta, is the cause, this is the reason, why such a gift that is given in a certain manner does *not* bear great fruit nor great benefit for a certain person.

And yet, Sāriputta, this is the cause, this is the reason, why such a gift that is given in a certain manner *does* bear great fruit, great benefit for a certain person.”

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¹⁵ **A non-returner** (*anāgāmī*), on overcoming the five lower fetters (*orambhāgiya saṃyojanā*), is reborn in the Brahmā worlds known as the Pure Abodes (*suddh’āvāsa*), the five highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa, loka*) where only non-returners assume their last birth to become arhats and attain nirvana. These worlds are Āviha (“non-declining”), Ātappa (“Unworried”), Sudassā (“Clearly Visible”), Sudassī (“Clear-visioned”) and Akaṇiṭṭha (“Highest”) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46).

The 10 fetters are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) aversion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya*). See **Is rebirth immediate?** = SD 2.17(4.4), the 5 kinds of non-returners.