

On the perfection of *dānā*.

The 157th London Eza
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Thank you very much for joining the 157th London Eza today and giving me an opportunity to give a talk.

Recently, Goinge-sama, Head Priest of Shogyoji Temple in Japan, had a chance to listen to a priest's Dharma talk. The priest talked about a piece of advice given by his mother a long time ago, which is "Shin-Buddhist priests should always behave with a smile" and he talked about the teaching of "Seven kinds of spiritual *dānā*" taught by Shakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. Through his experience, Goinge-sama had the idea to ask all Dharma friends in Japan to think about their own experiences of giving or receiving "Seven kinds of spiritual *dānā*". Therefore, today I would like to think together with you about what *dānā* is and its perfection.

◇ What is *dānā*?

The fundamental purpose of practising the Buddha-dharma, or the Buddhist teaching, is to become a Buddha, that is the common goal for all Buddhists beyond the difference of traditions. For this purpose, all Buddhists are expected to practice the *pāramitā* (jp. *haramitsu* 波羅蜜, "perfection of virtue"), which Shakyamuni Buddha chose in order to attain Supreme Enlightenment. In Mahayana Buddhism in general, we are given the teaching of *satpāramitā* or six *pāramitā* practices.

- 1) *Dāna* (jp. *fuse* 布施) : Perfection of practicing donation, giving or offering.
- 2) *Sīla* (jp. *jikai* 持戒) : Perfection of keeping Buddhist ethics.
- 3) *Kṣānti* (jp. *ninniku* 忍辱) : Perfection of patience, forbearance and forgiveness.
- 4) *Vīrya* (jp. *shojin* 精進) : Perfection of energy, diligence, enthusiasm or effort for Buddhist practice.
- 5) *Dhyāna* (jp. *zenjo* 禪定) : Perfection of Buddhist meditation
- 6) *Paññā* (jp. *hannya* 般若) : Perfection of wisdom to observe Interdependent Origination or Emptiness.

The first practice among them is *dānā*, which is usually translated as donation, giving or offering. In the teaching of Mahayana Buddhism, *dānā* is mainly categorised into the next three forms of offering.

- 1) Offering by using one's wealth, such as giving money or giving things. (jp. *zaise* 財施)
- 2) Offering of Dharma, Buddhist teaching. (jp. *hōse* 法施)
- 3) Offering, by which you can comfort those who are suffering from calamities, and remove their fear. (jp. *muise* 無畏施)

◇ What are the seven kinds of spiritual *dānā* (offering)?

Apart from the main three offerings, it is written in a sutra called *Samyukta Ratnapīṭaka Sūtra* that there are “Seven kinds of spiritual offering”. Let’s see what is written in the sutra.

The Buddha said that there are seven kinds of giving, that without decreasing one’s wealth, give rise to the attainment of great karmic fruits.

The first kind of giving is named the giving of eye. One always uses a gentle eye contact to look at one’s father, mother, teachers, elders, śramaṇas, and brahmins, refraining from using hostile eye contact, this is named the giving of eye. By doing so, when one’s body breaks up and is reborn into another body, one will gain pure eyes; when one attains Buddhahood in the future, one will gain Divine Eye and Buddha Eye. This is named the first karmic fruit.

The second kind of giving is named the giving of kind and pleasant countenance. When one faces one’s father, mother, teachers, elders, śramaṇas and brahmins, one does not frown and manifest an unkind countenance. By doing so, when one’s body breaks up and is reborn into another body, one will gain a well-formed appearance; when one attains Buddhahood in the future, one will gain complexion of pure gold. This is named the second karmic fruit.

The third kind of giving is named the giving of words. When one talks to one’s father, mother, teachers, elders, śramaṇas and brahmins, one speaks soft and gentle words, refraining from harsh and unkind words. By doing so, when one’s body breaks up and is reborn into another body, one will gain eloquence in speech. Anything said, will be rejoiced, trusted and accepted by others; when one attains Buddhahood in the future, one will gain the four kinds of eloquence. This is named the third karmic fruit.

The fourth kind of giving is named the giving of body. When one meets one’s father, mother, teachers, elders, śramaṇas and brahmins, one should rise, welcome them and prostrate to them. This is named the giving of body. By doing so, when one’s body breaks up and is reborn into another body, one will gain a well-formed body, tall and large body, and a body well-honoured by men; when one attains Buddhahood in the future, one will have a body like nigrodha tree, with invisible uṣṇīṣa. This is named the fourth karmic fruit.

The fifth kind of giving is named the giving of heart. One may have used valuables to perform offering, but if one’s heart is not gentle and kind, then this is not named giving. With a gentle and kind heart, one sincerely performs offering, this is named the giving of heart. By doing so, when one’s body breaks up and is reborn into another body, one will gain a brilliant mind, non-ludicrous mind. When one attains Buddhahood in the future, one will gain a mind of sarvajña-jñāna . This is named the giving of heart, the fifth karmic fruit.

The sixth kind of giving is named the giving of seat. When one sees one's father, mother, teachers, elders, śramaṇas and brahmins, one arranges seats for them, and even offer one's seat to them, inviting them to sit. By doing so, when one's body breaks up and is reborn into another body, one will always gain dignified and precious seat adorned with seven kinds of jewels. When one attains Buddhahood in the future, one will gain the Lion Throne. This is named the sixth karmic fruit.

The seventh kind of giving is named the giving of shelter. One makes one's home the shelter for one's father, mother, teachers, elders, śramaṇas and brahmins, letting them walk, sit, and lie at one's home. This is named the giving of shelter. By doing so, when one's body breaks up and is reborn into another body, one will gain palace as their residence spontaneously. When one attains Buddhahood in the future, one will gain abodes in dhyāna. This is named the seventh karmic fruit.

These are named the seven kinds of giving, while not decreasing one's wealth, give rise to the attainment of great karmic fruits.

◇ How can we interpret the offerings?

You might have felt some confusion, reading this English translation of the seven kinds of offering, because the translation of the sutra is too literal and not very clear. They usually are interpreted as follows.

- 1) The giving of the eyes. (jp. *gense* 眼施) : To give gentle and benevolent eye contact.
- 2) The giving of a kind and pleasant countenance. (jp. *waganse* 和顏施) : To give friendly, peaceful and soft countenance.
- 3) The giving of words. (jp. *aigose* 愛語施, *gonjise* 言辞施) : To speak soft and gentle words, refraining from harsh and unkind words. To give caring attitude and words.
- 4) The giving of the body. (jp. *sinse* 身施) : To work voluntarily using your body, expressing your respect by your body.
- 5) The giving of the heart. (jp. *sinse* 心施) : To perform offerings sincerely, gently and kindly. Your giving needs to be accompanied with your heart. To be mindful of your neighbours. To have a heart of harmony and goodness.
- 6) The giving of a seat. (jp. *shōzase* 床座施) : To arrange seats for others, even offering your seat to them. To give others a place to be. To give your place even to competitors with no regrets at all.
- 7) The giving of shelter. (jp. *bōjyase* 房舍施) : To make your home the shelter for others, letting them walk, sit, and lie at your home. To give others a place to shelter from rain, wind and difficulties. Welcoming others to where you are, such as your home and sangha.

◇ Relationship of the *dānā* with Three Wheels Temple.

All participants of the 29th Shokai Retreat, which was just held from the day before yesterday

to this morning, had weekly pre-meetings in the last three weeks to discuss about and digest the teaching of the seven kinds of spiritual offering. In those meetings, we shared our experiences of doing the offerings and more importantly of receiving the offerings. Many comments and impressions from the meetings made me realise some important points when we practice the offerings. Being given some realisations, I came to remember a poem. Now let us take an opportunity to read this poem on the meaning and purpose of Three Wheels, which was composed by the late Prof. John White, who was one of the founding members of Three Wheels Temple because actually, the name of this temple, “Three Wheels”, is based on the teaching of perfection of *dānā*. Let’s learn together from the poem what “the Three Wheels” means.

The Meaning and Purpose of Three Wheels

Three Wheels, Sanrin Shoja,
is a place
of journeying,
of coming together,
of spiritual adventure
and exchange.

It is a place
for young and old
to learn from each other.

It is a place to 'be'.

It is a physical symbol
of a spiritual ideal,
the concept of true service,
represented
by the Three Wheels
of the Giver, the Receiver,
and the Gift.

三輪精舎の意味と目的

三輪精舎 Three Wheels は
旅をして、
共に集い、
精神的な冒険や
交流をする
場である。

精舎は
老若が互いに
相手から学びあう場である。

精舎は「ありのままにある」場である。

精舎は、
与える人と受け取る人と贈り物の
三輪によって
表わされる
真の奉仕という概念、
精神的理念の
形体的象徴である。

If the Gift itself is pure,
given solely
for the giving,
without thought
of reward or return
for the Giver,
of debt or obligation
in the Receiver,

then,
in their return,
the Receiver
can freely become the Giver,
the Giver
becomes the Receiver.

Then,
out of diversity
unity and harmony
are born.

The Three Wheels
are the one wheel
and the Great Wheel
turns.

This
is the meaning and purpose
of Sanrin Shoja.

John White

もし贈り物そのものが清浄であり、
与える人に
報酬や返礼の思いなく、
受け取る人にも
負債や責務の思いなく、
ただ与えるためにのみ
与えられるならば、

その時、
今度は、
受け取る人が
そのまま与える人に、
与える人が
受け取る人に成れる。

そうならば、
相違から
統一と調和が
生まれる。

三輪は
一輪であり、
そしてその大輪が
回る。

これが
三輪精舎の
意味であり目的である。

ジョン・ホワイト

At the very beginning of the relationship between Prof. John White and Shogyoji Temple in Japan, he was given a calligraphy of a Buddhist statement, “Three wheels should be pure”, by Venerable Chimyo Takehara, Head Priest of Shogyoji Temple. Then at the time of the establishment of this Buddhist temple, John was asked to name it. Remembering the Buddhist statement John named this temple “Three Wheels”. “Three wheels” in this context means “giver, receiver and gift”.

◇ For whom do we perform *dānā*?

In the English literal translation of the sutra, it is said,

“By doing so, when one’s body breaks up and is reborn into another body, one will gain” “When one attains Buddhahood in the future, one will gain”

This could be interpreted as meaning that we should practice good deeds for our sake in order to become better people. Do you think it is the right interpretation of the notion of *dānā*? One of the main teachings in Mahayana Buddhism is “to benefit oneself and benefit others”. In the sense that to practise good things for one’s own sake is at the same time to benefit others, such an interpretation sounds Okay, doesn’t it? More importantly, however, the word “benefit” in the Shin Buddhist context means “to attain true faith”. The attainment of faith in Shin Buddhism means that we become fully aware of our own bad karma and take refuge in Amida’s unconditional love that embraces us all and abandons none. Thus, we become selfless through this given faith alone. This is called “Other Power faith”. It is a unique Shin Buddhist teaching. Probably, some of you, who are familiar with the teaching of Other Power, might have wondered if the seven kinds of offering are self-power practice or other power practice.

Self-power practice is that you practise good for your own sake of becoming a buddha. Other-power practice is that first we become fully aware of our own karmic problems and at the same time of the unconditional love and compassion of Amida, who helps us attain birth in the Pure Land. Then our supreme joy of being saved by Amida makes us work for others naturally and continuously like becoming Amida’s hand and foot. This supreme joy allows us to pronounce *Nenbutsu*, *Namu Amida-butsu*, which means that “I take refuge in Amida Buddha” as our expression of gratitude to him. This is the meaning of Other Power faith. At the moment of attaining Other Power faith, you become free from your own attachments, self-centred ego and pride and purely become grateful to everyone and everything. Therefore, we cannot help working for others without any expectation at all. After working for others in this way, we naturally come to realise that our good deeds were not only for others but also for ourselves. We receive something from others that is more important than what we gave to them.

◇ How can we practise *dānā* properly? Is it giving or sharing?

Learning the meaning of the Three Wheels and remembering Amida's Other Power, it is obviously important for everyone to give and receive a gift purely. Although we can intellectually understand it, some people said that it is not easy to do so. I agree with them as we tend to expect reward or return from the receiver. Even if we do not expect any thing to be given back, we unconsciously expect their appreciation in words or in attitude quite often. What makes us to do so? It is our ego or pride, which comes from our blind passion, isn't it? Then how can we become pure despite the fact that we sadly have self-centred ego? I think what can help us is nothing but our own awareness. The "awareness" here comes from "our awakening to the truth of life", which breaks through our self-centred world. This awakening is given through our spiritual encounters with others. Regarding this topic, *dānā*, if I can realise the fact that what I possess is all gifts, I would not have to have any pride or attachment to what I give. Actually, even our lives and bodies are gifts from our parents, so everything in our lives is gifts for each of us. Having considered this fact, I felt that the English word "giving" as a translation of *dānā* cannot be always applied because it tends to make me arrogant in assuming that I am a giver. I believe that it is better for us to say "I share" rather than "I give" because what you are presenting is not just your possession. The word "share" allows me to feel gratitude that comes from my awareness of what I possess as gifts. It also stops me from feeling superior to receivers and makes me aware of the foundation that we are interdependently related to each other. However, in the case when I am a receiver, it sounds better and natural for me to say "Someone gave to me", rather than saying "Someone shared with me" because the level of my appreciation would be deeper.

Considering and deepening this thought, I came to remember an expression of Shinran Shonin, the founder of Shin Buddhism. In a letter of Rennyō Shonin, which was read out today during the service earlier, he mentioned about one of the Shinran Shonin's sayings. Shinran Shonin said,

'I, Shinran, have no disciples, because, when I expound the Tathāgata's Dharma to sentient beings in the ten directions, I am simply acting as an envoy of the Tathāgata. I, Shinran, do not propagate any new Dharma whatsoever. All I do is simply entrust myself to the Tathāgata's Dharma teaching and teach others to do likewise. Apart from that, I have nothing to teach. How then can I claim to have any disciples?'

As you can clearly see, Shinran Shonin did not give his own teaching but shared his joy of entrusting himself to Amida Tathāgata and his great satisfaction of being saved by the Tathāgata. I cannot help feeling Shinran Shonin's genuine sincerity towards the Three Treasures: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, as a *Nenbutsu* practitioner, one of the sentient beings, to be saved.

◇ Purity of the giver, receiver and gift.

Going back to the poem, “The Meaning and Purpose of Three Wheels” by Prof. John White, I would like to introduce one of my very recent experiences. In advance of the 29th Shokai Retreat, I, on behalf of Three Wheels, contacted a Dharma friend, Mr. Max Nilsson-Ladner, in order to ask him to give his Vow of sincere practice for the retreat. Although he didn’t know much about the role, having received an explanation of some important points of giving the vow, he sincerely accepted it and expressed his deepest gratitude for the opportunity for him to look into himself. When I heard his response, which allowed me to feel his joy and sincerity towards practicing Dharma, I was so moved and felt a great joy myself. Thinking about where my joy came from and what it was, I came to remember some paragraphs in John’s poem.

If the Gift itself is pure,
given solely
for the giving,
without thought
of reward or return
for the Giver,
of debt or obligation
in the Receiver,

then,
in their return,
the Receiver
can freely become the Giver,
the Giver
becomes the Receiver.

Then,
out of diversity
unity and harmony
are born.

It was at this unforgettable moment that I came to realise who Max is. When his sincerity

allowed him to be grateful for receiving the opportunity, then I immediately became a receiver of his gratitude. Through our dialogue, out of diversity of him and me, unity and harmony were immediately born. It was absolutely a spiritual encounter for me with Max in one turning wheel of the Three Wheels (giver, receiver and gift). This experience made me realise what “pure” means in this poem. This purity is nothing but “sincerity in gratitude” (報恩感謝の誠). Then I came to understand that what John wanted to “share” with all of us by composing this poem was based on what he had learnt and experienced through his spiritual encounter with Venerable Takehara and Dharma friends in the Shogyoji sangha in Japan.

◇ Importance of awakening to the consideration, love and compassion hidden behind gifts.

In the last one and half months, my wife Sanae was away in Japan. During her absence, I was so busy trying to do what she always does. Coming to know that I was having a tough time doing her role, many of you helped residents of Three Wheels by cleaning the temple, giving food etc. Receiving your gifts, I came to realise there were some deep considerations that come from the love and compassion of you, the givers. One day, one of our Dharma friends, Mr Amit Khanna, gave us homemade Indian curry cooked by his mother. It was not the first time for us to be given her curry. Some days later, Amit asked about its taste. According to him, his mother cooked more curry than his family needed in order to give us some. Actually, some amount of the curry Amit needed was for his friends who visited one day before. Amit’s mother cooked the curry a bit milder than usual because one of his friends visited him for the first time. Then Amit said “Kenshin-san, my mum is saying that she will cook the curry a bit hotter next time as you are familiar with the hot Indian taste.” Having such a conversation with him, I realised not only the sad reality of the lack of my appreciation but also such a great consideration of the giver which is hidden behind the gift. Even after giving the curry, his mother was wondering if we had been able to enjoy it or not and thinking about its taste for the next time.

Unfortunately, we tend to express our appreciation only by understanding what we receive superficially. In this example, I didn’t know enough about Amit’s sincere kindness and did not know at all how much his mother thinks about those who have her curry. It was a wonderful reminder for me that I should remember that all offerings include deep consideration, love and compassion for me. Likewise, John’s deep consideration, love and compassion for the readers are much more condensed in his poem than we can imagine. In the same way, when we think about Amida’s salvation, it is much more important to become aware of Amida’s love and compassion that lies behind it rather than simply becoming aware of the fact of his saving us.

◇ Perfection of *dānā*.

Finally, I would like to talk about the perfection of *dānā*. To be honest, I do not know if we can accomplish it or not. Definitely, it is not my business to judge if I accomplished *dānā* practice or

not. *Dānā* is a practice we do throughout our lives and my perfection of the *dānā* practice will be judged by someone else when I end my life. Perfection of *dānā* is such a great thing like in the expression, “Rome wasn’t built in a day”. However, I am sure that it is possible for everyone to accomplish a single practice of *dānā* if we

- become aware of what has been done for us and do not take anything for granted.
- become aware of the love and compassion behind the gifts we receive.
- do *dānā* likewise for others to share our own joy and gratitude of being given.
- do *dānā* likewise for others without self-centred ego and any expectation.
- just do it for the doing.

When we do a single pure practice of *dānā*, we will be given great joy and energy. If we continue to practise the *dānā* with sincerity in gratitude, the practice will become our very natural habit of good deeds and someone would say that it is the perfection of *dānā*.

Coming to the conclusion of this talk, I became much more aware of how much I have been given in my life in Japan and U.K. I have been welcomed into the sangha of Shogyoji and Three Wheels, been taught Dharma, been given kind words and benevolent countenances, been given a place to be, been given spiritual shelter. I would like to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for your warmth and sincere *dānā* practice with my deepest gratitude.