



Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche Teachings

Generosity

Today, in connection with this place, Namo Buddha (Nepal), I will talk to you about generosity. You all know what happened here, but I will still give you a summary.

Buddha was born here in a former reincarnation. During that life, he met a tigress and her five cubs who were starving to the point that, despite her love for them, the tigress was about to devour her young ones in order to survive. On seeing this, Buddha was moved with unbearable compassion. He saw the animals suffering so much that he himself sacrificed his body completely to them, part by part.

If we had to choose between all the wealth in the world and our life, everyone would choose life. But in this case, his compassion was so overwhelming, it gave Buddha the inner strength to selflessly give away his body to the suffering beasts.

We might think this is just a story and it could never happen in reality. But, as most of us here are parents, we have some experience about how far we are willing to go for our children if they are suffering. We are ready to do anything for them. This is because of this kind of love and compassion for them.

I will talk about the following points:

- 1) The meaning of generosity
- 2) Different kinds of generosity
- 3) How to practice generosity
- 4) The benefit of generosity

- 1) The meaning of generosity

Most of us exchange gifts on Christmas. If we receive something nice, we will compliment the giver: "Thank you. That is a wonderful gift. You have been very generous!" We usually equate generosity with the gift of material things. This is the logical perspective when approaching the subject of generosity.

From a spiritual perspective though, the giving of an object as such is not the most important point. The main aim of generosity is to overcome the stinginess in our mind stream, in order to eventually become free from it.

We say in Buddhism that Buddha had completely and fully accomplished the practice of generosity. But what does that mean? There are still many poor people and many people who suffer. So what did Buddha accomplish?

The next question is, how did he accomplish the practice of generosity so completely? There aren't any stories about his generosity when he was a prince. Later as a monk he stayed in the woods and after his enlightenment he spent his time mainly teaching. So when did he fully practice generosity?

The way he practiced generosity was that he had neither a feeling of stinginess towards his possessions, nor any desire for things he didn't possess. Because these two aspects of miserliness and desire were completely absent from his mind, he had fully accomplished generosity.

This also means that we do not need wealth, or anything material, to practice generosity. Anyone can practice it.

The way we define generosity in Buddhism is a *mental state of giving without stinginess*.

This can be also defined in more detail due to the experiences we make when we practice this mental state of giving without being stingy, or, without withholding anything.

I will give you an example. If someone has a birthday party, there might be different motivations to give this person a gift. One may be to give something that we are not very attached to, which is cheap and which has no importance for us. That gift we can give away easily without feeling miserly. Would this match the definition of generosity that I just gave? Actually this does match it. But, if we have any intentions in the background like 'I hope I will get some presents from this person in future' or 'I hope she appreciates what I gave her', then even if in regard to the object as such, we don't act stingy, we harbour expectations during the act of giving, which might lead to suffering if not fulfilled. So we can be doubtful that this is the right way of giving.

If we are also disappointed because our present wasn't properly appreciated, or, we didn't receive anything in return, then we did not have a *genuine mental state of giving without stinginess*. We have not fully accomplished this state of mind, as it might create suffering.

So we can add that generosity is a *mental state of giving without stinginess and without expectations towards a certain result*. If we can have this kind of attitude, then real well-being can ensue from the act of giving.

For example, when Buddha, in a former life, offered his body to the tigress, he harboured no self-interest and had no selfish hopes or fears concerning the outcome of his actions with regard to himself. He only wished for the tigress to benefit from his flesh. That was enough for him. If he had any self-serving intentions, he would not have been able to sacrifice his life. But because he was able to just let go of his life, he was able to foster the right kind of inner strength and experienced inner peace for this act.

If we think of our life, we all have a partner. If we have the intention to really help him or her, then we are happy just because we were able to do something nice for the other person. But if we have some expectations connected with our help, for example we want to get some support in return, then we will be disappointed if these expectations are not fulfilled.

It can be quite difficult. This is not a primarily Buddhist or religious explanation. We know all of this through our experiences. If we give a nice present to our partner, but it is not to their liking, there can be a lot of trouble ensuing from that!

So what is the main point here? That, there are expectations involved. Of course I cannot tell you not to have any expectations anymore, but, we need to keep in mind that they are a source of problems for us. Therefore, to genuinely be generous in the Buddhist way, we need to give without any expectations towards a desired result.

If we go even more into detail, then this *mental state of giving without stinginess and without expectations towards a certain result* needs to be motivated by love and compassion. To our children, we give anything they might need – education, experience, money etc. – without any second thought. How does this happen? It happens because of our love and compassion for our children.

Here in Nepal, there are many beggars and very poor people. You have certainly seen quite a number of them. Often we get this heartfelt thought: 'Oh, I wish I could help them.' So, we do our best by giving them some money, for example, even though we do not even know them.

The motivation here is compassion for their calamities. And if we are able to help them, we feel good about it. So we can see how important love and compassion are as the motivations for our generosity. We don't have any problem giving away 100 Rupees in these situations, but when we conduct business we cannot even bear to let go of 1 Rupee. Again, this is due to our state of mind, whether it is infused with compassion or not.

So this is the meaning of generosity. It is a state of mind and not dependent on material things.

Do you know Jetsun Milarepa? He was a very famous Tibetan Yogi. One evening when he was meditating in his cave, some robbers appeared looking for something they could steal. Milarepa was just laughing at them: "I have nothing here to take during the day time. No matter how much you search around at night, you won't find anything." He had fully accomplished generosity, so there was nothing anymore that would be taken away from him.

But please do not think now, that generosity is only a mind state and you never need to give anything to anyone anymore. Keep on giving Christmas and birthday presents!

2) Different kinds of generosity

We can distinguish between three types of giving: 1) giving material things; 2) giving life and 3) giving Dharma. Here, Dharma means any kind of teachings, advice or method aimed at turning our mind into a more virtuous direction. This is how we define Dharma in Buddhism. In Hinduism, Dharma means responsibility. But in Buddhism and Hinduism alike, Dharma is aimed to protect us from falling into negativity.

Whatever kind of generosity we engage in needs to be motivated by compassion, free from any expectations of getting something in return, and, free from stinginess. As I said before, if we harbour expectations of gaining anything in return for our generosity, suffering might ensue, so it cannot be a genuine Buddhist practice. It would be contrary to the Buddhist philosophical view.

I do not need to speak about the giving of material things. This is fairly clear to everyone. Also, we do not need a detailed explanation on giving life, which is basically the same as protecting life. There are many stories of wars, where people sacrificed their lives, but this has lessened in the past decades. Even though maybe now fewer people are actually killed, we have also invented many weapons and bombs that can potentially kill millions of people at a time. So in this sense, times have actually become much more dangerous.

We might sacrifice fewer humans through war these days, but, we still sacrifice a great many animals - most of them for the sake of human beings. This is connected to the value that we attribute to animals. So it is very important that nowadays, we practice the generosity of giving life in the sense that we must protect animals.

Even though animals have another physical form than we humans, they are equal to us in their desire for happiness and wellbeing, as well as their aversion to suffering. But for most of us, it is difficult to see animals on an equal basis to humans.

Therefore, it might be easier for you to imagine that all animals are equal to dogs, or any other animal that you might like. So protecting them from being killed and keeping them alive, or, by releasing captured birds and fish, is an act of generosity of giving life.

The giving of Dharma is to provide methods to turn one's mind stream into a positive direction. This includes sharing any experiences that we have, any education, or anything that is helpful to others. This is especially important in the present time. I am not saying that Buddhist teachings are the most important because I am Buddhist. Any beneficial advice is needed, especially within our education system.

In all of the subjects being taught, maybe only two or three percentage of this deals with how we can become better human beings. The rest has nothing to do with personal development. From kindergarten up through to university, compassion and the importance of compassion are hardly mentioned. Nor is the fact that we need to reduce jealousy, or, that we need to make some effort to be kind and patient etc. This type of advice is not given enough anywhere, I think.

Many times, I have witnessed stories like this one: if there are two brothers from Dolpo¹, and one stays in Dolpo whilst the other goes to Kathmandu for his education, they behave very differently when they grow up.

The one who stayed in Dolpo will be very considerate and concerned about others due to the development of a natural, unconditioned empathy. The one who went to Kathmandu will be more calculating in his actions and more concerned with his own security. Even if he is not overtly competitive, his primary thought will always be with his own wellbeing and independence, whilst the concern for others follows behind. My observation is that there is the same kind of difference between people from the city and the villages in other countries.

So it is important to impart and receive explanations on how to be genuinely generous.

We should not counsel others by saying: "Oh, this is Buddhist and I am Buddhist, so you have to follow what I say." Or: "I am Christian. This is the Christian way, so you have to behave like this." We should not make any connection with a religion, but explain in connection with our everyday experiences and needs. Then we can talk to anybody from grandparents down to young children.

3) How to practice generosity

Generosity with regard to material things is difficult and we need to practice it. First I want to tell a story in this regard.

¹ Dolpo is a very remote area in the north-western Himalayan part of Nepal

One day Patrul Rinpoche² received a piece of gold from one of his students. He carried it close to him all day and put it in his pillow when he went to sleep. Normally he never put anything special in his pillow. This was the first time, because he was afraid the gold might get stolen. During the night he woke up few times, and checked whether or not the gold was still there. This happened a few nights in a row, and eventually he said to himself: “Ever since I got this piece of gold, I haven’t had a good night’s sleep. Before, I was able to sleep very well and without any worries, wherever I went. The gold not only bothers me during the day, but more importantly, it is disrupting my sleep.” Then Patrul Rinpoche simply gave the gold away.

If we want to practice giving things away, then maybe in the beginning we are not able to let go of our favourite things for real, but, we need to develop the strong wish to be able to do so eventually.

The first step is to visualise giving it away. So first, we move whatever is most valuable to us from the left hand to the right hand and back, thinking that we are giving it to someone else.

We visualise giving it to our friend and then to someone we do not know. First of all, this is a mental training. If we can actually give it to someone else, that is very good, but here we are mainly training the thought of giving away whatever we are attached to, so that our stinginess naturally decreases during this process.

This natural decrease is the psychological outcome that we are aiming to achieve. It is important to understand though, that ‘giving’ doesn’t mean that we have to give away everything that we own. We need to give what is possible, and what is beneficial to the other, based on a clear understanding of the situation.

Our mind is generally quite childlike. If we are unhappy and we recite: “I am happy, I am happy, I am happy” ten to twenty times, then we actually feel happier at the end. This could make us laugh, thinking that this is the way a child acts. But still, dealing with our mind in this way can be helpful.

Sometimes, when I see something nice or beautiful – don’t be fooled, I am not always practicing, so this is why I say ‘sometimes’ – I dedicate it thinking ‘May all beings be able to enjoy this. May all beings be happy’. Contemplating this way a few times, I become less attached to whatever draws my fancy and I relax. But don’t forget, that I do not think in this way all the time!

If you want to buy a car, maybe there is not enough money in your bank account and you can’t buy it. Whenever you see this type of car on the street or in the newspaper, you have a hard time. So what can you do? You can only let go, and think: ‘May

² Great Tibetan scholar and meditation practitioner (1808-1887)

someone else be able to enjoy this car. May my friend get a car like this. May everyone in need of a car, be able to get a car like this.'

If you mentally offer the car, even though you don't own it, the mind immediately relaxes. Just try it out. It might not work right away, but if you keep on practicing this kind of thinking ten to twenty times, your mind will definitely relax. Even though this feels like child's-play, these visualisations protect our mind.

Most video games these days are about killing. Even small children train in shooting at others. I often think about how beneficial it would be to have video games that have an element of positive mind training, like learning how to be generous. This could really help the way we think.

Now, we get to the *generosity of giving life*. These days the killing of people in wars and other conflicts has decreased. On the other hand, we have weapons at present that could destroy the entire earth within minutes. So protecting the lives of humans is still important.

What we really need to do, though, is to heighten our regard for animals and attribute more value to their lives. Even though on a worldwide basis many politicians and scientists talk about improving the protection of animals, this is not based on compassion but is mostly for scientific reasons.

If it becomes forbidden to kill tigers, then the only reason is that they might soon become extinct, and not because they suffer through being killed.

The best way of thinking is to cultivate the awareness that all beings wish for well-being exactly the same way we do, and, that they want to avoid suffering in exactly the same way we do.

Today, when we went to visit Namo Buddha, we met a few goats - a male, a female and a kid. They were staying together like a family. Still, we don't attribute any worth to them and just eat or sell them at our whim.

All of this happens because we have no respect.

If we are not able to consider goats to be the same value as humans, as I just said before, we can then imagine that they are the same value as our dog or cat. After we generate a feeling of sameness, to kill or cut them will make us feel horrible.

We will adopt a non-violent behaviour towards them and be able to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of animals.

The moment we have this attitude of not wanting to harm animals and we appreciate their kindness towards us, our life becomes meaningful.

When we use the term 'wild animals', then we mostly refer to tigers, lions and so on, but, judging by behaviour, only humans should be called that. Only if we adopt a non-violent lifestyle towards other beings can we lead a peaceful life like the life of a deer.

Generosity in connection with Dharma is to share any experiences, advice, knowledge etc. to help others to attain a peaceful mind without expecting others to see us as being very learned or very clever. The motivation should be to share with others so we can help them and bring about peace. Any experiences or advice on how to hurt other beings should never be passed on. For example, if we know how to make guns, we should not teach that to anyone.

4) The benefit of generosity

The less miserly we are, the less suffering we have. We can easily see amongst our classmates or colleagues, that the ones who are the least giving are the ones who face the most problems. Therefore, generosity is something that we need in our life.

From a Buddhist perspective, if we can fully accomplish generosity we reach Buddhahood.

Namo Buddha, Nepal, March 2014

Translated from Tibetan by Daniela Hartmann

Edited by Jaqueline Bourbon