

Dāna (Maha-p,phala) Sutta

The Discourse on (the Great Fruit of) Giving
[On the motivation to give wisely]
(Aṅguttara Nikāya 7.49)

Translated & slightly abridged by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

This discourse given to Sāriputta and the lay followers 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” [4b]. 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.

The Discourse on (the Great Fruit of) Giving

1 At one time the Blessed One was staying on the shore of Gaggarā Lake in Campā. Then a large number of lay followers from Campā went to the venerable Sāriputta and, having bowed down to 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, venerable sir, 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, friends, come again on the next Uposatha day, and perhaps you will get to hear a Dharma talk in the Blessed One’s presence.”

“As you say, venerable sir,” the lay followers from Campā said to the venerable Sāriputta. Then rising from their seats, bowing down to him, and then circling him rightwise, they left.

1a On the following Uposatha day, the lay followers from Campā went to the venerable Sāriputta and, having bowed down to him, stood at one side. Then the venerable Sāriputta, together with the lay followers from Campā, went to the Blessed One and, having bowed down to him, sat down at one side. As he was sitting there at one side, he said this to the Blessed One:

[60] 2 “Venerable sir, might there be the case where a person makes some gift and it does not bear great fruit or great benefit, whereas another person makes the same gift and it bears great fruit and great benefit?”

“Yes, Sāriputta, there would be *such a case*.”

3 “Lord, what is the cause, what is the reason, why a person makes some gift and it does not bear great fruit or great benefit, whereas another person makes the same gift and it bears great fruit and great benefit?”

(1) “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

accessories¹—to a brahmin or a recluse. What do you think, Sāriputta? Might a person make such a gift as this?”

“Yes, Blessed One.”

“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,’ on the break-up of the body, 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) Then there is 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.’ 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?”

“Yes, Blessed One.”

“Having made this gift thinking, ‘Giving is good!’ on the break-up of the body, 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.

(3) 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...(and) on the break-up of the body, 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.

(4) “Or, instead...he makes a gift thinking, ‘**I am well off. They are not well off.** It would not be right for me, being well-off, not to give a gift to those who are not well-off,’ (and) on the break-up of the body, 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.

(5) “Or, instead...he makes a gift thinking, ‘**Just as there were the great sacrifices of the sages of the past**—Aṭṭhaka, Vāmaka, Vāmadeva, Vessāmitta, Yamataggi, Aṅgīrasa, Bhāradvāja, Vāseṭṭha, Kassapa, and Bhagu—in the same way, I will distribute my gifts’...(and) on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the company of the Nimmāṇa,raṭī 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.

(6) “Or, instead...he makes a gift thinking, [62] ‘When this gift of mine is given, **it calms my mind.** Satisfaction and joy arise’...(and) on the break-up of the body, 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.

(7) “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**’ *cittālan-kāraṃ citta,parikkhār’attham*). 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?”

“Yes, Blessed One.”

¹ “Lighting accessories,” *padīpeyya*, “that which is connected with lamps”.

“Having given this, 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,’

...nor thinking, ‘I am well-off. They are not well off. It would not be right for me, being well off, not to give a gift to those who are not well-off,’

...nor thinking, ‘Just as there were the great sacrifices of the sages of the past...in the same way this will be my distribution of gifts,’

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

4b —but thinking, ‘**This is an ornament for the mind, a support for the mind**’—on the break-up of the body, 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**.² He does not come back to this world.

This, Sāriputta, is the cause, this is the reason, why a person makes some gift and it does not bear great fruit or great benefit, whereas another person makes the same gift and it bears great fruit and great benefit.”

—evam—

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² A Non-returner (*anāgāmi*), 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 Arhants and Nirvana. These worlds are Āviha (“Non-declining”), Ātappa (“Unworried”), Sudassā (“Clearly Visible”), Sudassī (“Clear-visioned”) and Akaniṭṭhā (“Highest”) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46). The 10 Fetters are: Personality view (*sakkāya,dīṭṭhi*), persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), repulsion (*paṭigha*), greed for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*), greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), conceit (*māna*), restlessness (*uddhacca*), ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). In some places, no. 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by illwill (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya*). See Piya Tan, “Is rebirth immediate: a study from canonical sources”, Sutta Discovery series, 2003 §4.