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THE BODDHISATTVA'S VIEW ON GIVING AND THE METHOD OF PRACTICING GIVING IN DAILY LIFE

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ABSTRACT:

This article presents two main contents: Bodhisattva's views on giving and the method of practicing giving in daily life. Because of love for all beings, Bodhisattvas refused to enter Nirvana and vowed to lead beings to liberation. Therefore, giving is one of the ten perfections on Bodhisattva's journey to enlightenment. Bodhisattvas practice giving to benefit all beings and train the mind of desire and selfishness. The Bodhisattvas conceive that: to practice giving is to practice letting go, letting go of narrow views and small and tight things can be grasped and possessed. All the deeds of the Bodhisattva are not except dedicated positive energies through positive actions to benefit all beings.



On the path to liberation, a Buddhist disciple must practice in the spirit of a Bodhisattva. Giving does not stop at great material value, but it acts to provide all necessary to serve life's needs. Sometimes giving as simple as a smile, sympathy, and positive energy has also made others feel at peace when they contact you. That is also the message the writer wants to present in this article.

KEYWORDS: Bodhisattva, Dana, Applying Give in Daily Life.

I. INTRODUCTION

In life, giving is considered one of the human being moral values. For Buddhism, giving is the basic foundation for developing a spiritual life. It can be said that sharing is not a direct path to enlightenment, but it is a factor in eliminating defilements and leading to happiness in the inner life.

In the Nikaya, the Buddha repeatedly mentioned the issue of giving. A Bodhisattva who wants to fulfill his wish must practice generosity. The Buddha taught many methods to combat greed, hatred, and delusion, in which cultivating generosity creates favorable conditions for eradicating Three poisons. On their journey to fulfilling their vows, Bodhisattvas see generosity as essential in bringing happiness to themselves and others.

For some people, giving is seen as a quality of generosity and stops at the allowable level. However, for Bodhisattvas, giving entails much sacrifice, even for their own life. Therefore, giving is the first of the ten perfections that enable the Bodhisattva to aim for the ultimate enlightenment of perfect Buddhahood.

II. CONTENT

In daily life, many people practice giving for many different purposes. However, Buddhists must give according to the Buddha's teachings. Giving is defined as follows:

II.1 Definition

II.1.1 What is Dana

"Dāna" is a Sanskrit and Pali word meaning "generosity" or "giving". Dāna is the first of the Six Paramitas: generosity, ethics, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom. Giving is always discretionary and may consist of time, energy, money, food, clothing, gifts... In particular, for a Buddhist disciple, giving includes giving away material things and spiritual. Therefore, all beings must perfect the good qualities on the path to enlightenment that the Buddha taught through the practice of giving. In the Anguttara Nikaya, the Buddha taught very clearly about the benefits of those who practice giving. "They become rich, affluent, and wealthy, and no damage comes to their property from anywhere, whether fire, flood, rulers, bandits, or unloved heirs."¹ Thus, giving not only benefits many people but also helps those who practice giving have lasting blessings and can avoid evil karma in life. Giving is also a practice method applied by Bodhisattvas to benefit sentient beings.

II.1.2 What is Bodhisattva

Bodhisattva is the object of the noblest practice of giving because the concept of the term speaks for itself. Bodhisattva is composed of two words "Bodhi" and "sattva." Bodhi means "awakening" or "enlightenment," and "sattva" means "sentient being." Sattva also has etymological roots that mean "intention," meaning the intention to enlighten other beings. Thus, A Bodhisattva refuses to enter Nirvana when he finds all beings can't attain Nirvana. Or in other words, the Bodhisattva wishes to help all beings overcome the sufferings in life to have peace and happiness in the present life.

II.2 Bodhisattva's almsgiving practice

Zen Thich Nhat Hanh said: *A Bodhisattva is someone who has compassion within himself or herself and who is able to make another person smile or help someone suffer less. Every one of us is capable of this.*² So, the Bodhisattva ideal is the highest moral principle of life based on the foundation of compassion and wisdom.

The Theravada and Mahayana Sutras both express Bodhisattva's thoughts in Buddhist literature. "Bhikkhus, there is one person who arises in the world for the welfare of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare and happiness of devas and humans. Who is that one person? It is the Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Fully Enlightened One."³ This shows that not only when the Mahayana appeared, the Bodhisattva thought propagated, but even when the Buddha was still in the world, this point of view was also clearly presented.

The Theravada canon expresses the Bodhisattva's thoughts through the Buddha's teachings to his disciples and demonstrates his Bodhisattva practice through past lives. Buddha gave many alms, including his body. In Jataka Tale has a story:

*One day, when wandering in a forest along with his disciple Ajita, he saw from the top of a hill that a tigress was lurking to kill and eat her own cubs out of hunger. Moved by compassion he thought of sacrificing his own body to feed the tigress and save the cubs.*⁴

¹ Bhikkhu Sujato, 2021, *Aṅguttaranikāya, Sappurisadana Sutta*, Dharma Audiobooks (Publisher), p. 4085

² Thich Nhat Hanh Zen, Lecture subject: *Loving Speech and Deep Listening*, posted on January 10, 2022.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPkASv004wA>

³ Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Anguttara Nikaya*, Wisdom Publications, Boston, p.108

⁴ Maple press, 2018, *Buddha Tales (Illustrated) Stories from Jataka*, Maple Press Publisher, p.25.

The level of generosity of Bodhisattvas does not stop at common material values, but it is the noble sacrifice of those who have awakened to the truth of life.

Bodhisattvas practice giving not from the point of view of comparing or discriminating the object of giving. The purpose of the above work comes from the motive of renunciation and the point of view of removing attachment to an existing property. Deep awareness of working and changing process is the basis for Bodhisattvas to practice the concept of renunciation. These are the eight things the Buddha taught in giving *"He gives what is pure, he gives what excellent, he gives a timely gift, he gives what is allowable, he gives after investigation, he gives often, while giving he settles his mind in confidence and having given, he is elated."*⁵

When Bodhisattva's practice of giving, the object of giving does not stop at humans but is extended to all sentient beings, in the Anguttara Nikaya, Buddha stated:

*"If a person throws the rinsing of a bowl or a cup into a village pool or pond, thinking, may whatever animal live here feed on this, that will be a source of merit, to say nothing of what is given to a human being."*⁶

The above action is derived from infinite compassion for all sentient beings. The universe consists of many different live, human being is one of them. Therefore, we should not respect our own life but forget the need to live all living beings. The problem of creating a living environment or providing food is a method of giving that we need to perform according to Bodhisattva's vows.

II.3 Practice almsgiving in daily life

We all have different attitudes and approaches to life. So, you can start your life by practicing generosity and gratitude. In particular, we should not blame any situation or object for the hindrance, but the important thing is that we only need to generate the mind of loving-kindness, at that moment, we are already practicing giving.

II.3.1 Practice giving in the spirit of Bodhisattvas

Today, when science and technology develop, people's lives are improved and the problem of giving has also become easy and popular. In Vietnam, many charity organizations are established for different purposes to serve the needs of life. Religious and non-religious people also practice almsgiving depending on the conditions. Therefore, the problem of hunger or poverty of people gradually improved.

Material giving is necessary to sustain life, but spiritual giving is also an important factor contributing to the quality of life every day. Of course, your cheerful and happy life will positively affect the spiritual life of others and vice versa. So, why don't we give each other joy and peace every day? In other words, if we can't help others, don't harm them, if we can't make others happy, don't make them sad as His Holiness the Dalai Lama said: *"Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can't help them, at least don't hurt them."*⁷

According to Buddhist teachings, giving is of three types: giving material of generosity, giving dharma and giving of fearlessness. Giving of material is the method of giving with all that we have. If we only help others to satisfy their material needs without guiding them in the practice of transforming their suffering, then that is flawed. Material things only feed people, but spiritual life is the decisive factor in quality of life. When people realize that everything is impermanent, people will have positive thoughts and actions.

Today, religions in the world still exist and develop because it meets the spiritual needs of people. Particularly for Buddhism, the Buddha always emphasized: *"Oh, Bhikkhus, both formerly and*

⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Anguttara Nikaya*, Wisdom Publications, Boston, p.1172.

⁶ Thanissaro Bhikkhu (translate), 2017, *Handful of Leaves, An Anthology from the Anguttara Nikaya*, Metta Forest Monastery, USA, p.64.

⁷ Judi Neal Editor, 2013, *Handbook of Faith and Spirituality in the Workplace*, University of Arkansas, USA, p.216.

now what I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering.⁸ Therefore, if we have been imbued with the doctrine of suffering, we should spread the thought to everyone so that they can be free from suffering and be happy. It is also an effective method of giving, as the Buddha taught in the Dhammapada: *"The gift of Dhamma excels all gifts."*⁹

Besides, giving fearlessness is a noble act of great humanity. To give others peace is not easy. To do so, we must first build consensus for ourselves. The energy of stability is an essential element that can help us empathize with others. When others are afraid and sad, if you are close and share the difficulties in life, they will gradually reduce anxiety and stress. Currently, many people, when facing adversity, do not have a loved one to share, so the problem is almost unsolvable, and death is the path that they will choose when life comes to a standstill. Therefore, helping others in this time is essential. Your positive energy will be nutritious spiritual food for others to sustain life. Sometimes, in a more civilized society, people hardly have time to build human-to-human relationships. Therefore, you should be the one to form good relationships through family, friends and community life. The morality of each individual will certainly contribute to the formation of pure and noble social character.

When we live in a family or group, we don't have to be rich to give alms because in Buddhism, it's not just giving money to give away. If you see a person who practices giving and does not generate jealousy or anger in his mind, but instead generates joy and praise, your merit will be equal to that of the other giver. That good is so easy to do, why shouldn't we?

Thus, through almsgiving, we can help others with material and spiritual difficulties. In addition, that action makes people get rid of their selfish greed. Sometimes we wait for ourselves to be affluent before we give alms. However, giving what you have is also what others need. Therefore, everyone, give generously without expecting to be returned, your merit and blessings will always increase. That's how we are walking the way the Bodhisattva did, doing the things that the Bodhisattva did. However, if we don't practice the Bodhisattva spirit properly, sometimes giving goes wrong.

II.3.2 Limited problems in the practice of almsgiving

In life, we have many opportunities to give alms but often ignore them unintentionally or intentionally. Bodhisattvas, on the contrary, when conditions permit, can practice giving at any time and anywhere. Discriminating thought and the purpose of giving are two factors that prevent beings from practicing giving.

The giving of beings is sometimes based on the principle of the pursuit of fame, fortune, position, and benefit. From there, they began to consider and choose the form of donation. Once giving is coupled with a discriminating mind, one will calculate to provide. Sometimes they give away extra things or stop all forms of giving. According to Buddha, this is the way evil people give.

*"Mendicants, there are these five gifts of a bad person... They give carelessly. They give thoughtlessly. They don't give with their own hand. They give the dregs. They give without consideration for consequences."*¹⁰

Today, there is a form of giving life practiced by many people which is life release. However, many people have misunderstood this issue, leading to improper action. Life release is to save the lives of animals in a timely and quick manner. This act comes from a love for all sentient beings. People release with the purpose of not wanting to see animals die at the hands of others, so they decided to save lives. This action has absolutely no arrangement regarding quantity and time to perform. However, now several organizations and individuals carry out the periodic released of animals, so they actively buy the animals from the people who hunt them. Thus, it encourages hunters to seek out more animals for profit. That is what the Buddha completely disagrees with, and thinks it is a form of giving thoughtlessly to evil people.

⁸ Bhikkhu Nanamoli, Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995, *Majjhima Nikaya, The Simile of the Snake*, Kandy, Sri-Lanka, p.234

⁹ Acharya Buddharakkhita, 2014, *Dhammapada*, Dharma Publishing, USA, p.137

¹⁰ Bhikkhu Sujato, 2018, *Aṅguttaranikāya*, p.4000, ReadingFaithfully.org

Sometimes mistakes in giving do not benefit themselves and the object of giving, but on the contrary, it also leaves very serious consequences. So we need to think very carefully about this especially giving life. In fact, as long as you respect the lives of all sentient beings, you have fully realized the spirit of giving. When people's compassion is always nurtured, even the miniature life like an ant will not dare to kill, let alone other animals. Boosting loving-kindness is also a decisive factor in your wise actions, which according to the Buddha, are people with wisdom. We can understand: *A person of wisdom is not one who practices Buddhism apart from worldly affairs but, rather one who thoroughly understands the principles by which the world is governed*¹¹. Therefore, if humans need to live, so do all sentient beings. That is the law of life and we all need to respect it.

Another form of negativity that is now becoming a problem is collecting money and possessions to perform almsgiving. It's not bad but the unregistered donation process has created suspicion in the community. Since then, many controversial issues have arisen. So, if we call for support from others, everyone should have a clear record and report so that the giving can be long-lasting and effective.

In addition, in giving, we should reduce unnecessary cumbersome procedures. If the process of giving and receiving is more straightforward, the more we will adequately implement the Bodhisattva's *Dana Paramita*¹². Dana Paramita is also a way for us to eliminate our self-grasping. Then, we will no longer think of discriminating between the giver and the object being given.

II. CONCLUSION

The image of Bodhisattva in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist literature is a moral standard we can all follow. Through the practice of giving, the Bodhisattva manifests a pure, selfless heart. The deeds of the Bodhisattvas are symbols of healthy and meaningful lives for humanity. Bodhisattva's method of giving has gone beyond the limits of material life in the world. Bodhisattvas are ready to give away what people need even the body to help others. For Bodhisattva, worldly Dharmas have no existence, the Bodhisattva's only existence is the light of altruism and the spirit of almsgiving.

On the path to liberation, sentient beings must practice according to the bodhisattva's vows. To do that, we need to eliminate discriminating thoughts and attachments in the practice of giving. Equality of study will open us to the correct views to act. All sentient beings who were our relatives in many past lives. Therefore, extending love to everyone is also a link that connects relatives. And indeed that giving is also fundamental to a meaningful human existence.

Almsgiving is the unlimited work of any individual, organization, country or territory. This work has become a matter of standard duty of humanity. Although India and Southeast Asian countries are not yet world powers, these countries have practiced giving in a timely and quick manner. When this world still has war, disease, poverty and death, there will still be Bodhisattvas coming to save sentient beings. Better said, if we give each other love, solidarity and harmony, then indeed humanity will have a prosperous and happy life.

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¹¹ Daishonin, 2018, *The Kalpa of Decrease,* The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, Read How You Want Publisher, Australia, p. 1121

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