



Nalandabodhi Connecticut  
Paramita of the Month Newsletter



"For generosity, nothing to do,  
Other than stop fixating on self. "  
-Milarepa, The Song of the Six Perfections

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Tibetan Buddhist teachings of the Kagyu Lineage break the perfection of generosity into four categories: material generosity, dharmic generosity, giving the protection of fearlessness, and the generosity of loving-kindness. Of these the first two focus on acts of body and speech while the latter two are also associated with the mind.

Material generosity refers to the skillful gift of material objects to someone who is in need. Skillful giving means giving in a way that is beneficial to all and will not bring harm to another being. We must carefully examine how our material gift will be used, establishing certainty that the receiver will not use the gift to harm themselves or others. We must also be certain that the act of giving itself does not harm other beings, for example killing an animal to feed a starving person.

Dharmic generosity refers to practicing the Dharma diligently in order to achieve the capacity to teach others. Once we have accomplished this we should then always be ready to help others and share the teachings with them compassionately. This aspect of generosity can take the form of personal practice or of actually sharing the teachings with another. Any effort we make to study or spread the dharma should be seen as dharmic generosity.

The giving of the protection of fearlessness is giving either material or mental aid to another in such a way that their fear can be alleviated. The giving of food or shelter can be viewed as easing someone's fear. Ultimately, any act of generosity that allows others to remove their own defilements is an act of giving the protection of fearlessness. This might take the form of giving advice to those who seek it or sheltering those in physical danger.

The generosity of loving-kindness involves relating to others in a way that is very genuine and not contrived. This means opening ourselves to others so that we can more easily and sincerely relate to their suffering. Truly understanding their problems then allows us to help as effectively and completely as we are able.

From the bodhisattva's perspective there is a difference between worldly generosity and the perfection of generosity. Even a worldly act of generosity can remove pain and suffering and alleviate poverty and illness. But, a worldly act of generosity is still filled with ego clinging. We perform the act with a great deal of self-concern. Our acts of generosity can become competitive. We become focused on what we can gain through our acts of giving. We may even become upset if our gifts are not received well and graciously by others and might develop a feeling of disappointment.

The perfect generosity of a bodhisattva, as described by Milarepa in the opening quote, is free of all concerns that arise from a sense of self. It is free of any desire for personal gain, free of any sense of receiving something in return for our generosity. It is free from concerns for the accumulation of

personal merit and the benefits that might accrue for us in this or future lives.

In closing we might reflect on a practice described by Theravadan teacher Sharon Salzberg and shared by a sangha member. Sharon teaches that instead of attending to the many thoughts that might arise following an impulse towards generosity, such as thoughts of why we should not give, we should simply act on our original impulse without over-analyzing. While we must of course be skillful, this deceptively simple practice can bring great benefit. It can help us to not be distracted by the flood of thoughts that bombard us and allows us to cultivate our virtuous impulses and weaken our non-virtuous ones. In this way we can progress along the path of the bodhisattva.

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The information presented in this newsletter is based upon a teaching given by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche in June 1984 at KTD Monastery in Woodstock, New York as presented in the text "[Transforming Mental Afflictions and Other Selected Teachings](#)" available from [Namse Bangdzo Bookstore](#).

A complete translation of Milarepa's Song on the Six Perfections translated by Ken McLeod is available [here](#).

Special thanks to sangha member Thomas Pruzinsky for sharing the teachings of Sharon Salzberg with us.