

# **Dana - Sila - Bhavana** **for** **Lay Buddhists**



**A Gift of Dhamma**

# Dana – Sila \_ Bhavana

## Lay Buddhists

Yanone, Myanmar

**Introduction:** The path to Nibbana comes in two ways: one is *Sila-Samadhi-Panna* for the Monks; and *Dana-Sila-Bhavana* for the lay Buddhist. Lay Buddhist could do charity (Dana) based on his/her appropriate earning; observing the lay Buddhist precepts; and practice Samatha or Vipassana at an appropriate time (Bhavana). Lay Buddhist must have the right livelihood (*Samma Ajiva*) to accumulate wealth to support the family, the Sanghas and the Buddha sasana. Thus, in Theravada Buddhism, we have the routine that lay Buddhist need to follow: *Dana – Sila – Bhavana*. Without the support of lay Buddhists the Buddha sasana would come to screeching halt.

Lay Buddhists' Theravada ideal is for householders to support the order of Sangha and reap the merits thereby to gain mundane benefits here and hereafter to live in wealth now and in blissful abodes hereafter. Unless, a householder (male or female) is ordained as Bhikkhu or Bhikkhuni, to attain release in this very life is next to impossible. In Dhammapada stories, there were only two exceptions, the *king Sudhodana* and *Minister Santati* who had attained arahatship, in the cloth of a lay Buddhist, at the time of Buddha.

In the two suttas, *Paharada sutta* and *Nakulapati Sutta*, Buddha said this to the householders how a householder could attain release from the Samsara, in the sequential steps – Sotapanna, Sakadagami, Anagami and Arahantship. Buddha said, Nibbana is something we all must strive in sequential steps and is impossible for a householder to leap frog the process. The proper way for a house holder is – *Dana , Sila, Bhavana*.

In Myanmar, Buddhist carry out the meritorious deeds of giving charity (Dana), observing morality and training practices – (Samatha or Vipassana) for cultivating - *Dana, Sila, Bhavana*. On a daily routine, Buddhists perform the charitable deeds. It is a Buddhist tradition at every Buddhist house to offer, at a minimum, food, water and flowers dedicated to the Triple Gems every morning. In addition, they offer alms-food to the Sanghas who are on their daily alms round every morning collecting alms food.

In some towns, to collect alms food every morning, Sanghas will go in procession. The town people heartily and volitionally do their act of charity offering alms-food to the Sangha. This act of charity in support of the Sanghas is the Theravada

tradition and is our strong belief that householders should support the Sanghas in order to perpetuate the Buddha sasana.

It is also a common occurrence in villages and towns where people occasionally make charitable acts such as inviting the monks to their individual home to offer alms food, novice initiation of their sons, when they reach age seven, at the monastery, donating the four requisites (robes, monastery-shelter, medicines and alms food) to the sangha.

### The Sense of Charity

Charity means donation or giving away one's own properties to others. There are three kinds of charity:

- giving material offerings (*Amisa dana*),
- giving sanctuary and protection to animals (*Abhaya dana*) and
- giving doctrinal lectures (*Dhamma dana*).

In dispensing the charity, volition (*cetana*) and the belief in kamma and its results (*Saddha*) play important roles. Giving Dana is like growing paddy; the good rains in the beginning, in the middle and in the later part of the rainy season can produce a good yield of rice. So in performing the charity, to produce good results, the three steps of volition must be present to produce great benefits to the donors. These three steps of volition are:

1. Volition that arises before giving (*Pubbacetana*);
2. Volition that arises while giving (*Muncacetana*); and
3. Volition that arises after giving (*Aparacetana*).

It is very important to have all three volitions clean and pure whenever we perform any act of charity.

### The Advantages of Charity

Charity of any kind is praised by Buddha in many ways. It is:—

- - like building a stairway to **celestial realms**;
- - like a **saving account** or provisions storage in the long cycle of rebirths
- - like a beacon of light directing the way to **good destination**;
- - helps in support of attaining path (**Magga**) and fruition (**Phala**);
- - helps to become a **ruler of a kingdom**;
- - helps to produce mundane benefits - **luxuries and wealth**;
- - helps to enable one to **enjoy happiness**;
- - helps **Devata** to protect us from natural and artificial calamities;
- - helps to **civilizing the uncivilized**;

- - helps to **bring success** in every day's' living and
- - helps to provide **noblest auspiciousness** (Mangala).

### 1. Offering Alms-food

I offer alms-food and other eatable to the compassionate self-enlightened Buddha who is endowed with the infinite glory and wisdom. By the power of my deed of merit, may I attain the Nibbana as soon as possible. This is in our daily prayer....

#### *The Benefits of offering Alms-food*

One could accrue the benefit of long life; acquiring beauty, wisdom, strength and happiness.

### 2. Offering Water

I offer this pure and cool water to the compassionate Buddha who is endowed with the infinite glory, and wisdom. By the power of my deed of merit, may I attain the Nibbana as soon as possible.

#### *The Benefits of Offering Water*

One could accrue the benefit of longevity, beauty, wealth, strength, wisdom, cleanness, fame and great retinue.

### 3. Offering Flowers and Fragrance

I offer these beautiful flowers of fragrance to the compassionate Buddha who is endowed with the infinite glory, and wisdom. By the power of my deed of this merit, may I attain the Nibbana as soon as Possible.

#### *Benefits of Offering Flowers and Fragrance*

One could accrue the benefit of a rebirth in the celestial realm or in the human existence for 1,00,000 world cycles and ultimately attain Magga, Phala and Nibbana.

### 4. Offering Lights

I offer lights to eliminate the darkness, to the compassionate Buddha who is endowed with the infinite glory, and wisdom. By the power of my deed of merit may I attain the Nibbana as soon as possible.

#### *The Benefits of offering Lights*

One could accrue the benefit of repeated rebirths in the celestial realms or in human existences; and will have bright and fair complexion, possess penetrative wisdom, and attain Magga, Phala and Nibbana.

## Stories on the Benefits of Charity

### 1. The Benefits of Offering Alms-food

Ninety-four world cycles ago at the time of *Siddhattha Buddha*, a man saw the Buddha in his alms round and noticed the fair complexion of the Buddha emanating yellow hues. In admiration of the Buddha he paid homage to him. He also invited the Buddha to his house and offered alms-food.

By the power of that merit, the man was repeatedly reborn in celestial and human realms. He was never reborn in the four miserable realms. In Gotama Buddha's time, he became a man of great wealth. When he came of age, he was ordained as a Bhikkhu. Then he became an arahat.

### 2. The Benefits of offering Water

At the Parinibbana of *Padumuttara Buddha*, pious Buddhists offered pure water by pouring at the Bodhi Tree.

At that time, a certain man carried with him perfumed water in a beautifully decorated pot and offered it to the Bodhi Tree.

By the power of this merit, in his next existence, the man became a deva at the Tusita celestial realm. He enjoyed celestial pleasure and royal pleasure in several of his existences. At the time of Gotama Buddha, he became an Arahata named *Gandhodakiya Thera*.

### 3. The Benefits of Offering Flowers

Once, the Venerable Maha Moggallana went to the celestial realm. When he reached there, he saw a great splendid mansion among the colorful flowers blooming not only in water but also on land.

One goddess resided there together with her attendants. When the Maha Thera saw her, he asked her about the meritorious deeds of her past existence.

The goddess replied thus. "Once I was called Pesavati and I lived in Nalaka village: which is in the eastern side of Rajagaha City. One day I met the Venerable Sariputta and with much reverence. I donated him many flower. As a result, I am now living peacefully in this grand mansion"

### 4. A Story Showing the Benefits of Offering Lights

One man paid homage to the *Padumuttara Buddha* lighting five lamps around the foot of a Bodhi tree. For this good deed, when he died he was reborn repeatedly in celestial or in human realm repeatedly. He also obtained the power of being able to see things from one hundred yojanas away through all obstacles.

That man became an Arahat named *Pancadipaka Thera* in Gotama Buddha's time.

The *Sumangala Buddha* donated lights as his fulfillment of *dana parami*. By the power of that merit, bright hues emitted from his body. Those hues were said to be brighter than those of the sun, the moon, stars and planets.

### 5. Offering Alms-food

Pious Buddhist cherishes offering alms food to the Buddha or to the order of Sanghas. It is a way of supporting the Sanghas and the Buddha's sasana so Bhikkhu's could practice meditation without worry for their subsistence.

Offering alms food by the lay Buddhist to the Sanghas has twofold benefits: the lay Buddhist accrued merits, while the sanghas could concentrate on their pariyatti and Patipatti striving to gain arahatship.

### Different Kinds of Charity

The charity done by the virtuous lay Buddhist is called *Sappurisa-dana*. There are five kinds of *Sappurisa-dana*, namely:-

1. Saddhadana,
2. Sakkaccadana,
3. Kaladana,
4. Anuggahitadana, and
5. Anupahaccadana.

#### (1) Saddhadana

The charity based on the belief in kamma and its results is called Saddhadana. The person who dispenses this kind of charity will gain the benefit of possessing great wealth and beautiful complexion in the existence in which the merit could produce its fruit ional benefits.

#### (2) Sakkaccadana

Sakkaccadana means donating the prepared offerings with sincere respect and reverence. The donor in his next existence the merit will produce the benefit at the suitable time. The person who dispenses this kind of charity will be wealthy and his children, wife, slaves and employees are obedient to him.

For those who offer contemptuously, in their next existence, he will have no influence on his children, wife and slaves, in spite of being wealthy.

### (3) Kaladana

The charity dispensed at an appropriate time is called Kaladana.

In his next existence the merit of his charity will produce benefits; the donor will possess wealth and gets things that he wishes.

### (4) Anuggahitadana

The charity dispensed with the mind unattached to the offering is called Anuggahitadana.

The donor in his existence the merit of his charity will produce benefits and he the person who dispenses that kind of charity will be wealthy and will enjoy the worldly pleasures.

### (5) Anupahaccadana

The charity that will not harm the donor himself or anyone else is called Anupahaccadana.

In his next existence the merit of his charity will produce benefits; the person will possess wealth. And his wealth will be five kinds of dangers (floods, conflagration, tyrants, thieves and unworthy heirs).

#### References:

1. The Teaching of the Buddha – by Ministry of Religious Affairs, Myanmar.
2. Dhammapada – by Daw Mya Tin
4. Illustrated Dhammapada – by Ven. Weragoda Sarada Maha Thera.

**Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!**