

Buddha Sāsana

Newsletter of the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre



The economy of gift

by Patrick Kearney

Dāna (“gift;” “giving;” “generosity”) is the ethical value underlying all Buddhist traditions. It is listed, for example, as the first of the three trainings of generosity (*dāna*), ethics (*sīla*) and meditation (*bhāvanā*). Generosity is also valued as a virtue throughout society, as demonstrated in the community’s praise and admiration for members of volunteer bush fire brigades. The continuous generosity entailed in parenting is another area where we are familiar with the practice of *dāna*.

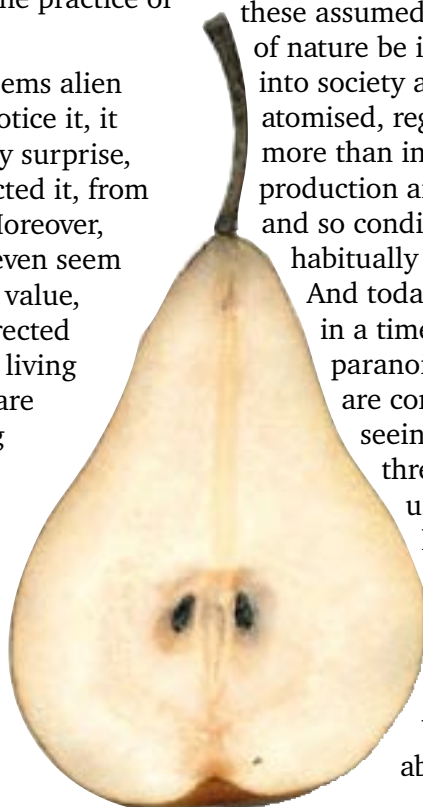
And yet *dāna* often seems alien to us, and when we notice it, it is as if we are taken by surprise, that we had not expected it, from ourselves or others. Moreover, in some contexts we even seem eager to downplay its value, as in the suspicion directed toward single parents living on welfare, that they are exploiting us by being financially supported as they cultivate the generosity of parenting. Or the suspicion directed towards refugees, who are seen as making demands on

our generosity that are unacceptable and manipulative.

Why is *dāna* a problem? Because *dāna* is bound up with community, and a particular vision of community. We cannot practise giving without the other to receive our gift. The other cannot practise giving without us to receive the gift. But we live in a society that takes for granted, as fundamental characteristics of nature, separation, isolation and competition, and demands that these assumed characteristics of nature be incorporated into society as values. We are atomised, regarded as little more than individual units of production and consumption, and so conditioned into habitually acting as such.

And today we are living in a time of increasing paranoia, when we are conditioned into seeing the other as threat, as out to get us and what we hold dear. Such conditioning has the power to destroy *dāna*.

So let us begin by thinking about the nature



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of community. Community, when it works, provides a social space within which we are cared for, valued and protected, and within this space we construct an individual identity. Receiving care, we learn to see ourselves as someone who belongs, in some way, to others. For when we learn what it means to be cared for we also learn that we are expected to give back to those who care for us. The gift of community is felt as a moral obligation to maintain it – to care for those within it.



We find this process within all the institutions of social life. Formal institutions, like school and work; and informal ones, like our circle of friends, or our intimate relationships. In each of these we learn who we are by learning how to belong to community, and in doing so we learn to receive care and to return it. We learn the economy of gift.

When we learn to receive the care and support of others, we begin to realise our dependence on others. We realise our vulnerability, our inability to exist alone, separate and disconnected. When we learn to receive, we also internalise an obligation to return the gift. For gift involves an economy, whether it be of family, friends or state. Where there is gift, there are givers and receivers, and neither can exist without the other. So we learn to return the gift, to support the other in his or her dependence and vulnerability.

So *dāna* is always social, since it always entails the other, from whom we receive, to whom we give. The Buddha says, “Giving, one binds friends” (*Yakkhasaṃyutta* 12). Which implies that without generosity, we have no friends.

Dāna as a practice entails entry into a community, one defined by an economy of gift. As givers and receivers of gift, as members of this economy, we are friends. And we find in the *suttas* that the Buddha’s students characteristically call each other “friend.” But whence do we enter? Where are we before we take that step? We start from a consumerist economy of commerce, defined by mutual competition designed to maximise individual consumption. And in *this* social space we are not friends, but customers.

As a dharma centre, the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation



New 9 bedroom accommodation block built entirely with *dana*. *Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu!*

Centre occupies an ambiguous position between these two worlds. We are a Buddhist community, existing as a crystallisation of the economy of gift. The Centre would not exist – you would not be reading this now – without the gifts of time, labour and money that brought it into existence and enables it to survive. But the Centre is also necessarily part of the economy of commerce, and within this economy we “market” courses of meditation. People pay money to come here and learn meditation, and having completed their courses, they go. And in accepting this relationship, which is the default relationship of our society, they accept an obligation placed upon them as a condition of entry into the course, which is to pay the stated fee we charge.

But as people become more familiar with this Centre and its place within the wider community of Buddha-Dharma, they may begin to discern that something else, something more, is happening. They begin to realise that they are recipients of gift. No-one who works here does so for the money, or for the career opportunity. We do it as gift. No-one who comes to support the Centre or donate money to it does so as a business opportunity. We do it as gift. As people use the Centre they gradually come to realise that they are the recipients of gift, and realising that, feel an obligation to return the gift. And so they

enter into community, the economy of gift.

What we accept as a free gift becomes, once we feel ourselves part of the community defined by that gift, a felt moral obligation, freely taken up, to return the gift, to maintain the economy of gift that sustains the community. But when one is a customer or client, one does *not* feel part of a community, and so has no sense of an obligation to maintain it. The only obligation is to pay the bill. Anything extra is felt as unjustified. And one cannot *command* entry into the community of gift. One must enter it voluntarily or not at all, for any such demand will be heard as excessively heavy. There must be inspiration, a *desire* from the heart, to enter the community.

And there are reasons to avoid this entry. For to acknowledge gift is to acknowledge vulnerability and dependence, and the necessity of opening to the other. This can be felt as a threat to the individual consumer, who is used to the more familiar, less demanding space of a purely commercial relationship, where nothing *of oneself* is demanded, only cash. So the issue of entry into the economy of gift raises the question of whether the recipient of the gift is ready to receive it. Some people will refuse the gift offered by community, for fear of stepping out of a well defined and comforting isolation into the unknown of relationship.

Dāna represents a basic ethical value for Buddhism, and ethical values are *kusala*, which means they are both beneficial in their own right (they are *wholesome*), and they lead to something more valuable (they are *skilful*). That which is wholesome is beneficial within itself. It needs no reference to what lies beyond it for its justification. That which is skilful contains direction, a movement

toward something beyond it, something which grows out of it, which is an extension of it, a fulfilment of it. So in Buddhist ethics, *dāna* is **both** beneficial in itself, **and** directed towards a beneficial aim.

The power of a gift, its karmic fruitfulness or *puñña*, is based in part on the way in which it is given. This includes both the interior mind state or motive and the exterior method of giving. Giving and receiving must be done gracefully, if gift is to maximise its power. The most effective way to give entails a motivation which sees and values both the act itself (its wholesomeness) and its power to effect a beneficial result (its skilfulness). The Buddha's close lay

to trust in their coming, and so develop a greater sense of security. When we suffer an inner poverty, a sense of threat, then we have nothing to give. Giving can both demonstrate and develop a sense of inner wealth, which includes the sense that the universe itself can and will provide. We realise are not under threat, and so can be content with what we have and what may come.

Further, *dāna* is always social, since there must be the other to whom to give. So *dāna* always has social consequences. When we give and receive gracefully, others notice, and their attitude towards us – and even towards themselves – can change. They can discover their own inner wealth, and further,

because they are warmly disposed towards the one who is gracefully generous toward them, they become part of the wealth of that person.

In traditional Buddhist societies *dāna* events are community events, and they provide people with an opportunity to reaffirm the social ties that connect

them. For people in these societies, the satisfaction gained from the social activities involved in *dāna* – giving alms, sponsoring ordination and *kaṭhina* ceremonies, building and maintaining dharma centres – is greater than that gained by individual “consumption.” This is the satisfaction gained from participatory belonging, from being part of a community to which one wants to belong.

In our modern “developed” world, where we are caught up in the economy of commerce, we think it natural to use our surplus for investment and consumption, rather than for connecting with each other as members of

community. Perhaps the practice of *dāna* can teach us to redefine our sense of value, and therefore of pleasure, away from individual consumption to the fulfilment gained in reaffirming social ties and actively participating in that which we respect and value.

Staff Scholarship Fund

BMIMC has decided to establish a *Staff Scholarship Fund* to benefit selected members of the Centre's resident community who wish to further their dharma practice.

Staff working at BMIMC receive a small stipend to cover their day to day expenses, but this is not sufficient to save money for air fares, course fees etc. Many staff members have dedicated a significant part of their lives to dharma service, and without their efforts the Centre would not be able to offer so many practice opportunities to the wider community.

We invite people who have benefited from practice here to join us in supporting this Staff Scholarship Fund. It is intended that the first recipient of a scholarship will be our current manager, Jill Shepherd. Jill has been accepted to attend the 3 month retreat at the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, USA. The course offers a rare opportunity for long term practice with experienced western teachers, and will be led by Joseph Goldstein together with 8 other senior teachers. However, the cost of airfares and fees for this course are significant – especially for someone who has not earned a normal income for several years.

The Centre fully supports Jill in her plan to attend this course and encourages you to help by making a donation to the Staff Scholarship Fund. Cheques should be made payable to “Buddha Sasana Association of Australia” with a covering note to indicate that the gift is for the staff scholarship fund. Gifts to this fund are *not* tax deductible. The fund will be an ongoing project and the Centre hopes that Jill will be the first of many recipients of a scholarship.



New 7 bedroom accommodation block (also built entirely with dana)

disciple Anāthapiṇḍika (“Feeder of the Poor”) is the model of generosity in the tradition, because he gave out of the joy of giving, rather than out of a concern for the results for himself. He did not give as an investor, and therefore his giving had maximum impact, on both himself and the society around him.

There is also an intimate link between *dāna* and pleasure. An ability to really enjoy what one has entails a recognition of its impermanence, a capacity to let it go. Possessions come and go, and *dāna* reveals the empty nature of those things we value. Our valuables are part of a dynamic economy of gift. In giving we learn

BMIMC Cookbook hot off the press!

The first edition of the Centre's cookbook is now available. It features close to 100 vegetarian recipes from our test kitchen, including many retreat favourites plus contributions from our volunteer cooks. There are sections on European food, Asian food, Indian food, Middle-Eastern food, Mexican food, Soups and Desserts, plus information about menu-planning, cooking for large numbers and cooking for people with gluten intolerance. We have given quantities for either 6 or 24 people, so you can cater for small dinner parties or larger events.

Sample recipes include: Roast Tomato, Fetta & Olive Tart with Rice Crust, Braised Chinese Mushroom & Tofu Hot Pot, Vietnamese Rice Paper Rolls, Egg & Asparagus Kofta Curry, Middle-eastern Vegetable Stew with Couscous & Harissa, Beetroot & Orange Soup, Chinese Eight Varieties Soup, Gluten-free Orange & Almond Cake, Lemon Tart ...

To keep costs low, the format is A4 black and white photocopy (100 pages), comb-bound with plastic covers.

To order a copy, please fill in the form below and mail or fax it with your payment (cheque, money order or credit card) to:

BMIMC, 25 Rutland Road, Medlow Bath NSW 2780
ph/fax 02 4788 1024



Lucy Adcock (assistant manager) in cooking mode, with volunteers Markus Lanz and Graham Byrne

COOKBOOK ORDER FORM

I would like to order _____ copies of the cookbook @ \$15 each \$ _____

plus postage (see below for postage costs) \$ _____

TOTAL enclosed (or to be debited): \$ _____

Authorisation to debit my credit card (Visa, Mastercard or Bankcard only):

Credit Card no:

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 Expiry:

Credit Card name: Signature:

- I will pick up the cookbook from BMIMC I have included postage costs. Please mail it to:

Name	
Street	
Town	State
Postcode	Country

Postage Charges:	1 book	2-5 books
Australia-wide	\$3.00	\$7.50
Overseas - Asia Pacific	\$7.00	\$10.00
Overseas - Rest of World	\$10.00	\$15.00

Meditating in Lumbini, Nepal

by Tara MacLachlan

BMIMC management committee member

The reason for my most recent visit to Nepal, a favourite travel destination, was to practise at the Panditarama International Meditation Centre, Lumbini.

Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha, is situated in south-central Nepal near the Indian border, so the centre is an accessible stopping off point when travelling between these two countries.

At a distance of around 200 km. from Kathmandu, it is a long gruelling bus trip. I had done too many of these in the past and so chose to fly from Kathmandu to Bhairawa, a spectacular 20 minute flight over Nepalese foothills with their terraced slopes to the southern plains. It is then only a fifteen minute taxi ride through cultivated fields and small villages until arriving at the Lumbini Monastic Zone. The centre is located here.

The development of Lumbini is following a master plan designed by a Japanese architect. Monasteries and meditation centres representing the different Buddhist countries and traditions coexist peacefully in the Monastic Zone. This area is surrounded by woodlands, beyond which are the archaeological zone and areas designated for tourist accommodation and administration.

Panditarama is a small centre with a welcoming relaxed, atmosphere. The main building is a circular complex, with a small central courtyard, contained by gardens and natural bush. It comprises a large meditation hall, dining room and kitchen, bathrooms and simple and comfortable dormitories. There are also several separate blocks with 3-bed rooms. Altogether about 35 yogis can be accommodated. I shared a room

with a changing group of women from all over the globe. We had little chance to communicate but the camaraderie was strong and supportive.

During my time at the centre, I was treated with exceptional care by the resident sangha Sister Bhadda Manika and Sister Nimmila Nani, two nuns from Burma, and the Venerable Vivekananda, "Lumbini Sayadaw". With the support of local staff, the Sisters took care of all my practical needs with patience and kindness and provided wonderful vegetarian food, including home-grown fruit and vegies. Sayadaw supported my practice.

The Venerable Vivekananda is a gifted teacher of the Dhamma. He practiced and trained as a teacher in Burma under the tutelage of Sayadaw U Pandita. Beginning as a translator for Dhamma talks and interviews, he developed his abilities and became a teacher in his own right. In 1998 he was appointed to the position of resident Sayadaw at the Lumbini centre. He is also a skilled linguist speaking German, his parental heritage, two African languages learnt during a childhood spent in SW Africa, English, Burmese, French, Nepali and several others.

These unique qualities of a long personal experience of the Mahasi practice and monastic life in Burma, a comprehensive knowledge of Buddhist teachings, excellent language and communication skills, a Westerner's perspective and a kind and gentle nature made the opportunity of sitting with him a rewarding experience.

On a day-to-day practice level the centre followed a similar schedule to any I had previously encountered. Up from early



Sayadaw U Vivekananda at Panditarama Internationa Meditation Centre, Lumbini

morning to practice sitting, walking and mindfulness of daily activities. However, I find each teacher seems to bring their particular flavour to a retreat. With a daily interview, except for Saturday, I became acquainted with Sayadaw's "style", the easy informality yet subtle precision of his technique. Three days a week we all met in Sayadaw's room for Dhamma talks. These were always very satisfying and often involved lively question and answer sessions. The other four days when taped talks were played were never quite the same.

To my great fortune Sayadaw U Pandita's yearly visit to the centre co-incided with my stay there. For 12 days a large number of Nepalese Newari Buddhists joined the retreat. Although it meant facilities were stretched to the limit, it was a special opportunity for us all to be with the senior teacher of our lineage. As always I was greatly inspired by Sayadawji and by the faith of his Nepalese devotees.

I am very grateful to Sayadaw U Pandita, Sayadaw Vivekananda, Sister Bhadda Manika and Sister Nimmala Nani for their generous gift of the precious Dhamma.

Sayadaw U Vivekanada is in residence at Panditarama Lumbini most of the year. His teaching duties take him to Europe from late April until around the beginning of the Vassa, somewhere between late June and early July. Although he does not give Dhamma talks during the Vassa so as to devote some time to his own practice, he is always available for interviews and is committed to "serving the meditators here as best I can". He is especially interested in yogis who are committed to long-term practice. The best time of year to go is in the cooler months from September to April. It is possible to stay in Nepal for 5 months in a year but visas need renewing every one or two months.

To contact Panditarama Lumbini - postal address - "Panditarama International Meditation Centre, Lumbini Gardens, Nepal" or email Sayadaw Vivekanada at panditarama@mos.com.np

Patrick Kearney moves on

Patrick has decided, after three years as the resident teacher of Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre, that he wishes to explore opportunities to develop his teaching and practice independently of the Centre and free from the demands of the resident teacher role.

The Trust (the management committee of the Buddha Sasana Association) deeply appreciates the contribution Patrick has made to the development of BMIMC through the high quality of his dhamma teaching, his scholarship and his work in establishing an Australian Buddhadhamma. We welcome his continuing association with BMIMC.

Beyond the Centre

Patrick's teaching schedule away from BMIMC

Lismore mindfulness weekends

The Kuan Yin Meditation Centre in Lismore is hosting two non-residential weekend retreats, designed for beginning and experienced students. Each day will include individual interviews, a dharma talk and group discussion.

When: 24-25 May; & 22-23 November.
Cost: \$10 course fee and *dāna*.
Information & bookings: Contact Christine Wynard on (02) 6689 7116, or Ellen Davison on (02) 6688 6112 (a.h.)

Alice Springs teachings

This is a series of meditation sessions, teachings and discussions over two weekends and some days in between.

When: 16-24 August.

Cost: To be advised.

Information & bookings: Contact Jenny Taylor & Sue Fielding on (08) 8953 2776; or email redbetty@ozemail.com.au

Byron Bay retreat

This is a residential insight meditation retreat conducted at Byron Bay.

When: 5-14 September.

Cost: To be advised.

Information & bookings: Contact Christine Wynard on (02) 6689 7116, or Ellen Davison on (02) 6688 6112 (a.h.)

Evam me suttam

A series of five Wednesday night sutta study classes at the Buddhist Library, Camperdown. We will look at problems and controversies in the theory of insight meditation.

When: Wednesdays 1 - 29 October.

Cost: To be advised.

Information & bookings: Call the Buddhist Library on (02) 9519 6054; or email info@buddhistlibrary.com.au

Perth Retreat

This is a residential insight meditation retreat conducted in Perth.

When: 14 - 24 May 2004.

Cost: To be advised.

Staff wanted

Our current managers, Jill and Lucy, are both planning to travel overseas this year, so we will soon be looking for new people to help us manage the Centre over winter and beyond. We are looking for experienced meditators with a strong commitment to *dhamma* service, an ability to relate to people from diverse backgrounds, familiarity with computers and common office software (or a willingness to learn these), and strong communication skills - both oral and written.

Additionally some combination of the following skills will be required: small office administration, including book-keeping; cooking and house-keeping; building, gardening and grounds maintenance.

The position is live-in, and applicants will be working and living in a small meditation community of 2-3 people, supported by the Centre's Management Committee and the broader community of local meditators. The ability to live in community with others is an essential part of the job, and staff are encouraged to engage with this aspect of the work as part of their *dhamma* practice. Staff receive a small stipend in addition to full board and accommodation, plus a contribution towards car use if they are able to provide their own vehicle. They are also entitled to sit one 9 day retreat for free every 6 months.

For more information contact the manager on (02) 4788 1024 or email bmimc@pnc.com.au, or for further information about the Centre visit our website, www.meditation.asn.au

Around the Centre

by Jill Shepherd
Manager

Building programme update: Both accommodation blocks are now complete to lock-up stage! Many thanks to Harald, Derek, Drew and the Next Level Building team for their excellent work. Thanks also to all the people who helped out with painting doors, windows, fascias etc prior to installation. We have had a big input of volunteer help over the last few months, which is very encouraging.

The recent building fund loan appeal had a good response, allowing us to complete the buildings to lock-up stage and soon to fit out one of the new bathrooms. This will mean that although we will keep using the existing dormitories for a while, the pressure on bathroom and toilet facilities will be eased. As more money is raised, we will then try to finish off the interior of the larger 9 bedroom block so we can start using the new rooms, hopefully towards the end of this year.

Our last Community workday on March 9 brought the biggest response since I've been here: thirty people turned up to



John Orme and Nick Maddocks discuss the finer points of fencing, while Ian Baird and Gavin Cusack help out in the background

help! John Orme supervised the construction of a 30m long fence between us and our neighbours - a big thank-you to him for taking on that task. Other people painted, weeded the grounds, cleaned buildings and generally put a lot of effort into tidying the place up. Lunchtime turned into quite a feast, as in addition to the food which people brought to share, the Pankalasin family cooked Thai food for everyone.

Other Centre developments: thanks to Gabrielle Cusack's fund-raising campaign and all the people who donated to it so generously, we now have a brand new commercial-grade washing machine for meditator use. The old concrete laundry troughs have been replaced by a new sink and taps, making the laundry space more useable.

Most of our retreats continue to book out well in advance, which means we have a waiting-list for most courses. Don't forget that if you have to cancel, please do it as soon as possible so we can give the place to someone else. We have extended the refundable deposit period to ONE MONTH

before the course starts, as we're finding that the previous two week cancellation period does not allow enough time for people on the waiting list to join the course (refer to course information sheet for more details). Apart from the fact that these people miss out, the Centre is also affected by the



Lucy Adcock (assistant manager) in nail-gunning mode

loss of income from last-minute cancellations.

For this and several other reasons, we have had to increase our course costs slightly from August this year. Course costs were last increased four years ago, and over the last few years the cost of running retreats and maintaining the Centre has increased steadily. We have tried to keep the increase to a minimum, roughly 10%. It is still our intention to make the courses available to anybody, regardless of financial background, so if anyone feels unable to attend a course due to financial difficulties, we encourage them to contact us about our scholarship fund. There is also the opportunity to 'pay' for retreats by doing volunteer service - please contact me if you're interested in this.

Speaking of service, Lucy Adcock's time at the Centre has finished already. The year has rushed by, and in June she hopes to return to Thailand, to be an assistant for the summer season at Wat Kow Tahm with Steve & Rosemary Weissman. We wish her well with the next stage of her dharma service and thank her for all her good work here.

INFORMATION REQUEST AND DONATION FORM

If you would like to receive the newsletter or make a donation to the Centre, complete this form and send to BMIMC, 25 Rutland Road, Medlow Bath, NSW 2780.

Name

Address

I would like to make a donation of \$ to the Building Fund General fund

Donations to the Building Fund are tax deductible

Authorisation to debit my credit card:

Bankcard Visa M'card Card No

Cardholder Name Expiry date /

Signature

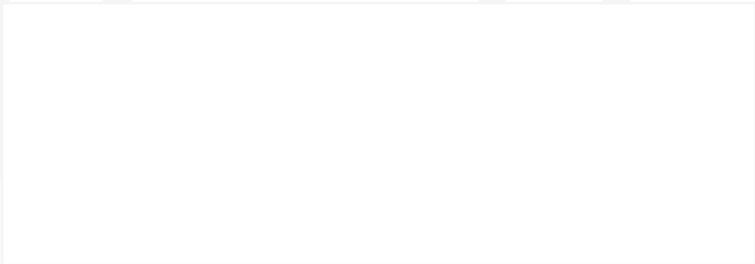
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Photo: Roger Myint and friends repaint the stupa, January 2003