

Dharma talk
Dec. 13-15, 2019

Discovering *Caga* (pronounced *charga*)—the urge, the internal impulse, from which generosity originates
Moving from constriction, fear, and miserliness to abundance, openness, awareness of *Caga*.
As a practice

Hear what you need to hear, and let go of the rest.

The case for generosity

This dharma talk began with a casual discussion with my husband. I have a long-standing reflex--every time I do something that contributes to our mutual well-being, like taking out the trash, I ask "how many merit points do I get?" He kindly supplies me with a totally arbitrary number. After forty years, he finally asked, "Is there a finite supply of these points?" To which I replied, "Goodness no; they are without end." "So," he said, "I should not be hoarding these points and dolling them out judiciously?" "No," I replied, "it is an opportunity for you to be absolutely generous, and before I am all done with this life, I will have given them all back into the infinitely flowing stream."

It seems to be much easier to live with the assumption of abundance than thinking that these points are scarce, calling for a miserly distribution, and living out of fear of insufficiency. I am rooting for its opposite: acceptance, openness, assumption of abundance, and trust in the continuous emanation of generosity. I know enough to understand that we vacillate between constriction and expansiveness, between fear and trust. But one is definitely more in need of cultivating than the other. One we can foster and the other we can let whither like an unhelpful weed, using our discretion, of course.

With the prompt of this conversation, I dove into the generous offerings of Buddhist writings, to see what wisdom I could find on this subject.

I read--

From the numerical discourses: "And what is the accomplishment of generosity? Here, a noble disciple dwells at home with a mind free from the stain of miserliness, freely generous, open handed, delighting in relinquishment, devoted to charity, delighting in giving and sharing. This is called the accomplishment of generosity."

AN 61.3, p. 450

"The goal of that path is the destruction of greed, hate, and delusion, and the cultivation of generosity directly debilitates greed and hate, while facilitating that pliancy of mind that allows for the eradication of delusion."

Bhikkhu Bodhi, Access to Insight website

This is helpful.

It turns out that generosity is the first of the Ten Perfections. Generosity even precedes morality. It precedes the practice of meditation. Generosity is foundational to the gradual training of the mind and the heart, which leads to less suffering. Generosity directly counters greed and hate. Generosity is the counter-point to the fear that underpins our emotional responses of clinging and aversion. We are the spiders caught in our own delusional, fabricated web of our own familiar self-deceptions of attachments and expectations. The undercurrent of fear keeps us locked into separation, believing our fabricated world is the only possibility. A practice of generosity helps cultivate the alternative. We do not have to be bound up in the isolation and loneliness of our own protective devices. Our minds can be trained to become more spacious, gracious, and flexible.

The same way we can witness the fear that drives so much of our emotional responses, we can discover what the Buddhists call *caga*, which is the root of generosity. *Caga* is a disposition of mind, a quality, an attitude of mind, which is congruent with liberality, generosity and munificence. It is also translated as abandoning and giving up, because letting go of the unwholesome is also necessarily present. The development of *caga* is the development of emotional maturity. We can give value and importance to the source of generosity. We can amplify it so we have a counter-point to fear, and miserliness, and constriction. We can exercise it so it is nimble and consciously available. The Buddhists call this equipping the mind—the merger of gladness with the wholesome, necessary to develop a mind that does not have to get lost in hostility or ill will.

The development of *caga* is different from the development of *metta*, or loving-kindness. *Caga* is passive state, while *metta* is active. When developed, *caga* becomes an attitude of the mediator, an internal place of residing, whereas *metta* requires a sender and receiver.

The Buddhist Hour Radio Broadcast Script 263, Sun 9 Feb 2003, website archives

On retreat, we work with all this on the levels of thought, attitude, and emotional responses toward our selves. Are we withdrawing into familiar constricted perception or are we open to revisiting our basic perceptual assumptions for a more open and accepting, although temporary, understanding? We work with all that we project onto others within the sanctuary of the silence we generously provide to one another. And we work with this same point of decision—openness or fearful withdrawal, when the new, unfamiliar states of being become apparent within your meditation. This is the lab.

Quoting a Thai Buddhist master, who was observing Westerners meditate, he commented on the second or third day of a retreat, “I notice that when these people meditate they are awfully grim.’ You’d look out across the room and all the people were sitting there very seriously, their faces tense, their eyes closed tight. It was almost as if they had Nirvana or Bust written across their foreheads.

He attributed their grimness to the fact that most people here in the West come to Buddhist meditation without any preparation...in being generous in line with the Buddha's teaching on giving...[they have] no experience in developing virtue in line with the Buddhist precepts. They come to the Buddha's teachings without having tested [how generosity functions] in daily life, so they don't have the sense of confidence they need to get them through the hard parts of mediation. They feel they have to rely on sheer determination instead." That is a very hard way to meditate.

Mediations, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, p. 1, 2003

What I want to do in this dharma talk is offer you the possibility of going back and picking up this first lesson in generosity, of discovering the well spring of your own *caga*, so you can bring richness and generosity to your attention. You can discover that everything you truly need in this moment is already present. It will affect the choices you make in each moment as to what to cultivate and what tendencies to steer away from. Combined with the knowledge of cause and effect, it will lead to the rise of each of the others on that list of the Ten Perfections-- leading to wisdom, strength, patience, truthfulness, resolve, loving-kindness, and equanimity. Without it, our practice can become like a parched, barren desert. Generosity is the rain that allows the desert to bloom. The seeds are already present in *caga*.

Cain and Abel

At the same time we are sometimes resistant to generosity. Why is *caga* an internal resource to which we have only a slim connection? Why? Perhaps, because it challenges what we see as our own self-interest. Or connecting with ourselves or others scares us. Or we are afraid of our own suffering and create walls in order not to feel. Or we don't know anything other than our habitual reactivity dictated by self-protection. I am certain you can come up with your own well-honed resistance. You may find that fear underlies your choice between generosity and constriction. Maybe you don't even know you have a choice.

Fear is at the root of the maintenance of our sense of self, maintenance of the web of our delusions. Fear drives clinging, aversion, and delusion. Fear can put up the "pretense of virtue, but really we're afraid of being bad. Fear also stops up from speaking up when we know we should. Fear is often what causes people to leave the path of dharma. When things start to go deep, beyond self-improvement, they can encounter fear and say, 'This path is not for me.'"

Judy Lief, John Daido Looi, Robert Thurman, Sylvia Boorstein, Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche, [Fear and fearlessness: What the Buddhists teach](#), Lion's Roar website

Fear maintains our sense of separation and duality. Fear is ubiquitous. We all have an underlying sense of not being able to settle, of not being secure. We have an existential feeling of uncertainty and instability, and that makes us very

anxious. When we do things to try to make ourselves feel secure by trying to establish a sense of fixed identity, we really end up making ourselves more miserable. We can enflame our negative emotions. When these emotions become inflamed, our fears grow. They compound. It just does not work.

Judy Lief, John Daido Looi, Robert Thurman, Sylvia Boorstein, Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche, [Fear and fearlessness: What the Buddhists teach](#), Lion's Roar website

The antidote to fear is generosity. It is the opposite of alienation and isolation. It begins with the acceptance of the fear. It moves toward the discovery of our own inner richness. Generosity comes from an internal impulse. It is a place of great treasure when coupled with discriminating wisdom. What gets in the way? Miserliness, grown out of fear.

In my reading of the suttras, I found the following revelatory teaching:

“And why is a talk on generosity wrongly addressed to a miser? When a talk on generosity is being given, a miser loses his temper and becomes irritated, hostile, and stubborn; he displays anger, hatred, and bitterness. For what reason? Because he does not perceive that generosity in himself and obtain rapture and joy based upon it. Therefore a talk on generosity is wrongly addressed to a miser.”

Angutara Nikaya, p. 771, Bhikkhu Bodhi translator, 2012; AN 5:157.4

When I read this remarkable paragraph, what it brought to mind was not a Buddhist story, but a biblical story. In fact, it is one of the most elemental and most obvious stories. If you are familiar with the story of Cain and Abel, you may recall, the brothers lived outside of Eden, with their parents, Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve had lost their innocence, and discovered a world of good and evil, what the Buddhist might call the wholesome and unwholesome. It is a world of cause and effect, which is incompatible with the world of timeless unity. Adam and Eve discovered the futility of hiding and suffering shame of their own making. Totally human.

Now their sons brought offerings to God. Abel, connected to his generous nature, brought his best, and Cain simply gave what he had. Abel was acknowledged and Cain's offering was not heeded. And, as you probably remember, Cain was “incensed and his face fell.”

And right before Cain murdered his brother, God said to Cain:

“Why are you incensed, and why is your face fallen? For whether you offer well, or whether you do not, at the tent flap sin crouches and for you is its longing but you will rule over it.”

Gen 4:7, Robert Alter, translator, p. 19, 2019

Like lecturing a miser, it did not turn out well.

In God's lecture to Cain, if we understand sin as separation, then we can easily see greed and hatred and delusion as always waiting for us, no matter how virtuous or ill behaved we have been. Our judgmental and fearful nature is always ready to pounce no matter what we have done or said. If we begin to accept the truth of its laying in wait, then we can say 'hello', and see if it has anything to offer us before our passions are triggered. We can develop discriminating wisdom. We have a choice. This is why we sit here, to discover the point of choice and practice making the one that is wholesome and congruent with our intentions for this practice.

The well-equipped mind knows this. That is why we cultivate the antidote to miserliness and misery. Then we can make a wholesome choice. Then we can become more mature and skillful in our responses. We are less likely to murder our brother when we know his well-being is tied to our own.

Putting this into practice

(*caganussati*—remembrance of one's generosity)

"Giving can also be identified with the personal quality of generosity (*caga*). When we develop and cultivate *caga*, we feel more inclined to give with kindness. The Buddha praised one who is accomplished in generosity (*caga-sampada*). Such a person, the Buddha said, 'dwells with heart free from the stain of avarice, devoted to charity, open-handed, delighting in generosity, attending to the needy, delighting in the distribution of alms.'"

AN 8:31, pp. 1165-1166: AN 8.33 p. 1166.

So, how do we go about putting this into practice? How do we develop a mature, well-equipped mind?

Meditation is not just a matter of bare attention. It is really a matter of more appropriate, deliberate attention. We are paying attention to the causes of suffering, and abandoning the habits that perpetuate it. This means thought, understanding, and memory are not enemies of meditation, but actually to be capitalized upon, and utilized. Bare attention, holding all thoughts and feelings loosely makes discerning the wholesome from the unwholesome possible, and makes it possible for us to let go of what we see is no longer fruitful. Letting go of the unwholesome is a cultivated skill.

Mindfulness involves keeping particular themes or intentions in mind so as to induce mental states necessary for concentration, clear insight and release. This is a function of the active memory.

In the Buddhist cannon, there is a practice of the recollection of generosity for training of the mind.

The practice of generosity does not necessarily come naturally to us. However it is of great benefit. When we are being generous, we put ourselves in a position

of wealth, of having something of value to share. It is proof to ourselves that we have more than enough. It gives us a sense of worth as a person. It creates spaciousness in the mind. Because we have behaved generously, we can see generosity as an operating principle in the world. We can begin seeing no separation between our own well-being and the well being of others.

Habits of being stingy move us to a more confining world, because there is never enough. Generosity makes the mind more spacious, connected to all those around you. Letting go of material things make it easier to let go of unskillful mental attitudes. The mind develops a habit of letting go more easily.

When you find all the hindrances consuming you—your dissatisfaction, your worry, your fear, your greed, your doubt—you can make a choice to recall moments of generosity. And, of course, giving and receiving are all the same. *Caga* is accessed and becomes increasingly familiar.

When you find yourself lost in judgment, you can imagine its opposite. We can be open to another point of view. You can remember moments of your own joy or the joy of others. You can remember your implicit interdependence to get you out of your narrow view of your life. You can remember that gift giving and thanksgiving are tied at the deepest level. You can see your own life, or this very breath, as a gift. You can look for the generosity in what you usually see as only mundane transactions.

Recalling generosity makes the mind more spacious, open and accepting, and calm and concentrated. We can become delighted in the smallest manifestation of a magnanimous nature. There is no room for aversion at that moment of delight.

AN V332:10, Sutta 11, p. 1567

There is a relationship between generosity and restraint. Keeping in mind that clinging, aversion, and delusion are always crouching at our tent-flap, barring our connection to the wider world within us and external to us, we must notice it and keep generosity in mind. This is a process of restraint. We learn to exercise the discipline of eschewing that which is harmful and choosing that which connects us to the good. That becomes our nature.

Generosity can have near enemies, of course. A near enemy is something that can masquerade as open heartedness, but lacks discriminating wisdom. We can adopt a servile position, mistaking slavish devotion for respect. We can give to others while holding an attitude of contempt. We can show poor judgment and give away to others what we actually need or what they will abuse. Idiot compassion is a possibility.

So we must look at what is our motivation for giving. Are we giving out of fear, to protect our self from retribution? Are we giving with a transactional expectation? I am generous to you, so you need to be generous to me. Good luck with that. Or

maybe I think giving is good, so I should practice it, without connecting to the other, the recipient. Or am I giving out of a sense of noble martyrdom? Am I trying to earn a good reputation? Or am I working toward a calm mind, which can allow elation and joy to arise? Or am I working to ornament the mind, equipping the mind, discover the spaciousness of *caga*?

We can give gifts to others quite casually, without respect for its actual meaning. We can mistake a gift something that would better be discarded. Or we can give thinking that now there is an obligation to be given something in return. We need to examine the timing and the motivation of our generosity. *Caga* will know the difference. Is there the delight? Is there joy?

After checking on our motivation, we are given the advice: act on each impulse of generosity. Do not miss the opportunity. Every time we act on it, we strengthen our association with factors of *metta* and renunciation. We get to have friendly, loving feelings toward the recipient at the same time we are letting go.

Joseph Goldstein pp. 329-330

The spaciousness that ensues with the abandonment of greed, hatred, and delusion creates a responsive and flexible mind. True kindness becomes possible. It becomes the reflex.

We are instructed:

“...you should develop this recollection of generosity while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children.”

AN 9.13

Recently I had the incredible opportunity to sit with my three year old grandson, Pax. As he cuddled in my lap, I said to him: “I am going to fill you with love. What color do you want?” “Pink!” he answered. I told him to let me know when he was all full up from his feet to his head. He let me know. It was a lovely moment of complete satisfaction for the two of us. And he then made the motion that summoned his invisible cat, Jim. Pax said: “And now I am going to fill Jim up with blue.”

What color do you want? Can you be open to receiving? Let's practice.

Ten recollections (*anussati*): Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, virtue, generosity, devas, stilling. (*Sati*) practices also: mindfulness of in-and-out breathing, death, mindfulness immersed in the body. Words for mindfulness and recollection are intimately related, so both are included in the ten recollections. (Stilling=abandonment of passions, aversion, and delusions)

