

## Generosity

*When a noble disciple recollects his own generosity thus, on that occasion his mind is not obsessed by lust, hatred, or delusion; his mind is straight, with generosity as its object....*

~The Buddha, *Anguttara Nikaya* 6.10

Generosity is the first of the Buddha's ten *paramis* because, ideally, it underscores all of our actions. Generosity is the direct antidote to greed and its myriad manifestations such as desire, craving, lust, and other forms of selfishness. When we feel greed in our minds, greed toward things, money, opportunities, relationships, or enhancing our reputations, our minds are contracted and narrow: we can only focus on trying to get what we want. These qualities of mind are understandably distracting and limiting. They overshadow our more expansive, joyful, and rarified qualities of consciousness.

Many years ago, in order to grasp this particular parami better, I made it a point to perform an act of generosity daily—an act that would not specifically benefit me in any way. My acts of generosity were often very simple, such as sending an interesting postcard to a relative, giving away a lunch to a homeless person, or picking up litter when walking. I found that doing these things gave me concrete examples of the sincerity of generosity. Yes, they were small acts, but the ease of wellbeing that they generated was a real treasure.

It is helpful to scrutinize the intentions behind our acts of generosity. It is not unusual to have mixed motives behind giving. We may give because we love someone, but then also expect him or her to give us something back. We may give because we think another needs something, and then bind our gift with some selfish expectation that our gift be used as we see proper. We may give to assuage guilty feelings. Even if our motivations are tainted, we

should still give. We should not let mixed intentions prevent generosity. However, by bringing awareness to our motives, we can hopefully rise above any sticky and insincere intentions and learn to give in a genuinely unselfish manner. This is why it is necessary to scrutinize our generous aspirations. Generosity without selfish agenda is generosity in its noblest form.

### **Reflective Journaling**

- Identify the intentions behind your gifts to family, friends, co-workers, strangers, and organizations.
- When you give, can you let go of expectations regarding how the person uses the gift?
- When you give, can you let go of expecting anything in return?
- What can you do to be more generous with your family?
- What can you do to be more generous with your co-workers?
- What can you do to be more generous toward strangers you may never see again?
- What constitutes wise intention and wise action regarding generosity?