

**Part One:**  
**NĀGĀRJUNA'S STORIES ON GIVING**



## The Painter Who Gave Away His Savings

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: Karmically-Rewarding Forms of Giving

Furthermore, on account of making gifts of the seven precious things, workers, carriages, gold, silver, lamps, candles, buildings, incense and flowers, one is able to become a wheel-turning monarch possessing an abundance of his seven types of treasures.

Additionally, through making gifts with timely appropriateness, one's resulting karmic reward is increased. This is as explained by the Buddha when he said, "If one gives to a person about to travel far, to a person come from afar, to a sick person, to a person caring for the sick, or if one gives to assist with manifold difficulties arising from storms or cold, this qualifies as timely giving."

Again, if one gives in a way which accords with what is most needed in a particular place, one reaps an increased karmic reward from that.

Also, if one performs an act of giving on the road in a wilderness area, one thereby gains an increased measure of merit.

If one continues giving constantly and without neglecting that practice, one gains from that an increased karmic reward.

If one gives a gift which accords with what the solicitor desires, one gains from that an increased measure of merit.

If one gives gifts which are valuable, one gains an increased measure of merit.

If one gives monastic dwellings, parks, forests, bathing ponds, and so forth—provided that those gifts are bestowed upon people who are good—one gains an increased karmic reward on that account.

If one gives gifts to the Sangha, one thereby gains an increased karmic reward.

If both the benefactor and the recipient are possessed of virtue, an increased karmic reward is gained as a result of that.

(Chinese textual note: "The notes in red read, 'Take for example bodhisattvas and buddhas who give with a mind of compassion. This is what is intended with respect to the benefactor. Giving for example to buddhas, bodhisattvas, arhats, or pratyekabuddhas—this is what is intended in regard to the recipient.'")

When one extends all manner of welcoming courtesies out of respect for the recipient, one gains from this an increased measure of merit.

If one gives that which was difficult to come by, one gains an increased amount of merit.

**Story: The Painter who Gave Away his Savings**

If one is able to give all that one has, one gains thereby an increased amount of merit. This principle is illustrated by the case of a painter named Karṇa from the city of Puṣkarāvātī in the state of Greater Tokharestan. He had traveled to the east to the state of Takṣaśilā where he served as a painter to that court for a period of twelve years.

He received payment of thirty two-ounce pieces of gold for his work and took it back with him when he journeyed back to the city of Puṣkarāvātī in his home state. He chanced to hear the sound of a drum beating to convene a great assembly. He went there and saw an assembly of the Sangha. With a mind of pure faith he asked the Karmadāna, "How much would be required to provide a day's feast for this assembly?"

The Karmadāna replied, "Thirty two-ounce pieces of gold would be adequate to supply food for one day." At this point, he immediately brought forth the entire sum of thirty two-ounce pieces of gold and entrusted it to the Karmadāna saying, "Prepare on my behalf a day's feast [for this entire assembly]. I will return here tomorrow." He then went back to his home empty-handed.

His wife asked him, "Well, what did you earn for your twelve years of work?"

He replied, "I earned thirty two-ounce pieces of gold."

She immediately asked, "Where are the thirty two-ounce pieces of gold now?"

He replied, "They have already been planted in the merit field."

The wife asked, "What merit field?"

He replied, "I gave them to the assembly of the Sangha." His wife then had him detained and sent before a judge that his crime could be dealt with and the matter properly adjudicated. The Grand Judge asked, "Why is it that we are convened here?"

The wife replied, "My husband has become crazy and deluded. He worked in royal service in a foreign country for twelve years and earned thirty two-ounce pieces of gold. He had no compassionate regard for his wife or child and so gave away the entire sum to other people. Thus, wishing him to be dealt with by judicial decree, I quickly moved to have him detained and brought forth."

The Grand Judge then asked her husband, "Why did you not share it with your wife and child, preferring instead to give the gold away to others?"

He replied, "In previous lives I did not cultivate merit. In the present life I am poor and so have undergone all manner of bitter suffering. Now, in this life I have encountered the field of merit. If I do not plant merit, in later lives I will still be poor, and so poverty will follow upon poverty continuously, such that there will be no time when I am able to escape it. I now wish to immediately relinquish this state of poverty. It is for this reason that I took all of the gold and gave it to the Sangha community."

The Grand Judge happened to be an *upāsaka*<sup>1</sup> who maintained a pure faith in the Buddha. When he heard these words, he praised him, saying, "This is an extremely difficult thing to have done. You applied yourself diligently and underwent hardship in order to obtain such a small material reward, and then you were able to take it all and give it to the Sangha. You are a good man."

He then took off the strand of jewels around his neck and gave it to the poor man along with his horse and the income which he received from the taxes on an entire village. He then declared to him, "At the beginning, when you had already made the gift to an assembly of the Sangha, but that assembly of Sangha members had still not partaken of that food, it was a case of the seed still not really having been planted. But now a sprout has already come forth from it. The great fruit of this will come forth in the next life."

### Conclusion

It is for reasons such as this that it is said that one gains the most merit if one is able to give entirely of that which has been hard to come by.

### Notes

1. An *upāsaka* (feminine: *upāsikā*) is a Buddhist layman, the minimum qualification for which is having formally received from duly-ordained clergy (usually a bhikshu with at least five years full ordination) the Three Refuges: refuge in the Buddha; refuge in the Dharma; and refuge in the Ārya Sangha. ("Ārya" is a reference to those who have realized the path of seeing or above.) Although pledging adherence to specific moral norms is not a prerequisite to obtain the Refuges and become formally "Buddhist," the universal ethical standard for the Buddhist layperson consists in the five precepts which prohibit: killing; stealing; sexual misconduct; false speech; intoxicants.

## The Fabulous Giving of Velāma Bodhisattva

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: Hearer *Dāna* versus Bodhisattva *Dāna*

Moreover, if it is not done for the sake of beings, if it is not done for the sake of realizing the true character of dharmas,<sup>1</sup> and if it is done solely for the sake of gaining liberation from birth, old age, sickness, and death, this is the *dāna* of the Hearers.<sup>2</sup> If one gives for the sake of all beings and if one does so for the sake of realizing the true character of dharmas, this is the *dāna* of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas.

If one is unable to make one's giving replete with every manner of meritorious quality, but rather desires only to gain a minor measure thereof, this is the *dāna* of the Hearers. If one wishes to make it entirely replete with every manner of meritorious quality, this is the *dāna* of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas.

If one gives out of a fear of old age, sickness, and death, this is the *dāna* of the Hearers. If it is done to assist the realization of the Buddha Path, if it is done for the sake of transforming beings, and if it is not done out of fear of old age, sickness, and death, this is the *dāna* of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas.

### Story: The Fabulous Giving of Velāma Bodhisattva

In this connection one ought to draw upon *The Sutra of the Past Lives of the Bodhisattva*. As discussed in *The Avadāna Sutra*, in the past, in Jambudvīpa, there was a king named Vāsava. At that time there was a brahman bodhisattva named Velāma who served as the teacher of the King. He taught the King the method for becoming a wheel-turning sage king.<sup>3</sup>

Velāma's own wealth was immeasurable. He possessed an abundance of precious jewels. He had these thoughts: "People look upon me as a noble man possessed of immeasurable wealth. If I am to be of benefit to beings, now is precisely the right time. I should perform a great act of giving. Although being wealthy and noble is blissful, everything is impermanent. This wealth, held in common with five types of agents (the King, thieves, fire, flood, and bad sons), causes a man's mind to be so scattered, agitated and unfocused as to make it like a monkey which is unable to remain still. A person's life passes more quickly than the disappearance of a lightning bolt. A person's body is impermanent and is a thicket of the manifold sufferings. On account of these things, one ought to practice giving."

After having these thoughts he wrote out a personal declaration in which he announced to all of the brahmins and monastics throughout Jambudvīpa, “We pray that each shall condescend to come and gather at our estate as we desire to present a great offering lasting for a period of twelve years during which boats will cruise on streams of rice consommé and there will be ponds filled with curds. There will be mountains made of rice and noodles and canals created of *perilla* oil. There will be robes, food, drink, bedding, and medicines. Everything will be of the most supremely marvelous quality for over a dozen years during which time we desire to make offerings in this way.”

There were eighty-four thousand<sup>4</sup> white elephants girded in gold-adorned rhinoceros hide armor. Rare gems were strung together to create a huge gold pavilion ornamented with four kinds of precious things. There were eighty-four thousand horses also clad in gold-adorned rhinoceros hide armor and caparisoned with strands of the four kinds of precious things.

There were eighty-four thousand carriages, each adorned with gold, silver, beryl, and crystal, shaded with the skins of lions, tigers, and leopards, draped with curtains of *pāṇḍukambala* gems and ornamented with various embellishments.

There were eighty-four thousand precious thrones fitted and adorned with multicolored cushions which were soft and smooth. Arranged at each end of the thrones were crimson pillows and embroidered blankets. Marvelous garments and flowing robes were supplied in abundance. There were eighty-four thousand gold bowls filled with silver nuggets, silver bowls filled with gold nuggets, beryl bowls filled with crystals, and crystal bowls filled with beryl gems.

There were eighty-four thousand dairy cattle. The cows each produced an abundant measure of milk. The horns of the bulls were adorned with gold. They were each dressed in white blankets.

There were eighty-four thousand beautiful women of refined appearance and endowed with meritorious qualities. Their bodies were draped in strands of white pearls and precious gems.

This represents only a summary recital of the main features. There were all manner of other arrangements which one could never succeed in detailing.

At that time, King Vāsava and eighty-four thousand kings of lesser states, together with their ministers, national heroes, and

those who served as elders each offered a contribution in encouragement and support consisting of ten thousand pieces of ancient gold.

After this Dharma offering had been arranged and completely set forth, the god Śakra Devānām Indra came forth and addressed the Bodhisattva Velāma by uttering this verse, in which he said:

The most rarely encountered things in heaven and on earth  
Which are able to delight everyone,—  
You have now already obtained them  
And made gifts of them for the sake of the Buddha Path.

At that time the gods of the Pure Dwelling Heaven showed themselves and offered praises through the utterance of this verse:

You have thrown open the gate of great giving.  
It is on account of feeling pity for all beings  
And out of the desire to seek the Buddha Path for their sakes  
That you now act here in this manner.

At this time the gods all had this thought, “We should stop up his gold vase so as to prevent the water from flowing forth. Why? Because, although there is a benefactor, there is no one suitable to serve as a field of merit.”<sup>5</sup>

At that time the Demon King said to the gods of the Pure Dwelling Heaven, “All of these brahmans have left behind the home life. They uphold the moral precepts purely and have entered upon the Path. Why is it that you now say that there is no one to serve as a field of merit?”

The gods of the Pure Dwelling Heaven said, “This bodhisattva is giving for the sake of the Buddha Path. All of those now here are possessed of erroneous views. It is for this reason that we claim there is no one to serve as a field of merit.”

The Demon King said to the gods, “How do you know that this man is giving for the sake of the Buddha Path?”

One of the Pure Dwelling gods then appeared in the body of a brahman. Holding a gold vase and a branch made of gold, he went up to the Bodhisattva Velāma and said to him, “What is it that you seek to gain through this act of great giving where you relinquishing what is so hard to give up? Is it that you desire to become a wheel-turning sage king who has the seven precious things, a thousand sons, and dominion over the entire world?”

The Bodhisattva replied by saying, “I do not seek this sort of circumstance.”

“Is it that you seek to become Śakra Devānām Indra so that you might then be lord to eight thousand *nayutas* of heavenly nymphs?”

He replied, “No.”

“Are you seeking to become the Lord of the Six Desire Heavens?”

He replied, “No.”

“Are you seeking to become the Brahma Heaven God who serves as lord over the great trichiliocosm and who is looked on as the patriarchal father of all beings?”

He replied, “No.”

“What is it that you seek?”

At this time the Bodhisattva spoke forth a verse, saying:

I seek that place which is without desire  
And which transcends birth, aging, sickness, and death.  
I yearn to bring deliverance to all beings.  
I seek the path to buddhahood which is just thus.

The transformationally-produced brahman said, “Benefactor, the Buddha Path is difficult to achieve. It is beset with great bitterness and suffering. Your mind is soft and accustomed to pleasures. It is certainly the case that you will be unable to seek out and accomplish realization of this path. As I suggested before: to become a wheel-turning sage king, or Śakra Devānām Indra, or King of the Six Desire Heavens, or the King of the Brahma Heaven gods—these would be easily achievable. It would be better to seek these instead.”

The Bodhisattva replied, saying, “Listen to my single-minded vow:”

Even if one were to cause a wheel of hot steel  
To spin around atop my head,  
I shall single-mindedly seek the Buddha Path  
And never cherish any regrets.

Were I to be subjected to the three wretched destinies  
And to the countless sufferings of the human realm,  
I would single-mindedly seek the Buddha Path  
And would never be turned aside by this.

The transformationally-produced brahman said, “Oh Benefactor, it is good indeed, good indeed that you seek buddhahood in this manner.” He then uttered a praise, saying,

Your power arising from your vigor is immense.  
You manifest kindness and pity extending to everyone.

Your wisdom has become detached and unobstructed.  
Your realization of buddhahood cannot be far off.

At that time the gods rained down a profusion of blossoms as an offering to the Bodhisattva. The gods of the Pure Dwelling Heaven who had stopped up the water from the vase then disappeared from sight.

The Bodhisattva then went before the most senior ranked among the brahmins and attempted to pour forth the water from the gold vase [and thus formally endow them as recipients of his offerings]. However, the water remained stopped up and would not flow out. The members of the assembly were then overcome with doubt and consternation and wondered, "All of these various kinds of great giving are replete in every way and the benefactor's meritorious qualities are also immense. Why then does the water now fail to flow forth from the vase?"

The Bodhisattva thought to himself, "This circumstance could be due to nothing other than one of these factors: Have I freed my mind of all impurity? Have I achieved a situation where there are no deficiencies in the gifts? What could have brought this about?" He personally contemplated the sixteen parts of the *Classic on Giving* and found that all preparations were pure and free of defects.

At this time the gods spoke to the Bodhisattva, saying, "Do not become overcome by doubt and regret. There is nothing which you have failed to accomplish. It is because these brahmins are characterized by unwholesomeness, error, and impurity." They then uttered a verse, saying,

These men are caught in the net of erroneous views.  
Their afflictions have brought on destruction of right wisdom.  
They have abandoned purity in the observance of moral precepts.  
They indulge useless asceticism and fall into unorthodox paths.

"It is for these reasons that the water is stopped up and will not pour forth."

Having said this, they suddenly disappeared. The gods of the Six Desire Heavens then emitted many different kinds of light which illuminated the entire assembly and then spoke to the Bodhisattva, proclaiming in a verse:

Practices from within the sea of error and unwholesomeness  
Do not accord with your orthodox path.  
Among the recipients of your gifts,  
There are none who can compare with you.

After speaking in this way, they suddenly disappeared. After the Bodhisattva had listened to this verse, he then thought to himself, “If it were actually the case that there was no one in the assembly who could serve as my equal, the water would indeed be stopped up and so would not flow forth. Could it actually be then that it is on account of this?” He then uttered a verse:

Throughout the ten directions, in the heavens or on earth,  
 Wherever there are good and pure people—  
 I now take refuge in them and, in reverence, make obeisance.  
 With the vase in the right hand, I pour an ablution on the left hand,  
 I now swear that I, this one person,  
 Should accept on their behalf such a great offering as this.

The water from the vase then straightaway spouted forth into the air, descended from above, and came down as an ablution upon his left hand. Then, when King Vāsava had witnessed this marvelous response, his mind became filled with reverence and he uttered a verse, saying:

Great Lord of the Brahmans,  
 This clear beryl-hued water  
 Has flowed on down from above  
 And, falling, has come to rest in your hand.

At that time, there arose thoughts of reverence in the minds of those brahmans in the great assembly. They placed their palms together, made obeisance, and took refuge in the Bodhisattva. At this time, the Bodhisattva uttered this verse, saying:

That which I have now given  
 Is not in quest of any blessings in the sphere of the three realms.<sup>6</sup>  
 It is for the sake of all beings,  
 And is to be employed in seeking the path of the Buddhas.

After he had spoken this verse, the entire earth with its mountains, rivers, and trees quaked and moved in six ways. Velāma had originally been of the opinion that this assembly should be the recipient of the offering and so gave it. Even though he realized there was no one in the assembly worthy to accept it, he now, out of pity, gave to them all those things which he had himself accepted.

Ideally, one would proceed at this point into an extensive discussion of all sorts of similar past-life causes and conditions associated with *dāna* (giving). The foregoing was an example of “outward giving.”

## Notes

1. "True character of dharmas" (諸法實相) is my translation of Kumārajīva's loose Chinese rendering of the Sanskrit *dharmatā* ("dharmas as they really are"). It is simply a reference to the "genuine character" or "actual nature" of dharmas (i.e. "phenomena") in their very essence as seen in accordance with ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*). It is simply a reference to phenomena as seen in the absence of even the most subtle discriminations and imputations. The implications of this definition would not seem to amount to a particularly earth-shaking revelation but for the fact that no ordinary common person actually sees phenomena in this way. Only āryas (those who have at least reached "the path of seeing") actually behold phenomena as they really are. In the dialectic of the *Exegesis*, this level of understanding is repeatedly identified both implicitly and explicitly with non-dual emptiness, nirvāṇa, and an utter absence of inherent existence, all non-nihilistic and non-affirming emblematic Mādhyamika expressions of the highest truth.
2. For the benefit of those unfamiliar with the terminology, "Hearers" (*śrāvaka*) refers to those Buddhists who strive only to gain the relatively rapid individual liberation of the arhat. Generally speaking, they do not wish to involve themselves in the extremely long training period required to become a buddha. The Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, do not fear even eons of working equally for themselves and equally for the liberation of other beings, all of this in preparation for their goal of realizing the utmost, right, and perfect enlightenment of a fully-enlightened buddha.
3. This refers to a *cakravartin*, a universal monarch possessed of personal qualities, powers, reign duration, and dominion vastly beyond those possessed by any royalty who have ever held sway in recorded human history.
4. "Eighty-four thousand" is, in Indian Buddhist literature, similar to the American vernacular use of "millions" which actually just means "lots," or, in more formal terms: "numerous."
5. Just as a fertile field planted with good seed yields abundant crops, so, too, a "field of merit" (*punya-kṣetra*) in the form of an adequately virtuous recipient, yields karmic fruits for the benefactor. The problem about which these celestial beings are so concerned is one of planting a marvelously potent karmic seed (in the form of this extravagant generosity) in a barren field. They are worried that the seed will be wasted.
6. "The three realms" is synonymous with all of existence and refers to the three progressively more refined zones of reincarnation coursed

through by beings stranded in cyclic birth-and-death: the desire realm (home of hell-dwellers, animals, hungry ghosts, humans, demi-gods, and the lesser gods); the form realm; and the formless realm.

Both of these latter zones may be entered in the deeper levels of meditative absorption, but also comprise the abodes of the higher and highest classes of god realms, each of which is itself comprised of a number of different subsidiary levels of celestial existence. Even though they involve immensely long lifetimes and freedom from suffering, because these celestial existences are impermanent and bound to eventually be fallen from, even the gods are seen in Buddhism to be not only not spiritually liberated, but also tragically-enmeshed in karma-bound suffering, no less enmeshed in fact than the denizens of the lowest purgatorial existences.

## Two Jātaka Tales of Shākyamuni's Sacrificing His Life

What is meant by "inward giving"? It refers to not stinting even in sacrificing one's own life as one gives for the sake of beings.

### Story: The Buddha's Past-life Sacrifice of His Body for Dharma

It is as discussed in the [stories of the Buddha's] past-life causes and conditions at a time when, as a bodhisattva, Shākyamuni Buddha was serving as the king of a great country. The world had no Buddha, no Dharma, and no sangha of bhikshus. This king searched in the four directions for the Dharma of the Buddha, but was finally unable to find it.

At that time, there was a brahman who said, "I know a verse uttered by the Buddha. If an offering is made to me, I will give it to you."

The King then asked, "What sort of offering are you seeking?"

He replied, "If you are able to break open your flesh and turn it into a torch as an offering to me, then I shall give it to you."

The King then thought to himself, "This body of mine is fragile and impure. The amount of suffering which I have undergone on its behalf in life after life is incalculable. It has never been for the sake of Dharma. Only now does it begin to be truly useful. It is certainly not to be spared now."

After reflecting thus, he called forth a *caṇḍāla* and ordered him to scrape the surface of his entire body so that it might serve as a torch. Then the *caṇḍāla* wrapped the King's flesh in white cloth, drenched it in ghee, and set fire to his entire body. Only once the fire had been lit did the brahman bestow on him that single verse.

### Story: The Buddha's Past Life as a Pigeon

Additionally, in a previous life, Shākyamuni Buddha was a pigeon in the snowy mountains. One time there was a great blizzard. There was a man who had lost his way. He was poor and in miserable straits, undergoing bitterness and suffering. Hunger and cold were both upon him and at that moment his life hung in the balance. The pigeon saw this man and immediately flew in search of fire, piling up twigs and then lighting them. He then additionally cast his body upon the fire as a gift to this starving man.

In just such a manner, he gave up his head, eyes, marrow, and brains for beings. Ideally, one would cite here many comparable instances from the *Sutra on the Causes and Conditions of Previous Lives*. All sorts of similar cases show what is meant by "inward" giving.

## **The Monk with the Fragrant Breath**

### **Nāgārjuna's Preamble: The Defining Bases of Dharma Giving**

Moreover, the giving of Dharma does not consist solely in words and speech. The giving of Dharma consists in constantly employing a pure mind and wholesome thoughts in the offering of instruction to everyone. Just as it is with the giving of material gifts wherein there is no measure of blessings or virtue associated with it if one fails to maintain a wholesome mind, so too it is with the giving of Dharma: If one fails to maintain a pure mind and wholesome thoughts, then it is not the case that this qualifies as the giving of Dharma.

Then again, if the speaker of Dharma is able to maintain a pure mind and wholesome thought as he praises the Three Jewels, opens the door to understanding offenses and blessings, explains the four truths, and so goes about teaching and transforming beings so that they are caused to enter the Buddha Path, this qualifies as true and pure Dharma giving.

Looked at another way, generally speaking, the Dharma [to be given] is of two types: The first consists in refraining from afflicting beings while also maintaining a wholesome mind, loving-kindness, and sympathy. This constitutes the causal basis for the path to buddhahood. The second consists in contemplating and realizing that all dharmas are truly empty. This constitutes the causal basis for the path to nirvāṇa.

If, while in the midst of the Great Assembly, one lets flourish a deeply compassionate mind as one sets forth these two types of Dharma, and if in doing so it is not done for the sake of garnering fame, offerings, or expressions of reverence, this constitutes pure Dharma giving rooted in the Buddha Path.

### **Story: The Monk with the Fragrant Breath**

This concept is illustrated in a story told in connection with King Aśoka who in a single day was responsible for the creation of eighty-thousand buddha images. Although he had not yet achieved the stage of "the path of seeing,"<sup>25</sup> still, he did maintain a minor degree of faith and bliss in the Dharma of the Buddha. Every day he invited bhikshus to enter the palace to receive offerings. Every day he retained one Dharma Master by order of seniority to speak the Dharma.

One day there was a young Dharma Master, a master of the Tripitaka, who was intelligent and handsome and next in order to speak the Dharma. He sat down next to the King. His mouth exuded an exotic fragrance. The King was filled with extreme doubt and suspicion. He was of the opinion that this constituted a deliberate impropriety arising from a desire to employ a fragrant scent to influence the retinue in the royal palace.

The King asked the bhikshu, "What do you have in your mouth? Open your mouth so I can see into it." [The bhikshu] then opened his mouth for [the King] and it turned out that there was nothing whatsoever therein. He was ordered to rinse out his mouth with water after which the fragrance remained just as before. The King asked, "Venerable One, is this fragrance newly manifest or has it abided with you for a long time?"

The bhikshu replied, saying, "It has been like this for a long time. It is not the case that it is just manifesting now."

[The King] continued to inquire, "How long has it been this way?"

The bhikshu replied in verse, saying:

It was at the time of Kāśyapa Buddha  
That I gathered the Dharma underlying this fragrance.  
It has remained so like this for a very long time,  
And has always been fresh as if newly arisen.

The King said, "Venerable One, I do not yet understand this brief explanation. Pray, expound on it more extensively for me."

He replied by saying, "The King should listen well and single-mindedly to my explanation. In the past, during the time of Kāśyapa Buddha's Dharma, I was a Dharma-proclaiming bhikshu who, in the midst of the Great Assembly, constantly took pleasure in expounding on the immeasurable qualities of Kāśyapa, the Bhagavān, on the true character of dharmas, and on an incalculable number of methods to access Dharma.

I conscientiously and earnestly set forth praises and offered instruction to everyone. From this time on forward to the present I have always had a marvelous fragrance coming forth from my mouth. This has been the case in life after life without cease. It has constantly been just as it is this very day." He then spoke forth a verse:

The fragrance from flowers on shrubs and on trees  
 Is utterly surpassed by this incense-like fragrance.  
 It is able to please the minds of all people.  
 In life after life it abides without ceasing.

At this time the King was filled with a mixture of shame and delight. He said to the bhikshu, "This is such as has never been before. The merit of speaking the Dharma brings such a great fruition as this."

The bhikshu said, "This may be thought of as merely the blossom. It is not yet the fruit."

The King asked, "What then is its fruit? Pray, expound upon this for me."

He replied, "Briefly speaking, the fruits are tenfold. May the King listen earnestly." He then set forth a verse for his sake:

There is a grand reputation and finely-formed features.  
 One experiences bliss and is the object of reverence.  
 There shines awesome brilliance like sunshine and moonlight.  
 So thus one becomes a man loved by all people.

There is eloquence and also there is prodigious wisdom.  
 One is able to end then the grip of the fetters.  
 One ceases all suffering and reaches nirvāṇa.  
 And so in this manner the count reaches to ten.

The King asked, "Venerable One, How is it that one gains such a reward as a result of praising the qualities of the Buddha?"

The bhikshu then replied in verse, saying:

If one praises the qualities possessed by the Buddha  
 And causes this to be heard everywhere by all people,  
 On account of results which come forth as reward,  
 One comes to be known by a grand reputation.

If one praises the genuine qualities of Buddha  
 And causes all people to experience delight,  
 On account of the [force] which is born from this merit,  
 In life after life features always are fine.

If one explains for people offenses and blessings,  
 Allowing them to reach a place of peace and delight,  
 On account of the merit which is thus produced,  
 One experiences bliss and is always content.

The powers of praising the merits of Buddha  
 Cause everyone hearing to have minds made humble.  
 On account of the power produced by this merit,  
 One eternally garners men's reverence as reward.

Displaying the lamp of the speaking of Dharma  
 Illumining and wakening all of the people —  
 On account of the power produced by this merit,  
 One's awesome bright brilliance shines forth like the sun.

If in many a fashion one praises Buddha's merits  
 And delights thus the hearts of all [by those words],  
 On account of the power produced by this merit,  
 One is ever the object of people's affection.

If with clever discourse one praises Buddha's merits  
 Which cannot be measured and cannot be exhausted,  
 On account of the power produced by this merit,  
 One's eloquent speech is never brought to an end.

If one praises the marvelous dharmas of Buddha  
 Which are such as no one can ever surpass,  
 On account of the power produced by this merit,  
 One possesses great wisdom which is pure in its nature.

When one praises the qualities possessed by the Buddha,  
 One causes afflictions of men to be scant.  
 On account of the power produced by this merit,  
 Fetters are cut off and defilements destroyed.

Because both kinds of fetters are brought to an end,  
 Nirvāṇa in this body has already been achieved,  
 As when torrents of rain pour down from the sky  
 All fires are extinguished and no embers remain.

Once again he addressed the King, saying, "If there still remains anything to which you've not awakened, now is the time to bring questions forth. The arrows of wisdom should be used to smash your armor of doubts."

The King replied to the Dharma master, "My mind has been both delighted and awakened such that now there remain no more objects of doubt. The Venerable One is a blessed man well able to speak forth the praises of Buddha."

When one speaks forth the Dharma in accord with the various causes and conditions discussed above and so brings about the deliverance of beings, this qualifies then as the giving of Dharma.

## Śāriputra Retreats from the Bodhisattva Path

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: The "Fulfillment" of *dāna pāramitā*

**Question:** What is meant by the fulfillment of *dāna pāramitā*?

**Response:** The meaning of *dāna* is as discussed above. As for [the Sanskrit antecedent for "perfection," namely] "*pāramitā*," it refers here to being able to cross beyond the river of [imperfect] giving and to succeed in reaching its far shore. (Ch. text notes: As for "*pāra-*," this means "the other shore." As for "*-mi*," this means "to reach.")

**Question:** What is meant by failing to reach the far shore?

**Response:** It is analogous to crossing over a river but returning before having arrived. This is what is meant by failing to reach the far shore.

### Story: Śāriputra Retreats from the Bodhisattva Path

For example, Śāriputra cultivated the Bodhisattva path for a period of sixty kalpas, desiring to cross over the river of giving. At that time there was a beggar who came along and demanded that he give him one of his eyes. Śāriputra said, "The eye would then be useless. What do you want it for? If you need to put my body to use or if you want any valuables I own, then I'll give those to you."

The beggar replied, "I've got no use for your body and I don't want any valuables you might own. I just want an eye, that's all. If you were truly a cultivator of the practice of giving, then I would receive an eye from you."

At that time Śāriputra pulled out one of his eyes and gave it to him. The beggar got the eye and then right there in front of Śāriputra he sniffed it, cursed, "It stinks," spat, and then threw it down on the ground. Then, in addition, he smashed it beneath his foot.

Śāriputra thought to himself, "It's a difficult task to cross over such base people as this. He actually had no use for the eye and yet he forcefully demanded it. Having gotten it, he not only threw it away, he even smashed it with his foot. How extremely base! People of this sort cannot be crossed over to liberation. Far better that I just concentrate on disciplining myself so as to gain an early liberation from the cycle of birth and death."

Having thought this to himself he then turned from the Bodhisattva path and directed himself to the Lesser Vehicle. This is what is meant by "failing to reach the other shore." If one is able to advance directly, avoid retreating, and complete the Buddha Path, this is what qualifies as "reaching the far shore."

## The Analogy of the Poisonous Snakes

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: The Meaning of Perfect Giving

Then again, to succeed in completing any endeavor is also referred to as "reaching to the far shore." (In the common parlance of India, whenever one takes up a task and then completes it, it is referred to as "reaching the far shore.")

Additionally, one may say that "this shore" refers to being miserly, *dāna* refers to being in the midst of the river, and "the far shore" refers to the Buddha Path.

Also, one may say that holding a view which insists on "existence" or "nonexistence" is what is meant by "this shore." The wisdom which refutes views insisting on "existence" or "nonexistence" constitutes "the far shore" whereas the diligent cultivation of giving corresponds to being in the middle of the river.

Then again, one may also say that there are two kinds of *dāna*, the first being the *dāna* of demons and the second being the *dāna* of the Buddhas. If in this practice one is being robbed by the thieves of the fetters such that one is afflicted by worries and abides in fearfulness, this constitutes the *dāna* of the demons and exemplifies what is meant by "this shore."

Where there is pure giving in which there is an absence of the thieves of the fetters and in which there is nothing of which one is fearful, one succeeds thereby in arriving at the Buddha Path. This constitutes the *dāna* of the Buddhas and exemplifies what is meant by "reaching to the far shore." This is "*pāramitā*."

### Story: The Analogy of the Poisonous Snakes

By way of illustration, in *The Buddha Speaks the Analogy of the Poisonous Snakes Sutra*, there once was a man who had offended the King. The King ordered that he be required to carry around a basket and look after it. Inside the basket there were four poisonous snakes. The King ordered the criminal to look after them and raise them.

This man thought to himself, "It's a difficult thing to have to draw close to four snakes. If one grows close to them they bring harm to a person. I could not raise even one of them, how much the less could I do that for four of them." And so he cast aside the basket and ran away.

The King ordered five men carrying knives to chase after him. There was yet another man who tried to persuade him to obey. [This

other man] had it in mind to bring him harm and so said to him, "Just raise them in a sensible fashion. There will be no suffering in that." But the man became wise to this and so ran off, fleeing for his life. When he came to an empty village there was a good man who assisted him by telling him, "Although this village is empty, it is a place that is frequented by thieves. If you now take up residence here you will certainly be harmed by the thieves. Be careful. Don't dwell here."

At this point he took off again and next arrived at a great river. On the other side of the river there was a different country. That country was a peaceful, blissful, and easeful place. It was a pure place devoid of any form of calamity or adversity. Then he gathered together a mass of reeds and branches and bound them into the form of a raft. He moved it along with his hands and feet. He exerted all of his strength in seeking to make a crossing. When he had reached the other shore he was at peace, happy, and free of distress.

The King represents the demon king. The basket represents the human body. The four poisonous snakes represent the four great elements. The five knife-wielding thieves represent the five aggregates. The man of fine speech but evil mind represents defiled attachment. The empty village represents the six sense faculties. The thieves represent the six sense objects. The one man who took pity on him and instructed him represents the good [spiritual] teacher.

The great river represents love. The raft represents the eightfold right path. The hands and feet earnestly applied to making a crossing represent vigor. This shore represents this world. The far shore represents nirvāṇa. The man who crossed over represents the arhat who has put an end to outflow-impurities. This is just the same in the dharma of the bodhisattva.

### Conclusion

If in giving there exist the three hindrances of an "I" who gives, an "other" who receives, and a valuable object which is given, then one falls into a demonic mental state wherein one has not yet left behind multiple difficulties.

In the case of giving as performed by the bodhisattva, it is characterized by three kinds of purity in which there is an absence of these three hindrances and in which one has succeeded in reaching

to the far shore. It is such as is praised by the Buddhas. This is what is meant by *dāna pāramitā*. On account of this it is referred to as having reached the far shore.

These six *pāramitās* are able to cause a person to cross beyond miserliness and the other afflictions—beyond the great sea of defiled attachment—so that one reaches to the far shore. It is for this reason that they are referred to as “*pāramitās*.”

## The Giving of King Sarvada and Prince Candraprabha

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: Perfect *Dāna* in Two Body Types

Additionally, the bodhisattva possesses two kinds of bodies. The first is the body produced from the karma of the fetters. The second is the Dharma body. Fulfillment of *dāna pāramitā* in both of these bodies is what is intended by perfectly fulfilling *dāna pāramitā*.

**Question:** What is meant by fulfillment of *dāna pāramitā* within the body produced from the karma of the fetters (*saṃyojana*)?

**Response:** This refers to when one has not yet gained the Dharma body and to when the fetters have not yet been brought to an end. One becomes able to give completely of all that one possesses, both inwardly and outwardly, including all manner of precious objects, and including one's head, eyes, marrow, brain, country, wealth, wives, and sons, doing so without one's mind moving or turning away from it. Take for instance Prince Sudinna who made a gift of his two sons to a brahman. (Chinese textual note: In our language, this [Sudinna] means "fine fondness.") Next, he relinquished his wife, and even then, his mind still did not turn away from continuing on with this practice.

### Story: King Sarvada Turns Himself In

This is also exemplified by King Sarvada (Chinese textual note: In our language, this ["Sarvada"] means "giving everything.") who was vanquished by an enemy country and who then fled and hid in the furthest reaches of the forests. He encountered a brahman from a faraway country who sought to receive alms from him. As for himself, his country had been crushed, his family had been wiped out, and he had been forced to flee alone and go into hiding.

Because he felt pity for [the brahman's] hardship in having come from afar and yet having gotten nothing, he said to the brahman, "I am King Sarvada. The new king has sent men out who are trying very hard to find me." He then immediately tied himself up and gave himself to [the brahman] who then gave him over to the new king and received great wealth and valuables [in reward].

### Story: Prince Candraprabha Sacrifices Himself

This is also illustrated by [the story of] Prince Candraprabha who had gone out sightseeing when a leper noticed him, presented himself at the carriage and addressed him, saying, "My body has come down with a serious disease which causes intense suffering and

causes me to be grievously tormented. The prince is traveling about for pleasure. Will he only bring happiness to himself? May he bring forth great loving-kindness and bring pity to mind. Pray, may I receive a cure that will rescue me?"

When the Prince heard him, he asked the physicians about this matter. The physician replied, "It would be necessary to obtain the blood and marrow of a man who from the time of birth had grown up without any hatred. It would be topically applied and also drunk. If one proceeded in this fashion, then he could be cured."

The Prince thought to himself, "If there is such a person, he is desirous of living and cherishes his own life. How could such a person be obtained? Aside from myself, there is no place where he could be found." He then issued an order for a *caṇḍāla* to come and instructed him to strip away flesh from his body, break his bones, extract his marrow, smear it on the body of the sick man, and then take his blood and provide it as a drink for him.

### Conclusion of Fetter-Generated Body Discussion

In this very manner one gives up all sorts of different physical bodies and gives up even one's own wives and sons and yet does not stint at all, treating these sacrifices as if they amounted only to only casting away some grass or some wood. One contemplates those things which are given and realizes that they exist merely on the basis of conditions. When one pursues this and seeks to find their reality, it can never be found. Everything is characterized by being pure and like *nirvāṇa*. And so this proceeds until one realizes the unproduced-dharmas patience (*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*). This is what is meant by fulfillment of *dāna pāramitā* while abiding in a body produced from the karma of the fetters.

## Two Stories of Bodhisattvas Manifesting as Animals

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: Dharma-body *Dāna Pāramitā*

How does the Dharma-body bodhisattva cultivate *dāna pāramitā* to fulfillment? In his very last fleshly body, the bodhisattva achieves the unproduced-dharmas patience. He relinquishes the fleshly body and gains the Dharma body.<sup>1</sup> In the six destinies and throughout the ten directions, he transformationally creates bodies in response to what is appropriate, and thereby goes about transforming beings. He provides all sorts of precious jewels, clothing, drink, and food as gifts to everyone and additionally gives exhaustively of everything he inwardly or outwardly possesses, including his head, his eyes, his marrow, his brain, his country, wealth, wives, and sons.

### Story: Buddha's Past Life as an Elephant

A case in point is that of Shākyamuni Buddha when he once was a six-tusked white elephant. A hunter had ambushed him and shot him with poison arrows. The herd of elephants stampeded towards him with the intention of trampling the hunter to death. The white elephant used his own body to defend him, protecting that man and having pity upon him just the same as if he was his own son. He ordered the herd of elephants away and then calmly asked the hunter, "Why did you shoot me?"

He replied, "I need your tusks." Immediately then, blood and flesh spontaneously pushed forth all six tusks from their sockets. He then used his trunk to pick up the tusks and give them to the hunter.

Although this was described as the [animal] body of an elephant, in a case where the mind is used in this manner, one should realize that this elephant could not have come into existence as retribution for the karmic actions typical of animals. Nowhere among the dharmas of those [on the path of the] arhat are there mental practices of this sort. One should realize that this was a Dharma-body bodhisattva.

### Story: The Elephant, the Monkey, and the Kapiñjala Bird

There once was a time when people in Jambudvīpa did not know enough to render proper reverence and respect to those who are older and those who are virtuous. At that time they had not been able to be crossed over to liberation through the use of words alone in teaching them.

At that time, a bodhisattva manifest as a *kapiñjala* bird. This bird had two close friends. The first was a great elephant and the second was a monkey. They all lived together around the base of a pipal tree. They were inquiring of one another, wondering, "We don't know who among us ought to be accorded the status of 'elder.'"

The elephant said, "In the past I viewed this tree when it was shorter than the height of my belly. Now it is so huge. From this we can deduce that I ought to be known as the eldest."

The monkey said, "In the past I've squatted down and plucked with my hand at the top of the tree. From this we can deduce that I should be recognized as the eldest."

The bird said, "In the past I fed on the fruit of such trees in the pipal forest. The seed then passed out with my feces and as a result this tree grew forth. It can be deduced from this that I ought to be recognized as the eldest." The bird continued, saying, "As a matter of propriety, the first born, being the eldest, ought to be the recipient of offerings."

The great elephant immediately took the monkey on his back and the bird then rode on the back of the monkey. They traveled all around in this fashion. When all of the birds and beasts observed this, they asked them, "Why are you going about like this?"

They replied, "We mean by this an expression of reverence and offerings to the one who is the eldest." The birds and the beasts all accepted this teaching and all practiced such reverence. They no longer invaded the fields of the people and no longer brought harm to the lives of other animals. The people were all amazed that all of the birds and beasts no longer engaged in harmful activities.

The hunters went into the forest and observed that the elephant bore the monkey on his back, that the monkey carried along the bird, and that they so transformed the creatures through cultivating respectfulness that the creatures all cultivated goodness. They passed this on to the people of the country. The people all celebrated this and remarked, "The times are growing peaceful. Though they are but birds and beasts, still, they are possessed of humanity."

And so the people as well modeled themselves on this. They all cultivated propriety and respectfulness. From ancient times until the present, this transformative teaching has flowed down through a myriad generations. One should know that this was brought about by a Dharma-body bodhisattva.

### Conclusion of Dharma-body *Dāna* Discussion

Additionally, the Dharma-body bodhisattva, in a single moment, can transformationally produce countless bodies with which he makes offerings to the Buddhas of the ten directions. He is able in a single moment to transformationally create an immeasurable number of valuable jewels which he supplies in abundance to beings. He is able in a single moment, in accordance with all of the different superior, middling and inferior voices, to universally speak Dharma for them. And so he proceeds on in this fashion until he comes to sit at the base of the bodhi tree.

All sorts of examples such as these constitute what is meant by the Dharma-body bodhisattva's fulfillment of the practice of *dāna pāramitā*.

### Notes

1. Generally speaking, a "Dharma-body bodhisattva" refers to a bodhisattva who has at least reached the first bodhisattva ground, a level which may sound rather elementary but which, on the contrary, is already the culmination of countless lifetimes of preparatory practice on the Bodhisattva Path.

## The Traveler and the Ghosts

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble

Then again, there *are* people who *do* have the idea of a self arise in relation to other phenomena. Take for example certain non-Buddhists who sit in dhyāna meditation. When they employ the "earth" universal-basis (*kr̥tsnāyatana*) contemplation and thus perceive the [pervasive] existence of the earth element, they may then think, "The earth is me and I am the earth." They may also be prone to do this in regard to water, fire, wind or space. Thus, on account of inverted views, they may then also reckon the self as existing within another person's body.

### Story: The Traveler and the Ghost

Additionally, there are times when someone generates the idea that his self inhabits another person's body. Take for example the case of a man who had been given a mission whereby he was compelled to travel a great distance. He spent the night alone in a vacant dwelling. In the middle of the night a ghost carried in a man's corpse and laid it down in front of him. Then there was another ghost who chased along behind and angrily castigated the first ghost, yelling, "This corpse is mine! Why did you carry it in here?"

The first ghost said, "It belongs to me! I carried it in here myself!"

The second ghost retorted, "The fact of the matter is, I am the one who carried this corpse in here!" Then each of the ghosts grabbed one of the hands of the corpse and tried to pull it away from the other. Thereupon the first ghost said, "There's a man here. We can ask *him* to settle this."

The ghost who had come in later then asked the traveler, "Well, who was it that carried this corpse in here?"

The traveler thought to himself, "Both of these ghosts are very strong. If I report the facts, I'm bound to die. If I lie, I'm also bound to die. So, since I can't avoid being killed in either case, what's the point in lying about it?" And so he replied, "It was the first ghost who carried in the corpse."

The second ghost flew into a rage, grabbed one of the man's hands, tore the limb off, and then threw it down on the ground. At this, the first ghost pulled off one of the arms from the corpse and attached it as a replacement. They then proceeded in this fashion with both arms, both feet, the head, the two sides, and so forth

until the traveler's entire body had been switched. The two ghosts then proceeded to devour the body which they had gotten from the exchange. When they had finished, they wiped off their mouths and departed.

At that point the traveler thought to himself, "With my very own eyes I saw those two ghosts entirely devour the body born of my mother! This body which I now have here is composed entirely of someone else's flesh! Do I really still have a body now? Or is it the case that I have no body at all? If I hold the view that I *do* indeed have a body—that body is actually somebody else's entirely. If I hold that I *don't* have one—still, there *is* a body here right now!" He continued to ponder like this until his mind became so confused and distressed that he became like a man gone mad.

The next morning, he went off down the road. When he reached the neighboring country, he saw that there was a buddha stupa and a group of monks. He couldn't talk about anything else. He could only keep asking whether his body was existent or nonexistent. The bhikshus asked him, "Just who are you, anyway?"

The traveler replied, "Well, as for me, I don't know myself whether I'm a person or a non-person." He then described in detail the events which had transpired.

The bhikshus remarked, "This man has a natural understanding of the nonexistence of a self. He could easily gain deliverance." And so they offered an explanation, saying, "From its origin on up until the present, your body has always naturally been devoid of a self. It's not something that just happened now. It is merely on account of an aggregation of the four great elements that one conceives of it as '*my*' body. In this respect, your original body and this one you now have are no different."

Thus the bhikshus precipitated the traveler's deliverance to the Path, whereupon he cut off all afflictions and immediately realized arhatship. This illustrates the occasional instance of reckoning the existence of one's self in the body of some other person.

One cannot hold the view that a self exists based on its being there or here.

### **Conclusion: Refutation of any Valid Characteristics of a Self**

Moreover, the actual nature of the "self" most definitely cannot be gotten at. And whether it be the characteristic of permanency, the characteristic of being impermanent, the characteristic of being

inherently existent, the characteristic of not being inherently existent, the characteristic of being compounded, the characteristic of not being compounded, the characteristic of being form, or the characteristic of being formless, all such characteristics as these cannot be gotten at.

If a characteristic exists, then a dharma exists. If there is no corresponding characteristic, then there is no associated dharma. Because it is now the case that this “self” is devoid of any characteristics, one knows consequently that there is no self.

## The Snake, the Turtle, and the Frog

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: *Dāna* Pāramitā Generates *Śīla* Pāramitā; Failing to Give Generates Ten Bad Karmas

How is it that the bodhisattva's practice of giving can generate *śīla pāramitā*? The bodhisattva reflects, "Beings become poor and destitute in later lives on account of not practicing giving. On account of becoming poor and destitute, the thought of stealing arises in them. On account of engaging in stealing, killing occurs. On account of being poor and destitute, one may be sexually unsatisfied. On account of being sexually unsatisfied, one may engage in sexual misconduct. Additionally, on account of being poor and destitute, one may be treated as of low social station by others. On account of the fearfulness associated with being of low social station, one may engage in false speech.

"On account of causes and conditions such as these which are associated with being poor and destitute one courses along the path of the ten unwholesome deeds. If, however, one practices giving, then when one is reborn, one possesses valuable goods. Because one has valuable goods, one does not engage in that which is not Dharma. Why is this the case? It is because the five objects of the senses are abundant and there is nothing which one lacks."

### Story: The Snake, the Turtle, and the Frog

This is exemplified by the case of Devadatta in a previous life when he was a snake who dwelt together with a frog and a turtle in a pond. They had all become close friends. Later, the water of the pond dried up. They were hungry, poor, in desperate straits, and lacking in any other resources. At that time, the snake dispatched the turtle to call forth the frog. The frog then sent back the turtle by uttering a verse:

If one encounters poverty, he may stray from his original intent.  
Failing to regard original principles, eating becomes foremost.  
You should take my words and tell them to that snake:  
"This frog will never come on over and show up at your side."

## Mañjuśrī Teaches a Beggar Child

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: Giving's Generation of Virtue

If one cultivates giving, in later lives one will possess merit and have nothing which one lacks. If this is the case, then one will be able to uphold the precepts and will be free of these manifold ills. This is how giving is able to bring forth *śīla pāramitā*.

Additionally, when one gives, one is able to bring about a scarcity of all of the fetters associated with the breaking of precepts while also being able to strengthen the resolve to uphold the precepts, causing it to become solid. This constitutes the causal basis associated with giving's ability to bring about increase in moral precept cultivation.

Moreover, when the bodhisattva practices giving he constantly brings forth thoughts of loving-kindness and compassion for the recipient. He is not attached to valuables and does not cherish his own goods. How much the less would he engage in stealing. When one feels loving-kindness and compassion for the recipient, how could one maintain any thought of killing? In ways such as these he is able to block off the breaking of precepts. This constitutes the practice of giving bringing forth precepts.

If one is able to carry out giving while employing a mind which destroys miserliness, then afterwards he will easily succeed in practicing the upholding of precepts, patience, and so forth.

### Story: Mañjuśrī Teaches a Beggar Child

This principle is illustrated by the case of Mañjuśrī when he was a bhikshu long ago in the past in a far distant kalpa. Having gone into the city to seek alms, he received a bowl full of "hundred-flavored delightful dumplings." There was a young child in that city who followed along after him, begging. [Mañjuśrī ] did not immediately give anything to him.

Then, when they had reached a Buddha stupa, [the monk] picked up two of the dumplings in his hand and required of the child, "If you are able to eat only one of the dumplings yourself, while taking one of the dumplings and giving it to the Sangha, I will give these to you."

The child immediately agreed and so then took one of the delightful dumplings and presented it to the Sangha community. Later, he obtained Mañjuśrī's consent to receive the precepts and subsequently brought forth the aspiration to become a buddha.

**Conclusion: How Giving Brings Forth Moral Virtue**

In this fashion the practice of giving is able to cause one to take on the precepts and to bring forth the aspiration to become a buddha. This illustrates how the practice of giving brings forth *śīla pāramitā*.

Furthermore, it is as a karmic reward for giving that one subsequently receives offerings of the four requisites, lives in a fine country, finds a good spiritual master, and has nothing in which he is lacking. One is therefore able to uphold the moral precepts. Additionally, it is as a karmic reward for giving that one's mind becomes well-regulated and supple. Because one's mind becomes well-regulated and supple, one is able to observe the precepts. Because one is able to observe the moral precepts, one is able to control one's own mind even from within the midst of unwholesome dharmas. All sorts of causes and conditions such as these demonstrate the bringing forth of *śīla pāramitā* on the basis of the practice of giving.

## The Buddha's Past-Life Giving & His Perfection of Vigor

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: How *Dāna* Generates *Vīrya* Pāramitā

How is it that giving brings forth *vīrya pāramitā*? When the bodhisattva engages in the practice of giving, he constantly cultivates vigor. Why is this? When the bodhisattva first brings forth the aspiration [to achieve buddhahood], his merit is not yet vast. At that time he is desirous of cultivating the two kinds of giving in order to fulfill the aspirations of all beings. Because of a shortage of things to give, he earnestly seeks for valuables and Dharma in order to be able to provide for them adequately.

### Story: The Buddha's Past Giving Generating His Perfection of Vigor

This is illustrated by the case of Shākyamuni Buddha in a previous lifetime when he was a great king of physicians who worked to cure every manner of disease without any concern for fame or profit. It was done out of pity for all beings. The sick were extremely numerous and so his powers were inadequate to rescue everyone. He was concerned about and mindful of everyone and yet matters did not correspond in their outcome to his aspirations. He became so distressed and agitated that he died.

He was then reborn in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. He thought to himself, "Now, I've been reborn in the heavens. All I'm doing here is consuming my reward of blessings without any sort of progress arising thereby." He then used an expedient means to put an end to that personal existence.

Having relinquished this long life in the heavens, he was next reborn as a dragon prince in the palace of Sāgara, the Dragon King. His body grew to full maturity. His parents were extremely attached in their love for him. But he desired to die, and so he went to the king of the golden-winged [*garuḍa*] birds. The bird immediately seized this young dragon and devoured him in the top of a *śālmālī* tree. His father and mother then wailed and cried in grief-stricken distress.

Having died, the young dragon was then reborn in Jambudvīpa as a prince in the house of the king of a great country. He was named "Able to Give." From the moment he was born he was able to speak. He asked all of the retainers, "Now, what all does this country contain? Bring it all forth so that it can be used to make gifts."

Everyone was struck with amazement and became fearful. They all withdrew from him and ran off. His mother, however, felt kindness and love for him and so looked after him by herself. He said to his mother, "I am not a *rākṣasa* ghost. Why has everyone run off? In my previous lives I have always taken pleasure in giving and thus have been a benefactor to everyone."

When his mother heard his words, she reported them to everyone else. The other people all returned. The mother thenceforth took pleasure in raising him. By the time he had grown older, he had given away everything he owned. He then went to his father, the King, and requested things to give. His father gave him his share. Again, he gave it all away. He observed that the people of Jambudvīpa were all poverty-stricken and lived lives of intense hardship. He thought to supply them all with gifts, but the valuables were inadequate. He then began to weep and inquired of everyone, "How will I be able to cause everyone to become completely supplied with valuables?"

The wise elders said, "We have heard of the existence of a precious wish-fulfilling pearl. If you were able to obtain this pearl then, no matter what your heart desired, there would be nothing which would not be obtained with certainty."

When the Bodhisattva had heard these words he spoke to his mother and father, saying, "I desire to go out upon the great sea and seek the precious wish-fulfilling pearl worn on the head of the Dragon King."

His father and mother replied, "We have only you, our one son. If you go out upon the great sea the many difficulties will be difficult to overcome. If ever we were to lose you, what use would we have for going on living? It is not necessary for you to go. We do still have other things in our treasury with which we will be able to supply you."

The son said, "There is a limit to the contents of the treasury. My intentions are measureless. I wish to bestow enough wealth to satisfy everyone so that they will never be found wanting. I pray that you will give your permission so that I may fulfill my original aspiration to cause everyone in Jambudvīpa to be completely provided for."

His parents knew that his determination was immense. They did not dare to restrain him and so subsequently relented and allowed him to go. At that time, there were five hundred merchants who,

because his special qualities were so extraordinary, took pleasure in following him wherever he went. They happened to know the day when he was due to depart and so they gathered there at the port.

The Bodhisattva had heard earlier that Sāgara, the Dragon King, had a precious wish-fulfilling pearl. He inquired of everyone, "Who knows the route across the sea to his dragon palace?" There was a blind man named Dāsa who had been to sea seven times and who knew all of the sea routes. The Bodhisattva instructed him to travel along with him.

He replied, "As I have grown old, both of my eyes have lost their acuity. Although I have been to sea many times, I cannot go this time."

The Bodhisattva said, "In going forth this time, I do not do it for my own sake. I seek the precious wish-fulfilling pearl for the universal benefit of everyone. I desire to completely supply all beings so that they are caused to never again be found wanting for anything at all. Then I wish to instruct them in the causes and conditions of the Dharma of the Path. You are a wise man. How can you withdraw? How, in the absence of your efforts, could my vow possibly succeed?"

When Dāsa heard his entreaty, he then happily shared the Bodhisattva's aspiration and said to him, "I'll now go out with you onto the great sea. However, I certainly will not survive. You should lay my body to rest on the island of gold sands out in the middle of the ocean."

When the provisions for the journey had all been loaded, they loosened the last of the seven lines. The ship set forth like a camel and arrived at the island of numerous gems. The host of merchants all tried to outdo each other in gathering up the seven precious jewels. When they had all satisfied themselves, they asked the Bodhisattva, "Why do you not gather them, yourself?"

The Bodhisattva replied, "It is the precious wish-fulfilling pearl which I seek. I have no use for these things which can be used up. You all should know when enough is enough and should realize the limits so as to avoid overloading the ship and failing to prevent self-destruction."

At this time the group of merchants said to the Bodhisattva, "Virtuous One, please invoke a spell for us to insure our safety." They then withdrew.

At this point Dāsa instructed the Bodhisattva, “Hold aside the dinghy. We will want to go off on this other route. When we have been driven by the wind for seven days, we will arrive at a treacherous place on the southern shore of the vast sea. There should be a steep cliff with branches from a date tree forest overhanging the water. If a strong wind blows, the ship will be overturned and capsized. By reaching up and grabbing hold of the date branches, you may be able to save yourself. As I have no sight, I will likely die at that point. Beyond this precipitous shoreline there will be the isle of gold sand. You can take my body and lay it to rest in the midst of those sands. Those gold sands are pure. This is my desire.”

And so it was just as he had foretold. The wind came and they set off. Having come to the steep cliffs, it was just as Dāsa had described. The Bodhisattva reached up, grabbed onto the date branches and so avoided disaster. He interred Dāsa’s body in the ground of gold. From this point, he went on alone according to Dāsa’s earlier instructions. He floated in deep water for seven days. He then walked for seven days in water the depth of his throat. Then he moved for seven days through water up to his waist. After that he walked for seven days through water up to his knees. Then he walked through mud for seven days.

Next, he came upon marvelous lotus flowers which were fresh and pure and soft. He thought to himself, “These blossoms are so soft and fragile. I should enter into the empty space samādhi.” And so he made his body light and then walked upon the lotus blossoms for another seven days.

Next, he came upon poisonous snakes and thought to himself, “These poisonous serpents are extremely fearsome.” He then entered the samādhi of loving kindness and proceeded to walk upon the heads of the poisonous snakes for seven days. As he did this, the snakes all extended their heads up to receive the Bodhisattva, thus allowing him to tread upon them as he passed.

After he had passed through this difficulty he saw that up ahead there was a jeweled city protected by seven sets of city walls. There were seven successive moats. Each of the moats was filled with poisonous snakes and there were three huge dragons guarding the gates.

The dragons saw that the Bodhisattva was possessed of a handsome and fine appearance, that he was a bearer of refined features and solemn deportment, and that he had been able to successfully

pass through numerous difficulties in arriving at this place. They thought to themselves, "It is not the case that this is an ordinary man. It is certainly the case that he is a bodhisattva, a man possessed of much merit." They then immediately allowed him to advance directly to enter the palace.

It was not so long ago that the Dragon King and his mate had lost their son and so they continued as before to grieve and weep. They had observed the arrival of the Bodhisattva. The Dragon King's mate possessed the superknowledges and so, realizing that this was her son, milk spontaneously flowed forth from her two breasts. She gave the order allowing him to sit down and then spoke to him, "You are my son. After you left me and then died, where were you reborn?"

The Bodhisattva was also able to know his previous lives. He knew that these were his parents and so replied to his mother, "I was reborn on the continent of Jambudvīpa as a prince to the king of a great country. I felt pity for the poverty-stricken people afflicted by the intense hardship of hunger and cold who thus are unable to enjoy their own unrestrained freedom. It is because of this that I have come here seeking to obtain the precious wish-fulfilling pearl."

His mother replied, "Your father wears this precious pearl as an adornment on his head. It is a difficult thing to acquire. Surely he will take you into the treasury of jewels where he will certainly wish to give you whatever you desire. You should reply by saying, 'I have no need of the various other jewels. I only desire the precious pearl atop the head of the Great King. If I may receive such kindness, I pray that you will bestow it upon me.' It may be that you can acquire it in this way."

He then went to see his father. His father was overcome with nostalgia and delight and experienced boundless rejoicing. He thought with pity on his son's coming from afar, having to undergo extreme difficulties, and now arriving at this place. He showed him his marvelous jewels and said, "I will give you whatever you want. Take whatever you need."

The Bodhisattva said, "I came from afar wishing to see the Great King. I am seeking to obtain the precious wish-fulfilling pearl on the King's head. If I may receive such kindness, may it be that you will bestow it upon me. If I am not given that, then I have no need of any other thing."

The Dragon King replied, saying, "I have only this single pearl which I always wear as crown. The people of Jambudvīpa possess only scant merit and are of such base character that they should not be allowed even to see it."

The Bodhisattva replied, "It is on this account that I have come from afar, experiencing extreme difficulties and risking death. It is for the sake of the people of Jambudvīpa who have only scant merit, who are poverty-stricken, and who are possessed of base character. I wish to use the precious wish-fulfilling pearl to provide for them everything they desire so that I may then use aspects of the Buddha Path to teach and transform them."

The Dragon King gave him the pearl and placed a condition on it by saying, "I will now give you this pearl. But when you are about to depart from the world, you must first return it to me."

He replied, "With all respect, it shall be as the King instructs." When the Bodhisattva had acquired the pearl, he flew up into space and, in the time it takes to withdraw or extend one's arm, he straightaway arrived in Jambudvīpa.

When the [Bodhisattva's] human royal parents observed his auspicious return they were delighted and danced about with joy. They hugged him and then asked, "Well, what did you acquire?"

He replied, "I have obtained the precious wish-fulfilling pearl."

They asked, "Where is it now?"

He told them, "It's in the corner of my robe."

His parents said, "How could it be so small?"

He explained, "Its power resides in its supernatural qualities. It is not a function of its size." He told his parents, "It should be ordered that, both inside and outside of the city, the grounds are to be swept clean and incense is to be burned. Banners should be hung and canopies set up. Everyone should observe the standards of pure diet and take on the moral precepts."

The next morning at dawn he set up a tall wooden pillar as a display pedestal and attached the pearl up on the very top of it. The Bodhisattva then swore an oath, "If it is the case that I am to be able to complete the Buddha Path and bring everyone to deliverance, then this pearl should, in accordance with my vow, bring forth all kinds of precious things so that, whatever anyone needs, it will manifest in utter repletion."

At that time, dark clouds covered the entire sky and rained down every type of precious thing, including clothes, drink, food,

bedding, and medicines. Whatever people needed was amply available. This was constantly the case, never ceasing until the end of his life.

Instances such as this illustrate what is meant by a bodhisattva's practice of giving coincidentally serving as the means to bring forth the *pāramitā* of vigor.

## Sudarśana, the Wheel-Turning Sage-King

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: *Dāna's* Generation of *Dhyāna Pāramitā*

How is it that the bodhisattva's practice of giving generates the *pāramitā* of *dhyāna*? When the bodhisattva gives, he is able to eliminate stinginess. Having gotten rid of stinginess, he is further able on account of this giving to devote himself to single-minded practice and the gradual elimination of the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*). It is the ability to eliminate the five hindrances which in itself constitutes [the basis for success in] *dhyāna*.<sup>1</sup>

Then again, it is on account of giving that the mind enters into the first *dhyāna* and so forth on up to the *dhyāna* of the extinction-*samādhi*. How is it that it is "on account of" giving? Perhaps when one gives to a practitioner of *dhyāna*, one reflects, "It is because of this person's cultivation of *dhyāna* absorption that I make an offering with a pure mind. Why do I settle for only a vicarious experience of *dhyāna*?" And so one then restrains his mental discursion and takes up the cultivation of *dhyāna* himself.

Then again, it could be that on giving to a poverty-stricken person, one reflects on this person's previous lives in which he engaged in all manner of unwholesomeness, failed to seek single-mindedness, failed to cultivate works generating karmic blessings and then consequently became poverty-stricken in this life. On account of this, one may provoke himself to cultivate skillful single-mindedness, thus enabling himself to enter the *dhyāna* absorptions.

### Story: Sudarśana, the Wheel-Turning Sage-King

According to the story about Sudarśana, a wheel-turning sage-king, eighty-four thousand of the lesser kings came to his court, all bringing marvelous things made of the seven treasures which they presented as offerings. The King declared, "I do not need them. You may each use them yourselves to cultivate blessings."

Those kings thought to themselves, "Although the great King cannot bring himself to take them, still, it wouldn't be appropriate for us to take them for our own use." And so together they constructed a seven-jeweled pavilion. They planted rows of seven-jeweled trees and created bathing pools made of the seven jewels. Within the great pavilion, they built eighty-four thousand multi-storied halls of the seven jewels.<sup>2</sup>

Within each of the multi-storied halls, there was a seven-jeweled throne with multi-colored cushions at each end of the throne.

Decorated canopies were suspended above and the ground was sprinkled with fragrances. After all of these preparations had been made, they addressed the King, saying, "We pray that his majesty will accept this Dharma pavilion with its bejeweled trees and bathing pools."

The King indicated his acceptance by remaining silent and then thought to himself, "I ought not to indulge myself with the pleasure of being the first to dwell within this new pavilion. I should invite good people such as the Śramaṇas and the Brahmans to first enter here to receive offerings. After that, I may go ahead and dwell in it." He then gathered together those good personages and had them be the first to enter the jeweled pavilion. There they were provided an abundance of all manner of fine and marvelous offerings.

After those people had all left, the King entered the jeweled pavilion, ascended into the multi-storied hall of gold, and then sat down upon the silver throne. There he reflected upon giving, dispensed with the five hindrances, withdrew the six sense faculties, did away with the six sense objects, and, experiencing joy and bliss, entered into the first dhyāna.

Next, he ascended into the multi-storied hall of silver, sat down upon the throne of gold, and then entered into the second dhyāna. Next he ascended into the multi-storied hall of beryl, sat down upon the crystal throne, and then entered into the third dhyāna. And then, finally, he ascended into the multi-storied jeweled hall of crystal, sat down upon the beryl throne, and entered into the fourth dhyāna. He sat there alone in contemplation for a total of three months.

The jade ladies, the precious queen, and eighty-four thousand female retainers all draped their bodies in strands of pearls and rare jewels and then came to see the King, saying, "As His Majesty has for so long now withdrawn from intimate audiences, we have dared to come and offer our greetings."

The King announced to them, "Sisters, each of you should maintain a mind imbued with correctness. You should serve me as friends. Don't act as my adversaries."

The jade ladies and the precious queen then began to weep and, as their tears streamed down, they inquired, "Why does the Great King now refer to us as 'sisters'? Surely, he must be thinking of us in a different way now. Pray, may we hear his intent? Why do we now receive the remonstrance: 'You should serve me as friends. Don't

act as my adversaries.?’”

The King instructed them, saying, “If you look upon me as a mere worldly entity with whom to indulge desires and thus abide in bliss, this amounts to acting as my adversary. If, however, you are able to awaken to the fact of impermanence, realize that the body is like an illusion, cultivate blessings, practice goodness, and cut away desire-laden affections—it is this which amounts to serving me as a friend.”

The jade ladies responded, “We shall adhere respectfully to the dictates of the King.” After they had spoken these words, they were sent back to their quarters.

After the women had gone, the King ascended into the multi-storied hall of gold and sat down upon the silver throne where he immersed himself in the samādhi of loving-kindness. He then ascended into the multi-storied hall of silver, sat down upon the throne of gold, and immersed himself in the samādhi of compassion. Next, he ascended into the multi-storied hall of beryl, sat down upon the crystal throne, and immersed himself in the samādhi of sympathetic joy. Finally, he ascended into the multi-storied jeweled hall of crystal and sat down upon the throne of beryl where he immersed himself in the samādhi of evenmindedness. This is an instance of the bodhisattva’s practice of giving generating the *pāramitā* of dhyāna.

### Notes

1. The five hindrances are: desire; ill-will; lethargy-and-sleepiness; excitedness-and-regretfulness; and doubt. Nāgārjuna explains them in Fascicle Seventeen of the *Exegesis* early in his discussion of the perfection of dhyāna meditation.
2. Perhaps it bears repeating here that “eighty-four thousand” is not to be taken literally in the context of Indian Buddhist literature. At the conservative end of its interpretation, it is akin to the American colloquial exaggeration “millions” which really just means “impressively many.”