An Analytical Study of the Concept of ‘Charity’ (Dāna) in Buddhism

Ashin Kittisāra

Research paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirement for
Master of Arts
In
Religious Studies

Graduate School of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Assumption University of Thailand
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ABSTRACT

Charity is one of the fundamental tenets of Buddhism that is clearly dependent on Buddhist beliefs. In this process of work, the researcher presents the documentary approach to an important Buddhist theme and his attempt is made in this research to understand the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ found in the texts and commentaries, to evaluate the practice of ‘charity’ in Buddhism and to show the usefulness of the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ to bring happiness and peace to society. Moreover, the researcher has discovered that much emphasis is laid on the concept and the ultimate goal of ‘charity’ in Buddhism which is important as it is concerned with the human virtue.
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In Buddhism, material progress has in no way helped in the reduction of the unwholesome roots of greed, hatred and delusion. As long as those roots of unwholesome mental states are not drastically reduced or are kept within reasonable limit, it would not be possible to think about peace, harmony, happiness and contentment in society. The relevance of Buddhism to the modern social context lies in the fact that Buddhist ‘charity’ offers a way the reduction of the unwholesome roots of greed, hatred and delusion. In this study, the historical development of the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ which is the foundation of all practices in Buddhism, is examined to highlight Buddhist value and strong support for equality that is explained in more detail in the Buddhist texts and commentaries. It is hoped that this research paper would serve as a useful tool to assist the readers to comprehend the basic important practice in Buddhism.
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# ABBREVIATIONS

Note: All references of Pāli works are to the PTS editions, unless otherwise stated.

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<td>Miln.</td>
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<td>PTS.</td>
<td>Pāli Text Society</td>
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<td>Peta-vatthu</td>
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S. Samyutta Nikāya
Smp. Samanthapāśādikā
Sn. Sutta Nipāta
Vv. Vimāna-vatthu
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Significance of the Research Problem

Theravāda Buddhism came to flourish in Myanmar since the time of King Anawratta’s rule in the Kingdom of Pagan in the 11th century. Since then, Buddhism has gradually developed throughout the country and has plied a crucial role in Myanmar. The majority of the people living inside Myanmar strictly follow the principles of the Buddhist religious practice. Thus, Buddhism has been considered as the state religion. Normally, the background for this research paper stems from the researcher’s own experiences he got in his village where the people from his village suffered a lot from cyclone Nargis in 2008. Causing catastrophic destruction by cyclone Nargis, people thought that they did many good deeds. Good deeds can help people not to get such suffering. But they got suffer a lot. Why? This is the main idea to issue for the research paper comparing with the Buddha’s texts and commentaries.

The final aim in human life in the Buddhist teaching is the total absence of suffering. Buddhists believe that charity can help donors fight against their suffering. This in turn will help them to be born again into a higher realm. The question of whether the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ can prolong the life cycles (Samsāra) may arise because some say that the Buddha himself struggled in many life cycles (Samsāra) for he did a lot of ‘charity’ work and profoundly practiced it in every existence. It is true that the Buddha in every existence performed ‘charity’ (Dāna-pāramīs) deeply and respectfully. Although the Buddha in every existence performed ‘charity’, his performance of charity was not for his benefit only but he also wanted all beings to be liberated from all bondage of mental defilements and finally to attain Nibbāna. Therefore,
‘charity’ done by the Buddha to fulfill all perfections (pāramīs) throughout his every existence should be understood. Actually, prolonging the life cycles (Samsāra) is not the result of charity. In fact, it depends on the donor’s wishes. If the donor gives something to others with the hope of enjoying the human luxuries and devas’ realms, it can prolong the life cycles in this way.

Furthermore, people may not understand about the three trainings taught by the Buddha. Some people may have doubt that charity is excluded from the three trainings: morality (Sīla), concentration (Samādhi) and wisdom (Pañña). Of course, the Buddha taught only the three trainings, but, it is impossible to establish morality (Sīla), concentration (Samādhi) and wisdom (Pañña) without charity. The three main trainings: morality (Sīla), concentration (Samādhi) and wisdom (Pañña) are essential and necessary to practice them in Buddhism. Although ‘charity’ is not included directly in the three essentials and is excluded from the groupings of the Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha in this context expressed ‘charity’ as the first prominent topic because without charity it is impossible to establish morality (Sīla), concentration (Samādhi) and wisdom (Pañña).

Discourse on charity taught by the Buddha is only for those who are able to completely eradicate all defilements in the present life and if, as a consequence of his striving hard, he attains the final liberation, there is no need for him to set up a new life. Since there will be no more rebirths for him who breaks the life cycle, the acts of charity are not necessary.

Regarding this, Bhikkhu Bodhi in the book called ‘Dāna: The Practice of Giving’ also gives his agreement as follows:

"It does not come at the apex of the path, as a factor constituent of the process of awakening, but rather it serves as a basis and preparation which underlies and quietly supports the entire endeavor to free the mind from the defilements. Nevertheless, though giving is not counted directly
among the factors of the path, its contribution to progress along the road to liberation should not be overlooked or underestimated”. (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1990, p. 8)

However, the entire Buddhist practices are geared to the attainment of Nibbāna and ‘charity’ (Dāna) is no exception. The term ‘charity’ is derived from the Latin word ‘caritas’ which has many meaning in English like kindness, love, good deeds and giving things. Even though it has many meaning, the researcher would like to use the idea of giving things as ‘caritas’ or ‘charity’. Basically, the term ‘caritas’ means charity and it is used now with the same meaning of ‘love’ in general. The term ‘love’ appears as a personal attachment in Buddhism. In fact, Buddhist love is found in the Metta sutta of Sutta Nipāta. (Sn.1.8)

The concept of love is to accept the altruistic feeling embodied in the Buddhist concept of love mainly denoted by the Pali term ‘Mettā’. The term ‘Mettā’ (loving-kindness) brings about the happiness and well-being of all beings. The Buddhist concept of charity is not the same as love in the general sense which designates a feeling of personal attachment motivated by desire (Kāma Taṇhā). Love with desire (Kāma Taṇhā) has the meaning of hoping to get something from others and may lead people to have immoral ways and do harm to others while Charity has the meaning of giving something to others without hoping anything in return. These two things are totally different. However, the true meaning of ‘charity’ in Buddhism should be known.

The attainment of Nibbāna through the practice of charity must have been further emphasized and given a new outlook especially when the Bodhisttava ideal come into vogue. An attempt was made to connect the practice of charity directly to the destruction of such samsaric life. For example, the wise man does not give for re-becoming and clinging to happiness of birth. Instead, he surely gives something away for the destruction of desire and for the destruction of re-becoming. Re-becoming again and again in life cycles is dismissed as an unfavorable aim of
giving and clinging to happiness of birth is denied by the Buddha. But this is to say that faith, modesty and wholesome gifts are the things good men pursue. (Nd. I. p. 424)

The Buddha illustrated ‘charity’ as the first and foremost prominent step for the beginners to practice. Further meritorious deeds (Puññakiriya-vatthu), the four means of benefiting others (Saṅgaha-vatthu) and other forms of Dhamma are expressed by the Buddha step by step. It may be stated that all the Buddha’s Dhamma are included in these three trainings. The main issue of this research paper will give a reasonable fact in the later chapter and will show how the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ runs as a social norm and evaluate one’s better life in this present situation and hereafter. For the researcher, such Buddhist ‘charity’ studies in the Buddhist texts comparing with his own experiences have been a great inspiration. Although there are limitations, the research represents a serious attempt to analyze the Buddhist ‘charity’ within a larger societal framework.

1.2 Research Objectives

The research objectives are:

(1). To study the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ (Dāna) in the Buddhist texts and commentaries.

(2). To study the practice of ‘charity’ (Dāna) in Buddhism.

(3). To state the usefulness of the practice of ‘charity’ (Dāna).
1.3 Thesis statement of the research

This research aims to show the situation confronting Buddhist practice of ‘charity’ in Burma and the conditions under which Buddhists have to pursue their attitude. ‘Charity’ (Dāna) can help not only to reduce many social problems but also serve to develop the spiritual progress of the precepts, concentration and wisdom including the growth of compassion, altruism and self-devotion and to improve the well being of both individuals and society as a whole enjoying freedom, happiness and balance between self interest and other interests.

1.4 Research Scope

This research paper is concerned with the analytical study of Buddhist ‘charity’ practiced by all Buddhists and will focus on the Buddhist texts and commentaries. In this context, this research scope would be from the religious point of view, not from the phenomenological point of view. As a consequence of religious views, there must be certain relationship created by the missionaries working for spiritual guidelines between the Buddhist community and man’s society. If there is no relation between them, there will no benefit, no trust and no devotion by the people. If there is no devotional relationship between monks and ordinary people, there will not be any material support and spiritual progress. Therefore, in this context it is hoped by the researcher that this research will give the basic knowledge about the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’.

1.5 Research Methodology

It is a documentary research concerning the analytical study of the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’. The researcher mainly focuses on the Buddhist texts and commentaries regarding the
concept of ‘charity’ in Buddhism which is not the arbitrary standard preached by the Gotama Buddha. Buddhist ‘charity’ makes people live in harmony and in peaceful co-existence in human society. Rather, this paper will illustrate how ‘charity’ (Dāna) gives mental encouragement to conquer all defilements and hindrances like anger, greed and so on. Many references will be used in line with the Buddhist texts and this paper also gives the general knowledge regarding the Buddhist ‘charity’ as defined in the Buddhist Texts.

The researcher will emphasize on the texts and also explain how the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ impacts on the society. In addition, this research paper will explore more about the changing of social customs and the changing of human nature as it plays a vital role in social, economical and political fields. The fact is that, the seed of Buddhist ‘charity’ which if spreads through human spirit can lead to a better world to live in peaceful co-existence among nations, religions and peoples.

1.6 Definition of the terms used

Compassion is a feeling of sympathy for the suffering of others.

Cetanā is a key Buddhist mental force which both a source of great merit (Kusala) and demerit (akusala).

Dāna is giving our possessions away, sharing our power with others.

Cāga is abandoning something.

Mettā is a strong feeling of deep affection for something and it is a popular form of meditation in Buddhism.
Merit is a blameless wholesome action producing beneficial results and brings all kinds of happiness and prosperity.

Sila is the quality of making mind and heart more relaxed and flexible.

Welfare is a work to help individuals, families, communities, and groups persons who are socially disadvantaged and to contribute to the creation of conditions that will enhance social functioning and prevent breakdown.

Engaged Buddhism is a kind of active involvement by Buddhists in society and its problems. Participants in this movement seek to actualize Buddhism’s traditional ideals of wisdom and compassion in today’s world.
Chapter II

THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF ‘CHARITY’ IN THE BUDDHIST TEXTS AND COMMENTARIES

2.1. The meaning of ‘charity’ in the Pāli texts (Tipiṭaka) and commentaries (Aṭṭhakathās)

There are many explanations in the Buddhist texts and commentaries about the concept of ‘charity’ such as giving away, sharing merit, donation, abandoning material things and so on. There are some Suttas like Peta-vatthu and Vimāna-vatthu that explain about ‘charity’. The Vimāna-vatthu illustrates the nature of meritorious deeds and the places of rebirth in one of the various human worlds and celestial existences after death. One of the significant stories in the Vimāna-vatthu is a story of two sisters: Bhaddā and Subbhaddā. It explains in the Vimāna-vatthu that both of them had predisposition towards giving something to the Buddhists monks. Even though they gave something to the Buddhist monks at the same time, the results they received were different. Subbhaddā got a better result than Bhaddā according to the commentary. Why was it so? The different results between them were because of their attitude in giving something. Sudhaddā’s attitude in giving was to the whole Sangha community whereas Baddhā’s attitude in giving was toward the individuals. (Vv. pp.48-50)

Giving should be understood in terms of giving to an individual and to the whole community. The latter is of much greater benefit than the former. Here, ‘whole community’ means an ideal community of monks who are equal in morality and who do not indulge in individual gains and pleasures. By exercising their fine opportunity of compassion for the welfare and happiness of the lay people, the whole community of monks creates the lay people’s opportunity of future investment. Frequently, the Vimāna-vatthu mentions various things people
The Buddhist Concept of 'Charity' in the Buddhist Texts and Commentaries

donate, such as food and other forms of gifts; divans, chairs, flowers, robes, clothing, lodging, lamps, a hut of sugar cane, vihāra, etc. Around 75% of the total stories in that Sutta is concerned with the giving practice and the rest are moral habit, faith in the Triple Gems, and obedience to husband, homage and offering to the Buddha’s statue and listenning the Dhamma and so on.

Buddhists believe that the virtue of giving would bring about the good results. But, some may have doubts about the efficacy of giving. The basic idea of the Peta-vatthu explains transfering of merit for those who have departed. Hence, it should be noticed that there must be someone who does the act of transferring merit. People do some good deeds and share their merit. A question may be asked if sharing merit with the departed ones is attachment or compassion. Actually, attachment and compassion are contradictory. People have different interpretations of compassion and attachment. It is important to know the exact meaning of compassion and attachment. According to Buddhist perspective, genuine compassion is not like pity or not just sitting there passively saying, ‘I feel sorry for them’. Everyone should go through the training of equanimity in order to develop genuine compassion.

Compassion in Buddhist texts is being interpreted with the similar term ‘Karunā’. Without a sense of equanimity towards all beings, genuine compassion is not possible. The Peta-vatthu not only explains the importance of transferring merit to the departed ones but also the fundamental human problem of death. Further, the Peta-vatthu emphasizes how life is important to live and shows there is no sense in mourning and grieving over a dead man. Mourning is useless without any benefit at all. As it is natural to cry over a dead person, we should not blame them. Even the Veneral Ānandā was mourning when the Buddha passed into Nibbāna. However, today many people are seen weeping aloud and showing extreme distress to attract the pity of others. When one hears the aloud cries, one also becomes sorrowful and all happiness fades.
However, the transferring of merit mentioned in the Buddha’s teachings is summarized as follows: this is the duty defined for kinsmen; to the petas, excellent offerings are made, and strength has been bestowed upon the monks. No little merit has been pursued by you. (Pv. v.25, p. 4)

It appears in the Kathā-vatthu that encouragement and commendation of offerings to the dead were made basically as a token of gratitude and thanks to the dead, as H. Nakamura writes.¹ However, we cannot ignore the fact that food and drink, etc, are mentioned in the Peta-vatthu corresponding to the nature of gifts offered by well-wishers. It is clarified in the Kathā-vatthu that a gift is purified by the giver only and not by the recipient on the ground that if the recipient purifies the gift, it is to say that the recipient becomes the agent for the giver’s happiness or misery. (Kv. p. 556). However, the acceptance of the purification of gifts by the recipient as appearing in the Dakkhinavibhanga Sutta of Majjhima Nikāya (M. III. pp. 256-257) helped to argue that gifts are purified not only by the giver, but also by the recipient. The commentator to the Kathā-vatthu says that the allegation would be reasonable, if the opponent had meant that the donor’s will is moved to act by the donee. But he meant that the donor’s will is purified, in the sense of great fructification depending upon the donee.

One of the developments observable in the Millindapañña is a new classification of departed ones. The Millindapañña says that among the four classes of deceased ones, only the class of deceased ones called ‘the deceased who live on the gift to others’ obtains benefits. The narrowing of the implications of the term ‘peta’ who could benefit from gifts made by benefactors suggests that such an act of giving in the name of the deceased is not merely for the benefit of the deceased or departed, but it also serves the purpose of the benefactor’s acquisition

¹ H. Nakamura, Living Ethics of Early Buddhism. P. 407
of merit. (Miln. p. 294). Hence, the Millindapaññha says that it is not that a gift is without fruit, without result—the benefactors themselves experience the fruit of the gift. This idea that a gift offered in the name of the deceased benefits both the giver and the deceased is accepted even in the canonical literature. (Pv. p. 4.)

Not all givings are considered to be charity. In everyday life, people say, “I give it to him.” The word “give” is “deti” in Pali. When we throw something away thinking, “let anyone take it, if they want it, if no one wants it, then let it be”, it is not giving away or charity but it is discarding or abandoning; in Pali, it is not Dāna, but Cāga. It is a kind of charity that is proceeded by the thoughts. This seems to show that ‘Cāga’ refers to the act of ‘giving’ away and not things given as gifts while ‘Dāna’ sometimes refers to the gift itself. On the other hand, if the term ‘Dāna’ refers to ‘giving’ itself as in ‘Giving is, indeed, praised in many ways’ then the term ‘Cāga’ can be more or less equated with the term ‘Dāna’. (J. III. p. 472).

Not only an act of giving may be generally described as a ‘charity’, but abandoning something should also be described as an act of ‘charity’ because when there is charity, there is also abandoning: when there is abandoning, there is also charity. The reason is that the two terms ‘charity’ (Dāna) and ‘abandoning’ (Cāga) are not totally different from each other. Since charity (Dāna) and ‘abandoning’ (Cāga) are not totally different, both of them have been used with similar meaning. Abandoning (Cāga) implies that the owner does not wish to keep any portion of anything or things in his possession. On the other hand, charity (Dāna) means giving things away without hoping for anything in return’, although the owner may still find them useful. The term ‘Cāga’ is used to denote ‘giving up’, ‘abandonment’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘renunciation’, etc.

However, this term does not occur so often in the Nikāya in the sense of giving up one’s possession or making gifts as in ‘Dāna’, but it is used in that sense more frequently in later
works. For example, it is used to denote the act of giving up of the most valuable things; namely, wife, children, kingdom, life and limb. (Dhp. A. III. p. 441). This kind of concept would have come into existence after the population of the Bodhisattava ideal. In fact, we are immediately reminded of the Vesantara Jātaka which characterizes the sacrifice or giving up of beloved ones. The concept of charity came to be emphasized in later works like Mahānīddesa and Cariyāpiṭaka. It is stated in the Mahānīddesa that the wise give charity (Dāna) for the destruction of greed for the purpose of breaking the life cycles (Nd. I. p. 424).

2.1.1 Meaning and Characteristics

The most significant sense of the term ‘charity’ is mental phenomena that purifies the mind and consequently helps to attain ‘Nibbāna’. We should know more about the mind in order to pay attention to the outward deeds and whether or not we are being sincerely generous. It is quite difficult to get genuine ‘charity’ and to be purely motivated by our mind. We may be giving away the best things but our thoughts may not be pure. We sometimes give something with selfish desire in order to get something in return. It is not the really the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’. It can be viewed as a selfish desire. The two things, stinginess (Macchera) and sloth (pamāda), are the main obstacles to giving anything. Stinginess denotes a social evil as is clear from the enumeration of five kinds of ‘macchariya’ mentioned in the Anguttara Nikāya. They are:

1. Stinginess regarding hospitality (Āvāsa-macchariya),
2. Stinginess regarding family (Kula-macchariya),
3. Stinginess regarding gains (Lāba-macchariya),
4. Stinginess regarding complexion (Vaṇṇa-macchariya) and
5. Stinginess regarding truths: monopoly of learning (Dhamma-macchariya). (A. IV. p. 459)

It is regarded as a vice according to Buddhism since it becomes a hindrance to the building up of a happy and adequately provided society. In other words, sloth (pamāda) can be characterized to be insensitiveness to the needs of the world. Here, ‘pamāda’ connotes ‘sloth’ resulting from unsteadiness of mind, which is vulnerable to wrong views about the nature of things. Buddhism teaches that there are two kinds of mental states that human being pass through every moment: the first one is called wholesome mental state and the other one is called the unwholesome mental state. There is significant evidence that these two mental states play the basic role in every action done by human beings. Charity (Dāna) is a mental instrument to expel the unwholesome mental states.

The real meaning of the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ is spending time and money in helping others in need or giving spiritual guidance to others without expecting anything in return. It is said that great wealth, great possession, abundant gold and silver, rich property, abundant treasures and grains are the products of giving, truth and discernment. (S. IV. p. 324). Buddhist ‘charity’ first helps to overcome personal greed and it gives one reliable investment for future existences. It is believed that all religions teach people to remove unwholesome mental states and do good things. Abstaining from unwholesome mental deeds is a part of religious action. Charity in Buddhism accompanied by wholesome volition can help to remove suffering in three ways; first, it helps to decrease or reduce our attachment to the object when we decide to offer something, thus it can gradually weaken the mental factor of craving, one of the main courses of unhappiness. Second, charity accompanied by wholesome volition will give the good result of
happy future births in the favorable pure land and third, charity will help one to develop virtue, concentration, and wisdom.

The characteristics of ‘charity’ are the destruction of attachment to objects of offering and the decrease of selfish desire. Its function is serving others by supporting them with necessary things such as prosperity, success and so on. It searches for the welfare and benefits of others with great compassion for which there must be the most powerful mind for some notable features concerning the arising of charity. ‘Charity’ has three levels: ordinary perfection (Dāna pāramī), superior perfection (Dāna upapāramī) and supreme perfection (Dāna paramaththa pāramī).

In the first level one has to practice giving things in his possession, in the second level one has to donate parts of his body and in the third level one has to donate one’s own life. In the practice of giving, one should keep one’s mind pure in the act of giving, selecting the worthiest recipients available and one must offer the most appropriate and generous gifts. It should be noted that charity (Dāna) in the Buddhist concept is the donation that aims to fulfill two kinds of objective; that is, (a) to give rise to the possibility of performing deeds of kindness, (b) to give rise to merits of non-attachment, self-intersection and this should be done within the three kinds of pureness: (1) pure material which means that things and goods must be pure, (2) pure intention which means that the intention must be pure as non-attachment in self-interest is the aim, thus, we have to make ourselves to be pure, and (3) pure persons which means that donor and recipient must be pure and have moral principles and virtues. (The Commentary to the Mangala Sutta, vol, 2, pp. 236-237)
2.1.2 The relationship between ‘charity’ and ‘action’ (Kamma)

The mind by itself is neutral. When it is associated with different mental factors, it becomes good or evil depending on which one of the two, good or bad mental factors, is stronger. Mind can only know objects; it by itself cannot determine good or evil. When the mind takes on certain recognition, it is also associated with good wholesome factors or with unwholesome factors. Among the mental factors, volition is the prime maker of our destiny and our fate. Volition is action (Kamma). Kamma is neither predestination nor some sort of determinism imposed on us by some mysterious, unknown powers to which we must helplessly submit ourselves. The Buddha said in the Dhammapada that all mental phenomena have mind as their forerunner, they have mind as their chief; they are mind-made. If one speaks or acts with an evil mind, ‘dukkha’\(^2\) follows him just as the wheel follows the hoof-print of the ox that draws the cart. (Dhp. p. 1)

Whenever the act of ‘charity’ (Dāna) is done, there must be a certain volition called ‘Cetanā’ in Pali. It is a necessary mental factor that motivates the act of charity. What is important to determine good and bad is the role played by ‘volition’. Hence, the Buddha clearly states: ‘Cetanā ham bhikkhave kammam vadāmi’. (Bhikkhus! I declare that volition is a cetanā.) (A.III.p.415) Giving something away is not possible without volition. It is only volition that causes the producing of results while material giving things are not capable of producing the result. Why is it so? Because volition is a mental action which produces the actual practice of giving and which is an important contributory factor for an act of giving. The donor must have the best supporting qualities which can be associated with three kinds as follows: (1) before

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\(^2\) In this context, dukkha means suffering, or physical or mental pain, misfortune, unsatisfactoriness, evil consequences, etc., and rebirth in the lower planes of existence or in the lower state of human society if born in the human world.
giving (Pubbacetanā): the donor should have a keen volition before he gives his charity, doing action (Muñca Cetanā): the donor must be joyful while he is giving charity that can make other people happy and post-charity volition (Apara Cetanā): he himself is satisfied for the good deed after giving has been done. (A.I. pp. 129-30)

This kind of relationship between the nature of deeds and the places of rebirth is established, even the kinds of gifts are destined to be classified according to their magnitude. Hence it is said that those who give pleasant things will get pleasant things; those who give the best will get the best; the giver of the excellent will become the receiver of the excellent; giving the chief thing means getting the chief place. (A. III. P. 51). There were those like Ajita Kesakambala and Purāṇa Kassapa who denied the efficacy of charity (Dāna). Ajita Kesakambala’s doctrine is known as the ‘theory of annihilation’ and he had made the following statement: ‘There is no such thing, O king, as alms or sacrifice or offering. There is neither fruit nor result of good and bad deeds’. Another senior contemporary of the Buddha, Purāṇa Kassapa, said ‘in giving, in self-mastery, in control of the sense, in speaking the truth, there is neither merit nor increase of merit’. His doctrine is known as the ‘theory of non-action’. (D.I. p. 53)

It is also stated in the Apanṇaka Sutta of Majjhima Nikāya that there were two groups of recluses and brahmins whose opinions were in direct opposition to each other. One group demonstrated that there was no result of gift, nor of offering, nor of sacrifice; there was no fruit nor ripening of deeds well done or ill done; there was neither this world, nor a world beyond; etc. (M.I. p. 401). No matter whatever their views were, the Buddha’s position to the prevailing numerous theories is clearly stated as ‘the believer in Kamma and the believer in action’ and there is not much concern to argue for the Buddha with others but Lord Buddha preached his
own doctrine. The Buddha said in the Nikäya about the results of charity (Dāna) that ‘Indeed, the miserly persons do not go to the world of gods. Fools, indeed, do not praise giving. But the wise man, rejoicing in charity, becomes happy in the other world on that account’. (Dhp. p.177). The Buddha preached the result of giving from the very early times and it is said that the giver goes to heaven. (Itiv. p. 26 G)

Whenever Buddhists do good things, there must be a certain volition which produces good results in the future. To be able to attain the final goal of Nibbāna, Buddhists accumulate many good deeds. Accumulating good deeds is not acquiring fresh Kamma. Through accumulation of good deeds, Buddhists can go to Nibbāna step by step. Although Buddhists have three steps to practice to attain Nibbāna, some rituals and practical activities at later time were added by the Buddhist leaders in order to relieve or satisfy people’s needs in their endeavor to attain the Buddha status. So, an accumulation of good deeds is not the acquiring of good Kamma or fresh Kamma even if the action is with good intention.

However, the summery of the Buddha’s idea should be noticed here that charity should be given wherever the mind is pleased. (S.I. p.96). The Buddha’s idea illustrates the fact that on the part of the giver, the volition is the primary motivated willingness to give. The giver’s willingness is not only to evaluate friendliness, sympathy, care, love, compassion, etc., but also to gradually reduce the human feelings of anger, hatred and ill-will etc. Although the practice of charity (Dāna) is related to the attainment of Nibbāna, charity can be seen at the beginning as a more socially and economically important factor to bring about friendliness and a harmonious and contented society. Nibbāna is the final goal for Buddhists. Nobody can know how long we
will continue in the life cycles. We cannot measure the distance between the attainment of Nibbāna and life cycles. So, charity should be the act to help decrease this distance.

2.2 Examples of stories concerning charity in the texts

There are many examples of stories in the Texts. One of the stories concerning 'charity' is about the story of Sīvali who brought fresh honeycomb into the city for sale. It was a time for him to offer his newly gathered honeycomb to the Buddha and his disciples because the citizens of the country at that time of the Vipassī Buddha had to compete with their king to see who made the greatest offering to the Buddha and his disciples. People all over the country had prepared all things except fresh honey to offer to the Buddha and his disciples for their meal. People, therefore, had to send many men to collect the missing ingredient. Fortunately, one of the men met a man who had brought a new honeycomb and tried to buy it with his entire thousand pieces of money which had more value than a single honeycomb was worth.

Hearing the unusual words from the man, the man who had brought the new honeycomb asked the reason ‘why is it so’? The other man explained that the honey was worth so much as it was the final item on the list of the menu offered to the Buddha and his disciples. Knowing this, the peasant, Sīvali, immediately replied, ‘if this is the case, I will not sell it but give it to you if I may receive the merit of the offering’. The citizens were impressed by him who had made a single item of offering. As a result of this, he was reborn numerous times in the pleasurable planes and he finally became the Elder Sīvali and attained Arahatship. His single offering continued to bear fruit as he was to be the honorable one who deserved to provide lodging and food for the Buddha and his disciples when they had been walking along a deserted road for several days. (A. A. I, p. 190)
One story was about Visākhā, the Buddha’s chief woman disciple. (D.A. III, p. 43). This story illustrates that she made offering a delightful charity. The Buddha visited her place when she was seven years old. Hearing the Buddha’s visit, her grandfather told her to welcome him. As she had accumulated many good and meritorious deeds in her previous lives, she became a religious and virtuous woman at the time of the Gotama Buddha. Hearing the Dhamma taught by the Buddha, she attained the first stage of fruition (Sotāpanna) at the age of seven. When she was fifteen, she was to be married and her grandfather prepared all things like five hundred cartloads each of money, gold, silver and copper vessels and so on to give. Her grandfather also believed that she must be able to take cattle with her. So, he gave an order to his men not to prevent if many powerful bulls and cows jumped over the barrier to join other animals going with Visākhā.

Why did all the cattle want to join other animals going with Visākhā? It was because she had given a generous gift of five kinds of dairy products to a company of 20,000 monks and novices in her former lifetime long ago at the time of the Kassapa Buddha. She was a daughter of the king called Ki Ki at the time of the Kassapa Buddha. King Ki Ki had seven daughters and Visākhā was the youngest daughter in the family. When her grandfather gave alms to the Buddha, she was so young but she kept requesting the monks to take more milk, curds, purified butter, etc, even though they said they had eaten enough. As a result of this, a large number of cattle went along with her to her marriage in the life time when she was Visākhā and no one had the power to prevent this merit from bearing its result.

Another story in the Anguttara Nikāya (A.IV, pp. 392-95) illustrated that Velāma who was born as a Brahmin made lavish offerings such as silver, gold, elephants, cows, etc., to anyone who came forward to receive them. He knew that to do more meritorious deeds, there must be the right view. To feed a moral person with the right view, its result must be greater than
feeding the immoral person. Feeding a streamenterer (sotāpanna) gave greater results than feeding the normal person. Next in order came non-returners, Arahants, Paccekabuddhas, and Sammāsambuddhas. Feeding both the Buddha and his community gave greater results than the feeding of the Buddha only. In the same way, it is more meritorious to construct a monastery for the general use of the Sangha without paying attention to individual possessions.

The Buddha was known as a peerless person and as a person of boundless compassion. The Buddha’s attitude toward the practice of charity is twofold; socio-economic and religious. Here, the question may arise about how would the Buddha, even though there was no evidence in his life as a prince that he had spent his time engaged in philanthropic activities such as charity, know various social forms and teach the way to attain benefit and happiness in this life and hereafter? It is true that the Buddha did not possess any material things since he had renounced the world. Nevertheless, the Buddha gave away countless things throughout his life cycles until he attained Buddhahood. Hence, we should not overlook the charity done by the Buddha. Instead, we should know the Buddha’s attitude for the benefit of charity which is very important in life to practice. The Buddha expounded and extolled the practice of charity and social forms when he became the enlightened one.

The following statement must be ideal for the Buddha’s attitude toward charity:

If people knew as I knew the result of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given nor would the stain of miserliness persist in overpowering their mind. Even if they were down to their last bit of food, they would not eat without having shared it, if those to receive it were present.’ (Itiv. p. 261).

The historical renunciation done by the Bodhisatta was recorded in the story when he gave a great elephant to others for the purpose of making the rain fall where the place did not
have enough rain and had a great shortage of rice. The king, the Bodhisattva, saw the people who were coming from another place called Kalinganagara and requested the king to give the elephant for the purpose of rain. The king did not hesitate to give them his precious elephant. Moreover, it was obvious in the Vesantara Jātaka, the last birth of the Buddha in the ten great stories of the Buddhahood that another historical and significant offering was done by king Vesantara in giving his beloved children and his wife away. Hence, the entire teachings of the Buddha are beneficial to many.

Whatever the Buddha taught, his teachings usually serve both social and religious purposes. Regarding Vesantara’s renouncements, some may argue that even though the entireties of the Buddha’s teachings are mostly beneficial and are for the welfare of the many, the practice of ‘charity’ done by Vesantara is unfair from the point of human rights. It is not the main idea in the Vesantara Jātaka whether Buddhism has human rights or not. To understand rightly about the main idea of the Vesantaka Jātaka is that he offered the elephant in order to perform social welfare for others’ benefit and he offered his own children in order to adopt all beings as his children by granting them to be reborn in the noble realm and he offered his beloved wife in order to become the Buddha who could help the entire world.

It is said that the search for sense-pleasures had been got rid of by King Vesantara, the search for becoming had subsided; he showed zeal only in the search for the Brahma-faring. His mind was bent on the thought, ‘How to let these creatures be harmonious, hale, wealthy, of long life-spans’ and what made Vesantara’s great and magnificent is that his mind was set continually and constantly on ten points; on taming (dame), calm (same), patience (khantiyam), control (samvara), restraint (yame), constraint (niyame), lack of anger (akkodhe), lack of injuring (avihimsāyam), truthfulness (sacce), purity (soceyye). (Miln. p. 116). It is said that King
Vesantara did not give that gift for the sake of success in becoming nor for the sake of wealth, nor for a gift in return, nor for diplomacy, nor for long life, nor for appearance, nor for happiness, nor for power, nor for fame, nor for sons, nor for daughters but it was for the sake of omniscient knowledge (Sabbaññuta Ñana). (Miln. p. 117)
CHAPTER III

THE PRACTICE OF ‘CHARITY’ (DĀNA) IN BUDDHISM.

3.1 Aspects of charity

Buddhist ‘charity’ by itself does not provide relief, joy and merit. Instead, it is formed principally for the purpose of bringing happiness to others and self. Mostly people know that ‘charity’ makes people to have mutual benefits not because of the position of patron and dependent, but as friends. Actually the principle of helping the poor is an opportunity to remove ill feeling between the classes. Buddhist charity, therefore, helps to decrease human suffering, encourages and uplifts the poor. The sympathies of the rich should be broadened by people. The main purpose of Buddhist ‘charity’ should be summed up as follows: the first purpose of Buddhist ‘charity’ is to bring the philanthropic forces of a man to work together in harmony and peace. Secondly, Buddhist ‘charity’ gives self assurance to lead a better life both for the present situation and the hereafter. Thirdly and the most vital or important thing for the Buddhist ‘charity’ is personal service. It should be practiced by kind-hearted people with the emotion of pity for the weaker.

The Buddha emphasizes giving charity to the poor as the hope for liberation from their miserable state through the practice of charity and praises even a small amount of giving. It should compared with those having no wish to give though rich; ‘some bestow gifts from their scanty means. Some, though having in plenty, have no wish to give. The gift made from a scanty source equals the gifts of thousand pieces’. (S.I. p. 20 G). There seems to have a doubt on the part of the wealthy that if a small amount of giving is as beneficial as a large quantity of charity, the rich may give only a little. Here, it should be known that charity through small quantity is to
be offered by a righteous man, and then such charity is better than the charity offered by a person who has no wish to give.

It should be noticed that the importance is not the amount of charity, but the state of the givers' mind. It is understandable that righteousness should pervade the entire human personality where charity is to be taken as one of such virtuous actions springing out of one's righteous personality. It is said that the moon in the sky outshines in splendor all the stars' array, so too a virtuous man outshines the mean people in the world in charity. (A. III. p. 34). The importance of righteousness is expressed with charity as follows: 'giving through faith is praised in many ways. Yet, the path to Dhamma is higher. Regarding the aspects of charity, it is classified from two points, the giver and the recipients. From the donor's point, he or she should have three qualities, (1) before giving, (2) while giving, and (3) after giving. From the recipient's point, the recipient should have three qualities too, (1) free from passion (2) free from hatred and (3) free from delusion.

There are three steps for doing good deeds in the Buddhist community. The first step is charity (Dāna), the second step is morality (Sila) and the third is wisdom (Bhāvana) which means the cultivation of mind. Buddhism advises the study of all kinds but needs to put all kinds of study into three universal Truths, i.e., the truth of impermanence (Anicca), the truth of suffering (Dukkha) and the truth of impersonality (Anatta). Why does Buddhism need to put all kinds of things into the three universal truths? The reason is that understanding the nature in the universe can decrease the three roots of evil; greed (Lobha), anger or hatred (Dosa), and delusion (Mohā). The understanding of impermanence can decrease greed (Lobha), and increase 'charity'. The understanding of suffering can decrease anger (Dosa) and increase compassion. The
understanding of impersonality can decrease delusion (Mohā) and increase wisdom. (A.III. pp. 336-337).

The first step of Buddhist ‘charity’ is very important for mental purification because it is the best weapon to expel the greed (lobha). Since we hold our personalities and our possessions as ‘I’ and ‘mine’, we are afflicted by greed with egoism and selfish desire. This is a thought free from Kammically unwholesome roots as ‘greed’, ‘hatred’ and ‘delusion’ for the consequence of any act based on the three Kammically unwholesome roots that cannot be good according to the theory of Kamma in Buddhism. Our mind should be glad and filled with joy whenever charity has been done. It is a clear idea of the nature to examine that if a man tells the truth or acts with the pure thought, happiness follows him like a shadow that never leaves him. (Dhp. 2)

Charity can help to cure the illness of egoism and to expel selfish desire. It is very difficult to determine for the giver to give away something precious and useful because stinginess is one force of evil and it disturbs one’s spiritual progress. Charity acts to reduce personal greed and destroys stinginess. Stinginess would surely give the result of fear of losing possessions either in this life or in a future life, meanwhile charity would take the responsibility of giving away everything and it gives back pleasant results such as prosperity and happier mental states in this life as well as in future life cycles until Nibbāna is attained. It is said that these five things, truth (saccā), austerity (tapa), brahma-faring (brahmacariyā), being intent on study (sajjhāya) and renunciation (cāga), are the requisites of the mind in order to develop the mind which is free from hatred and injury to others. Charity in the ultimate sense can be regarded as an act which is conducive to the development of the mind that is free from greed, hatred and injury to others. (M. II. pp. 205-206)
3. 2 Motivations for Charity

To share one’s wealth with others is a good Buddhist act. A rich person’s life is compared to a tree and a river. A river contains a large amount of water that is useful for others; people come to the river to wash, to bathe or to drink. Similarly, a tree also provides shade and bears fruit for people to eat. In the same way, the Buddha’s aim in giving ‘charity’ (Dānapārami) is not for his benefit only, but to help others. One should not give anything with the hope of getting something in return nor give with attachment to the recipient. Therefore, in Buddhist belief, motivation for charity is a mental state that can make others happy and make them to love all living beings. One certain thing for motivation of charity is that rich people are able to give economic support, while the poor who have no money can do kind deeds towards others.

Indeed, charity can make the mind soft. Whatever is got, his mind becomes soft thinking, ‘This is given to me, or this is given by me’. (A. A. IV. p. 123). Many people in the present situation think that money can make everything. It is partially true but one certain thing they forget is that charity is not just about money, but also involves the heart. No matter how many good conditions we have and no matter how beautiful our personal lives seem, our heart should be full of loving-kindness and compassion. The motivation for charity is just heart, not money. There are so many things which cannot be bought with money. We cannot buy everything with money except some things, for example, we cannot buy happiness and health with money. Hence, we cannot say ‘money makes everything’. Instead, charity can give everything that we want. The heart is the real instrument for spiritual and material progress rather than money.

The Buddha did countless donations in the past with the heart, not with the hope to be comfortable. The countless donations done by the Buddha in the past would come under the five actions if we group them and these five actions stated in the book called ‘Great Chronicle of
Buddhas’ are remarkable and all Bodhisattas must completely practice giving them in order to become a full Buddha:

1. Renunciation of high status and positions, such as kingship, universal sovereignty, wealth, and power so that they are collectively known as ‘Dhana-pariccaṇa’,
2. Renunciation of sons and daughters for other’s sake or for persons who ask for them ‘Putta-pariccaṇa’,
3. Renunciation of one’s own wife when someone makes a demand for her ‘Baddhiya-pariccaṇa’,
4. Renunciation of one’s own limbs such as hands, legs, ears, nose when someone asks for them ‘Anga-pariccaṇa’, and

Among the five renunciations, the renunciation of life done by the Buddha is very hard for the ordinary people to do. In the present time, sometimes we hear and read in the newspapers about giving one’s own organs to the pagodas or giving one’s own life, or burning oneself after wrapping up the whole body with cloth and pouring oil on it. Giving away one’s own life is creditable renunciation. Some people give their recommendation on such kind of creditable renunciation. According to them, such kind of renunciation can be done only by the great Bodhisattas, not by the ordinary people. However, some people may have doubts whether such kind of renunciation of one’s life made by the ordinary people may get any merit at all.

3.3 Value of giving

The Buddha said that no matter whatever kind of charity we do, meritorious deeds with a generous thought may have greatness, for example, even throwing away the water after washing a plate with good attention: ‘May the food with the washed water be the food for the creatures on
the ground’, gives a good result. The Buddha talks about the results of giving in the Dakkhinavibanga Sutta, Mijjima Nikāya, as follows:

‘Herein, Ananda, by giving a gift to an animal, the offering may be expected to repay a hundredfold. By giving a gift to an immoral ordinary person, the offering may be expected to repay a thousandfold. By giving a gift to a virtuous ordinary person, the offering may be expected to repay a hundred-thousandfold. By giving a gift to one outside (the Dispensation) who is free from lust for sensual pleasures, the offering may be expected to repay a hundred-thousand times a hundred-thousandfold’. (Bhikkhu Ñanamoli, 1995, p. 1104.)

Nobody can say how much more benefit for offering would be to a one-returner (Sakadagāmi), to a non-returner (Anagāmi) and to an Arahant (Arahatta). It is human nature to expect much benefit back when they make offering of even a small item. It can be found in the Sutta that ‘the sage who has known the former lives, who sees heaven and hell, who has attained the destruction of births, and who is the master of supernormal power; to him gifts should be offered, and the gifts offered to him bear great fruit’. (S.I. p. 175 G). It is also stated in the Itivattaka that ‘gifts offered to the nobles at proper time bear great fruit’. (Itiv. 26 G). Moreover, the Dhammapada also mentions that gifts offered to the persons free from passion, hatred and delusion bear great fruit. (Dhp. 356-359)

The Buddha said that everyone should develop wholesome mental states in order to have fortunate rebirth, physical beauty, intelligence and successful life and finally to attain Nibbāna. Because of charity done in a mundane way, one can gain whatever he wishes; good health or a wealthy life and so on. Regarding this, the Buddha said that a person who is well grounded on the gifts and virtue to a high degree, but not on meditation, such a person will be reborn after death among the devas worlds and he will surpass all other devas in their respective realms in ten respects; i.e. in divine life, beauty, happiness, fame, power, shapes, sounds, fragrance, tastes and
touch. (A. IV. pp. 241-243). Actually, Theravāda Buddhism has only one goal that is Nibbāna and forms systematic methods to be able to get that goal. We must accumulate as many good deeds as possible while we continue our existence within the life cycles (samsāra).

People who follow Theravāda Buddhism practice different good actions in the course of their daily life. Those who desire to be re-born in the mundane world prefer to practice charity (Dāna) and morality (Sīla) and those who desire to escape from the life cycles practice morality (Sīla), concentration (Samādhi) and insight meditation (Bhāvanā). It can be said that one cannot go beyond the realm of life cycle without meditation. It can be confirmed in that Sutta of Anguttara Nikaya that there are three grounds for meritorious deeds: 1. meritorious deeds based on gifts, 2. meritorious deeds based on virtue and 3. meritorious deeds based on meditation. (A. A. IV. p. 33). Typically they desire to escape from the life cycles and practice self-purification or meditation so that they can attain Nibbāna in a short time.

We should understand two methods of practice in Buddhism; the mundane way and the supreme way. The method between the mundane way and the supreme way may be a question whether Buddhist fundamental practice is the same or not. It is quite similar to the question of whether Buddhist ‘charity’ can prolong the life cycles (Samsāra). Many Buddhists seem to have such kind of questions and need to be explained to understand truly the Buddha’s attitude of working for every opportunity toward attaining the highest goal. The Buddhists’ main aim is training the mind through the gradual eradication of the three mental evil actions: avarice (Loba), ill-will (Dosa) and delusion (Mohā) and finally to attain Nibbāna. Most Buddhists understand that eradication of the three mental evil actions is just for self-purification and it revolves from one existence to another.
Buddhist 'charity' is the first weapon to destroy these mental defilements such as craving (Taṇhā), ignorance (Avijjā), and clinging (Upādāna). These mental defilements are essentially an account of the causal structure of the wheel of birth. To overcome these, Buddhist ‘charity’ can eradicate not only mental defilements but also help in the accumulation of good deeds at the same time. Eradication of mental defilements leads to purifying the progress of one’s own liberation meanwhile accumulation of good deeds stretch the life cycle with suffering. In this sense, Buddhism prefers to perform the cultivation of morality and meditation that leads to liberation rather than accumulation of charity. Accumulation of good deeds should come under the name of Kammic Buddhism and eradication of good deeds leads to Nibbānic Buddhism. Many scholars locate these different practices along a single continuum of Sila, Samādhi and Pañña. It should be made clear here that these are to enhance the Buddha’s teachings rather than to maintain traditional beliefs.

Here, Melford Spiro’s explanation in a book called Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes, is the best way showing the distinction between ‘Nibbānic Buddhism and Kammic Buddhism’. In his explanation, the mundane way is similar to Kammatic Buddhism and the supreme way is similar to Nibbānic Buddhism. It is the goal of improving one’s position within Samsāra for Kammic Buddhism meanwhile Nibbānic Buddhism called the supreme Buddhism just prefers the cultivation of morality, concentration and meditation in order to be released from the life cycles (Samsāra) in short. The main purpose in Buddhism, no matter whether it is Kammic Buddhism or Nibbānic Buddhism, is doing good actions which leads to good rebirths and, eventually to the attainment of Nibbāna by purifying the mind. Concerning Melford Spiro’s Kammic Buddhism, although Buddhist texts have many explanations, Melford Spiro uses the Burmese concept of Kamma which refers to moral
retribution for the actor and which refers to metaphysical force that, as the consequence of such action, is the cause of the retribution. (Spiro, 1982, p. 76)

3. 4. Aspects of Donor

Our life starts at the beginning with suffering and terminates with death at the end. Between the beginning and end of life, human beings while alive face many problems like economic, political and social problems and so on. Difficulties come to us in many ways. Our life, therefore, is not always associated with comfort as we would like to be. Facing some problems should be understood as the nature of life because our life is always associated with suffering. Penetration into the very nature of life problems can provide us with a deeper insight into life. Seeking the worldly happiness in wealth, luxury, sensual pleasure, respectable positions in life etc, gives us an illusion leading to borrowing and increasing debts and ever increasing suffering. There is valuable information in the Buddha’s teaching to see the worldly happiness as an illusion. Some other scholars state that seeing worldly happiness as an illusion is the root cause of immoral behavior such as theft, violence, falsehood and so on.

It is sure that the donor would get some reward when he or she gives something away. There are five advantages of giving gained by the donor; 1. the giver is good and dear to many people, 2. virtuous and wise men love him, 3. a good report is spread abroad about him, 4. he strays not from the householder’s norms, and 5. on the breaking up of the body after death, he is reborn in a blissful heavenly world. (A. III. p. 41). In another point, the five advantages of giving are counted slightly different from the above list. The fourth advantage of giving in the above list is replaced by the following; whatever company the giver approaches, be it of nobles, Brahmins, householders or recluses, he approaches with confidence and untroubled. (A. IV. pp. 79-82)
Real happiness attainable by the donor is of four kinds taught by the Buddha in the Sutta; possessing enough material resources, enjoying those resources, sharing them with relations and friends, and not being in debt. At this point, Buddhism points out that measuring material condition is not enough for the evaluation of one’s life because Buddhists understand the fact that material condition of wealth cannot give real happiness. Instead, moral quality as a noble wealth that leads to a blameless life can gain us real happiness.

Venerable K. Sri Dhammananda states four kinds of happiness in the book ‘What Buddhists Believe’:

“the first happiness is to enjoy economic security or sufficient wealth acquired by just and righteous means (athithi-sukha); the second is spending that wealth liberally on himself, his family, his friends, and relatives, and on meritorious deeds (bhoga-sukha); the third to be free from debts (anana-sukha); the fourth happiness is to live a faultless, and a pure life without committing evil in thought, word or deed (anavajja-sukha)”. (Sri Dhammananda, 1987, p. 144)

Those four kinds of happiness can be gained through the practice of ‘charity’. If ‘charity’ prevails in our heart, there is no place for stinginess. He who seeks to promote his welfare and who anticipates the attainment of perfect peace should be honest, upright, approachable, gentle, humble, contented, easy to support, simple in living, tranquil in his senses, prudent, modest, and not fawning on families. A materialistic and egocentric life is characterized not only by an increase in wants but also by restlessness, showing itself in being over-busy and overactive and lacking in moderation and self-restraint. ‘Charity’ promotes the well-being of all and builds naturally on qualities of sober humanism and it has to be reflected in having a few meaningful and selected tasks which are conducive to the maximum well-being of all concerned.
3.4.1. Quality of Donor

Through one’s own effort with righteous means, Buddhism encourages to search for wealth. It is said by the Buddha that by lawfully gathered wealth with efforts, he entertains rightly the needy beings with food and drink. (Itiv. 75 G). It is essential for the donor to make flawless donation. Basically, Buddhism does not deny the importance of material needs and illustrates that material things are not evil but the love of material things is the source of evil. For those who inspire for a spiritual goal, material things are needed at the minimum level to have a decent life to be free from hunger, disease and other unconditional things that can cause harm. As a human being, we need to get both material and mental qualities. These two qualities are essential in life because both of them condition a happy life. The Buddhist monks and nuns should have four requisites sufficiently; the food for the purpose of alleviation of hunger and for the purpose of maintaining one’s health, the clothes for the purpose of protection of the body from shame and from the insects, shelter for the purpose of engagement with the cultivation of the mind and medicine for the purpose of curing or preventing diseases.

The donor should qualify for his charity by giving with faith which is much extolled in the Suttas (A. III, 172), especially, one should give ‘charity’ with respect, taking delight in the opportunity, in the nobility of a morally sound life, in the teachings of Kamma and survival after death. One more quality of the donor is the moral and spiritual perfection. The donor should not give something to others which he does not enjoy and should give the same quality of delicious things as he himself enjoys. He should be a lordly giver (Dāna-pārami), a senior and a master of the gifts and a philanthropist who understands others’ difficulties. Further, he should be like an open house for the needy and take delight in distributing whatever the needy ask for.
The most important thing to recognize in the quality of the donor is volition (cetanā) which consists of three forms; before, during and after giving. To be happy before giving, he should be anticipating the opportunity to exercise his generosity. While giving, he should have the same happy mind by fulfilling a need. And, satisfying his accumulating good deeds, the donor should maintain his happy state of mind continually that he has done a good deed after giving. The Buddha taught about the quality of the donor in the Anguttara Nikāya (A. I, pp. 129-30) and the following statement is a very famous parable regarding the donor's quality in Buddhism: one who is completely blind, one who has only one eye and one who has both visions. For the completely blind man, he has neither the vision to improve his material circumstances nor the vision to lead a morally elevated life. For one who has only one eye, although one has the vision to improve his material conditions, he does not have the vision to live a morally elevated life. For the one who has two visions, he may have both the vision to improve his material circumstances and the vision to lead a morally elevated life.

3.4.2. The recipient of Gifts

The charity process in Buddhism must have three factors: a donor, a recipient and the given items. With regard to charity, the Buddha admonishes the virtue of giving in various ways. For example, He illustrates that ‘stinginess’ is a cause of ‘woeful course of existence’ and encourages people to be generous. Two points are very important to know; firstly, the given item should be anything which is rightly acquired and without causing harm both to the donor and the receiver; secondly the recipient should feel gratitude towards the giver. It is important to have mutual harmony between the donor and the recipient.
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The recipient of gifts is another factor which helps to determine the Kammic fruitfulness. From the recipient’s point of view, anybody can be a recipient as far as the donor is happy with the recipient. Buddha never prevented anybody in giving and always encouraged giving something to others. Preventing from giving does not have good results and it obstructs the donor from acquiring merit. Lord Buddha said the following three things: 1. He who obstructs the giver in acquiring merit (Dayakassa puññantarayakaro hoti), 2. He who prevents the receivers from getting a gift (patiggahakanam labhantarayakaro hoti), and 3. His own self is already ruined, utterly ruined (Pubbeva kho panassa atta khato ca hoti upahato ca). (A.I. p. 160).

Regarding the recipient of the gifts, the Buddha illustrated in various ways. The recipients are expressed in the Kosala Samyutta thus: a monk who abandons the following five unwholesome mental states: desire for sensuous pleasures, sloth and torpor, distraction and worry and skeptical doubts. These unwholesome states are expressed in Buddhism as the five hindrances (Nivārana). (S. I. p. 99). The Buddha also expressed in the same Sutta to possess the following five qualities: 1. morality, 2. proficiency in concentration, 3. insight, 4. emancipation and 5. knowledge. Those who have destroyed passion, hatred and delusion and who have reached the final emancipation are other recipients of gifts stated in the same Sutta. (S. I. p. 99)

There are three kinds of support: support father and mother (Ahuneyyaggi), support sons, wives, slaves, messengers, and workmen (gahapataggi) and support mendicants and noble ones (dakkhineyyaggi) that are practiced by the Buddhists (A. IV. p. 44 ff.). The worthy persons who should be offered things described in the Suttas, (D. I. 137; II, 354; III, 76) are as follows; the recluses (samaṇa), Brahmins (brahmaṇa), destitutes (kapanā), wayfarers (addhika), wanderers (vanībbaka) and beggars (yācaka). The recluses and noble ones who do not earn wages give
spiritual guidance in religious affairs to the laity and the laity should also provide them with suitable offerings. Poor people need some help from the rich to survive and by doing so, the rich become spiritually richer. Destitutes or mendicants are those who are not wage-earners and who are looking for something such as food and clothing which are the basic needs for survival for human beings.

The act of charity can benefit anyone who is not yet advanced spiritually. If the donor’s attitude in giving something is good, no matter whether the receiver is morally good or bad, the result for the donor will strengthen his own disposition to renunciation. In Buddhism, the Ariyas, the noble ones, such as the Buddha and his disciples who have reached the supramundane state are the worthiest recipients of gifts because of their purity of mind that makes the act of giving capable of yielding abundant benefits. Sometimes, the donor’s mind mentally offers to the noble Sangha but physically presents the gifts to a monk who has not reached the final destination but is trying to overcome the defilements. It will bear great fruit if the receiver does not pretend that he is a noble person. Therefore, we must be most careful of our own attitude while giving.

3.4.3. Manner of giving

Every day we hear the word ‘charity’ and practice it in different forms we believe in. Actually, we do not know what real ‘charity’ means and it may often occur to flummox in our mind whether our daily actions like giving food to the monks and some other charitable activities are rituals in reality or mere religious practices. Some may think that such kind of ‘charity’ is both ritual and religious practice as well. However, we need to know systematically ‘the essence of charity’ and ‘its manner of giving’. It is a way of giving something to receivers without making them feel embarrassed even when they ask with a sense of embarrassment and should be
given with due consideration and respect. It creates mutually enriching friendliness between the donor and the receiver when something is given with such warmth.

There are no condemned classes of people whatsoever in Buddhism nor any caste discrimination because all human beings are equal irrespective of birth. From the social point of view, the concept of charity gives birth to harmonious co-existence in society based on friendliness, benevolence, love, care and similar qualities. No matter what race we belong to, the idea of charity acts as a social binding factor. Therefore, from the standpoint of society and one’s relation to others, it is important to look into not only one’s intention, but also effects on oneself and others. It is said in the Ambalatthika Rāhulovāda Sutta that a deed which is conducive neither to the harm of self nor to the harm of others nor to the harm of both; such a deed is skilled. (M. I. p. 414 ff)

The manner of giving should be understood that whenever one practices charity, he or she may give away with thoroughness, with one’s own hand, with due thoughts and should not give away as if one were discarding something. (D. II. p. 357). Further, food should be given with respect at proper times and food should not be given at improper times. (A. II. p. 64 G). The starting point of the Buddha’s mission is a humanitarian approach to human problems in society and embodies the idea of equality with friendliness, compassion, love, benevolence, etc, expanded to all living beings. The concept of charity is not only among friends and relatives of the same caste, but also among the people of all walks of life irrespective of their birth. Even though it is extremely difficult to understand human nature and the inner experience of others, we feel sorry for them who face economic difficulties due to poverty. Thus, the Buddha’s idea emphasized on charity or provided something to the needy for the purpose of social and
economic progress and security as crime and delinquencies are the results of economic insecurity.

The following was an evidence to prove as a true ideal the Buddha’s attitude towards the welfare of the world. The Buddha frequently visited Sāvathi, the capital city of Kosala, and Rājagaha, the capital city of Magadha, because the Buddha well understood that these two places were the centers for commerce and politics at that time and due to economic instability, social crimes and delinquencies had developed. Hence, we should not overlook his visit to these two places because the Buddha’s attitude when visiting these two places very often was to build the foundation of morality and spiritual growth. Yet, these two places had made material progress in the world but required a strong moral base. The Lord Buddha also expressed the following statement on observing morality ‘Sīla’:

The Cakkavatti Sutta gives that “It is through having taken to wholesome practices that we have increased in life-span and beauty, so let us perform still more wholesome practices. Let us refrain from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from lying speech, from slander, from harsh speech, from idle chatter, from covetousness, from ill-will, from wrong views; let us abstain from three things: incest, excessive greed, and deviant practices; let us respect our mothers and fathers, ascetics and Brahmmins, and the head of the clan, and let us persevere in these wholesome actions. (Walshe, 1995, pp. 402-3)

3.5 Types of charity

Types of charity should be understood here in three forms; the giving of material things (Amisadāna), the giving of fearlessness (abhayadāna) and the giving of the Dhamma

1 See. E. Mayeda; A History of the formation of Original Buddhist Texts; pp. 64-69.
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(Dhammadāna). Out of the three, the material giving should be of two kinds; giving external things and giving internal things. The external things are also tenfold: food, drink, garments, vehicles, garlands, scents, unguents, bedding, dwelling, and lamps. (A.IV. p. 239) Although the items mentioned above were no doubt included in the list, the external things by way of sense objects become again six fold: visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible and non-sensory objects.

It should be understood here as the nature of religious material things, deeds done such as contribution of a new building for religious purpose, establishing a free hospital for all, free monastic education centers for children, setting up free universities for adults and free meditation centers for all, especially for the aged. Moreover, giving donation for public libraries, keeping a neighborhood park neat and clean or the purchase of a Buddha statue for a temple and so on, are also considered to be giving material things for religious purpose. Some people contribute not only funds for some projects but also provide physical labor as well to help others. Giving these things mentioned above are called giving external things. The following items used are also mentioned in the Nikāya; food, drink, cloth, vehicle, garland, scent, ointment, bedding, dwelling and light. (A. IV. p. 239)

The given items mentioned above are accepted as suitable gifts and it is quite natural that devotees thought of the Buddha as the worthiest recipient of their offering. There are many explanations in the commentaries why flowers, garlands, etc. were offered to the pagodas or the image of the Buddha. It is said that King Āsoka was reported to have made provisions for the offering of garlands, etc., to a pagoda or the image of the Buddha. (Smp. Vol. I. p. 52). Further, the offering of flowers, garlands, etc. was made not only by the laity but also by the bhikkhus. It
is also necessity to consider the construction of monasteries for the bhikkhus to dwell in because this deed comes to be regarded as more meritorious offerings than giving food and drink. Buddhists believe that building a monastery for the whole Sangha community is more fruitful than the individual offering. (D.I. p. 145)

The next step is internal giving things. The internal giving things are of two forms: doing good things for others in order to make them happy and fulfilling the wishes of other people who are needy. Giving of body, limbs, organs, hands, feet, eyes and so on, that lead to the welfare and happiness of the recipient at all times are included in the internal giving things. People should not hesitate to give immediately the internal giving things with the thoughtfulness of welfare and happiness of whoever asks for something. In one instance, there are eight items: 1. he gives clean things, 2. he gives what is delicious, 3. he gives at proper times, 4. he gives appropriately, 5. he gives with care, 6. he gives repeatedly, 7. he gives with joy and 8. he is glad after giving. (A.IV. p. 244)

Giving without fear (abhayadāna) means here protection of living beings when they are being badly threatened by kings, thieves, fire, water, enemies, lions, tigers, and other wild animals like dragons, ogres, goblins and so on. People sometimes give security and freedom from fear to others. By doing so, we may say ‘such kind of security giving is a fearless giving’ and it is the highest form of charity in internal giving things. A well known Buddhist practice of charity is protection of animal life. We can buy the domestic animals in order to save them from the slaughter houses or in order to free them from the swollen rivers during the regular rainy season. These acts are a kind of fearless charity. People often go to the pagoda or monastery compounds where there is a pond to feed the fish and tortoises in order to get merit. Saving life
is not only accumulating merit, but is also the ultimate expression of the Buddhist virtue of loving-kindness to others.

Protecting any life from slaughter is an auspicious charity done by Buddhists. Many Buddhists profoundly practice ‘loving-kindness’ on particular days such as giving respect to the elders’ day, celebration of the Buddha’s life events day and so on. Sometimes, Buddhists abstain from eating meat due to the maintaining of their loving-kindness to animals and freeing the birds from the cages. These forms are considered as fearless giving which seems to be a kind of requirement for gaining merit. Sometimes, people give a lovely smile to others in order to provide spiritual progress and some people wish to help to liberate animals from a net, from a fishing net or a bird-cage, or releasing the prisoners from the prison and undertaking any action of a similar nature for the sake of protecting the life of beings and all these acts are also being considered as the highest gifts of fearless giving. It should be known that a noble disciple observes the five precepts and gives to numerous beings without fear, without hatred and without ill-will. Such kinds of acts should be counted as done with immeasurable fearlessness, amity and good-will. (A. IV. p. 246).

Such kind of giving was known at the time when U Nu was the ex-prime minister of Myanmar. On behalf of the Government, U Nu during his presidency wished the animals to be free and some expressions can be shown in the article, thus:

*Exhorted them not to avenge themselves of the wrongs if the people, in their previous existences, had either ill-treated or slaughtered them and that the people would reciprocate by forgiving them (the animals) if they had similarly done such wrongs against them (the people) in samsāra (round of births),* (Spiro, 1982, p. 272).
Buddhist charity should include many different things; from the material support to spiritual support known as the highest giving of Dhamma. For the giving of Dhamma, the Buddha said that the gift of Dhamma or the gift of noble teaching is the highest gift of all. In the gift of Dhamma, there must be many forms like reciting some verses from texts or expounding the Dhamma or preaching the Dhamma by a monk or teachers who frequently give guidelines for meditation methods or who share the truth. Thus, these are the highest forms of charity in Buddhism. For those who are not qualified to teach the Dhamma, there must be other ways for them to accumulate ‘Dhamma charity’ like giving some Dhamma books or paying for the translation or publication of manuscripts or propagation of the Buddha Sāsanā through informal discussions and encouraging others to keep the precepts or to participate in meditation.

These forms are also called ‘giving of the Dhamma’. Explanation of some aspects of the Dhamma for the benefit of others should be included in the Dhamma giving. Moreover, other acts such as giving cash or giving voluntary service at meditation centers or helping to support a meditation teacher can also be considered as the highest gifts of the Dhamma. It is stated in the Anguttara Nikāya that ‘monks, there are these two gifts. What two? The carnal and the spiritual: these are the two. Of these two, the spiritual gift is pre-eminent’. (A. I. p. 81)

3.6 Reliable Investment

Our worldly things have to be usually protected from the five dangers, namely; fire, water, thieves, kings and the un-beloved ones. People who search for wealth and prosperity used to store their property in the earth, in pots or in very deep holes where their belongings could not be damaged by any danger. This storing system in the earth is an ancient system that has long existed in Myanmar. The purposes of property storing so that they would not be taken by any
enemies could be clarified as follows: 1. people have to save their property in order to avoid punishment from crime, 2. to avoid being stolen from thieves, 3. to use it in any financial crises, 4. to use it in case of famine. And in order not to lose track of the buried property, one has to make a special mark to track back the hidden property.

However, there is no guarantee for those who stash their property in the ground. According to Buddhist perspective, the earth can move at least five or ten inches in length every year. They have to make a mark on the earth so that they can know the exact place where they had buried it. Besides, someone who knows the storing place can take it away. In modern times, people have to use the bank storing system for the purpose of saving their property. The investment bank storing system is not very reliable because sometimes banks can go bankrupt. Therefore, the safest way to accumulate our wealth is by giving charity. According to Buddhism, charity helps accumulate wealth and happiness. Measuring material wealth is not enough for evaluation of one’s life because material condition of wealth is not the real happiness. It is the pure state of mind that can really bring happiness. The act of giving can accumulate wealth not only in this present life but also in the lives to come.

Charity can help achieve a certain amount of investment for future lives to come. And with regard to charity, the Lord Buddha stated his emphasis in the Nidhikanda Sutta stating the importance of what charity really means. Places and persons who can help us gain merit are stated in the Nidhikanda Sutta as follows: Cetiya where the relics of the Buddha are situated, the virtuous Sangha community, guests whether they are virtuous persons or not, ancestors and relatives and parents who are still alive. Charity can help meet good friends and all people can gain Nibbana through charity.
The Buddha mentions that the distribution of wealth is done through the support of the parents, wife and children, and helping relatives. It is more precise to support his wealth by dividing it into four parts; one portion of his wealth is for his enjoyment, two portions for his business and the last portion for saving. (D. III. p. 188 G). It is stated in the Anguttara Nikāya that the investment will make him, his parents, children, wife, servants, workmen, and friends happy. He makes himself secure against all misfortune and he is a maker of the five-fold offering; i.e. to relative, to guests, to departed ones; and he offers a gift to all beings who abstain from sloth and negligence and who are bent on kindness and forbearance and who tame, calm and cool their own selves. (A. II. pp. 67-68).

3. 7. Transference of Merit

The transference of merit can be rarely seen in other religions but it can be seen in most Buddhist ceremonies where the merit is shared with either living beings or departed ones. This transference of merit is called ‘yay zet cha’ (pouring water) in Burma which symbolizes a vessel of water that is poured slowly into the cup. Actually, the transference of merit is not expressed much in the texts and it is an old traditional and ritual belief. The point is that the transference of merit in Buddhism is the same as in the Hindu custom. According to Buddhism, everybody can do good deeds that can be shared with others. This transference of merit usually occurs at the end of the offering ceremony and to rejoice in the acts of charity. By making others share, the donor can share with others saying, thus; ‘let our good deeds be the condition for the arising of wholesome consciousness in others when they rejoice in our good deeds or let our good deeds be witness for the spirit of departed ones to live in peace’.
Some may say 'can Kamma be changed'? This idea stems from the reading of a book called ‘What Buddhists Believe’ written by Sri. Dhammananda. Regarding this, we have to look at the circumstances as well as beneficial and malevolent forces that are influenced by the operating law. Good appearance and poor appearance are two factors that favor the working of Kamma. For example, some persons obtain good birth because they did good kamma in the past. Even though they obtain good birth, they will not be able to fully enjoy the beneficial results of their good Kamma. Besides, beauty will be an asset to the possessor and a good-looking son of poor parents may attract the attention of others and may be able to distinguish himself through their influence. We should know that the unfavourable conditions open up possibilities for evil Kamma to operate and the favourable conditions will prevent the operation of bad Kamma. Thus, the working of Kamma is obstructed by birth, beauty, and ugliness, time and personal effort or intelligence. (Sri.Dhammananda. 1987. pp. 93-96)

Some say that transferring of merit can cost money. It is absolutely wrong. The Buddhist charity benefits as a future reward, a better life in the future or rebirth in heaven. Whatever charity we have done, it must be with a pure heart without expectation of a return. The mind must be freed from the hope of heaven and hell, merit and demerit, happiness and suffering. To want anything is to suffer simply from having the desire itself. To escape suffering, hope for merit and heaven must be totally rooted out. Buddhist ideas of good deeds such as honoring the elders, alms-giving to the monks, worshipping at the pagodas and celebrating the novice initiation ceremony and so on, are included in the religious actions. Sometimes, these religious actions are intertwined with custom or ritual beliefs.

The Buddhist act for transferring of merit has influence on the social life. However, it is questionable whether the merit transferred can surely benefit others or not. If we can transfer our
good deeds to others, we can also transfer our bad deeds to others. It may be contradictory with the doctrine of Buddhist Kamma which has an effect on us because each of us is responsible for what we do. In the Buddha’s teaching, there is a certain way to solve this contradiction with the doctrine of Buddhist Kamma. It is like giving a birthday card to a friend. A person sends a birthday card to his friend and writes some words of blessing and best wishes for him. When one receives his birthday card and reads the words of blessing and knows the best wishes from his friend, he may probably be happy.

Hence, one may have nothing to give to his friend for his birthday present but may just only send the birthday card which includes the words of blessing and best wishes. Similarly, Buddha’s aim regarding the transference of merit should be noticed here. It is possible to rejoice for someone who has an opportunity to see or hear some good things done by others. Rejoicing for good things done by others can be either by relatives or non-relatives. One who has just passed away may be aware of what others are doing and wait for the time when those sharing the merit announce that they have done good things on behalf of him. When they do some charitable or noble deeds, they must share their good deeds so that the departed spirit may come to know of it and be filled with joy.

The transference of merit is illustrated in the Pali translation as follows:

As rivers, when full must flow and reach and fill the distant main. So indeed, what is given here will reach and bless the spirits there. As water poured on mountain top must soon descend and fill the plain. So indeed, what is given here will reach and bless the spirits there. (Sri Dhammananda, 1987, p.310.)

Moreover, we can understand about the transference of merit more by looking at the following example. It is like a kindling oil lamp used to light lamps. The first oil lamp is lighted
by striking a match and many other oil lamps can be lighted from the first one but the luminous first lamp light will not be decreased regardless of how many lamps are kindled. The brightness of all the lamps will surely be radiant and luminous. Similarly, if we do some good things and transfer them to others and they have an opportunity to rejoice seeing or hearing our good things, the transference of merit will not decrease but rather it may increase like an oil lamp light. When someone has done good things, he must share his good deeds because sharing good deeds with others can be the condition for the arising of wholesome consciousness for others who are able to rejoice in them. It is the Buddhist religious actions to share with others whatever good deeds have been done.

The transference of merit can be done by pouring water into a cup or on the earth saying ‘on behalf of these meritorious deeds that I have done, may the making of libation be a witness for those who are waiting to rejoice or who have recently passed away’ and ‘the participants must say thrice a declaration of affirmation: sādhu, “well done”’ three times. It is the Buddhist Burmese practice of pouring water into a cup for sharing good deeds done by the donor as an act of charity. While monks do religious chanting in order to show one’s desire to donate this good thing, this kind of sharing merit can be distributed by the donors saying thus: to all who can hear and who are waiting for this opportunity, I will share my merit with all beings who will share my meritorious deeds.

One obvious incident happened during the Buddha’s life time. It was the time when king Bimbisāra one day invited the Buddha and his disciples for a meal. After offering a meal to the Buddha and his disciples, the king forgot to share his good deeds with other beings, especially his relatives. Therefore, ghosts who were his former relatives waited for him to share the greatest offering of the good deed. Unfortunately, this opportunity did not come to them to rejoice.
Ghosts were disappointed and made horrible screeching noises throughout the night so that the king could not sleep the whole night. Early morning the next day, the king came and reported about this matter to the Buddha. The Buddha explained the reason of this incident. The Buddha then advised him to do some offerings again and share it with others. Thus, the king was relieved and made another great offering. After that, he declared the sharing of his deeds to his relatives: ‘let this good deed be witness for my relatives’. Hearing the sound from the king, ghosts were so happy and gained wholesome states of consciousness. This kind of transferring merit could release them from their sufferings. (Dhp. A. p. 169)

According to Buddhism, good deeds can be classified into three types: charity, morality and mental development. All Buddhists believe that charity goes hand in hand with “Saddā” and it can be grouped into the two categories: the first category advises to share many material possessions with others who are needy. In this level, a donor will surely enjoy and think of his charity work as doing good things to others. This kind of charity can be seen as a personal interest and it is under the concept of ‘me and mine’ in accumulating good deeds. The second category of charity is quite different from the first one because it aims to help people for the cultivation of the mind. The cultivated mind destroys the root-cause of suffering in human life. In brief, the first category of charity leads to accumulative merits while the second category of charity leads to enlightenment.
CHAPTER IV:

THE USEFULNESS OF THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF ‘CHARITY’

4. 1. Charity as the basis for ‘precept’ (Sīla)

The word ‘Sīla’ is translated as a ‘morality’ or ‘virtue’ which has two meanings: first, it conveys the natural human behavior both moral and immoral or describes the natural events which are the domains of morality both good and bad. Second, morality promotes peace by keeping physical and verbal actions under proper control. The word ‘Sīla’ is derived from the words ‘Sīra or Sīsa’ which means head. When someone’s head is cut off, it is like destroying the whole body; so also if morality is absent in one, all forms of meritorious deeds surely come to ruin. In this way, morality is like the head of the body of meritoriousness and it seems to have similar meaning with ‘sīla’. It should be understood that morality can control physical and verbal actions so that people will not get involved in violence, disorderly manners and instead become gentle and quiet.

Charity helps develop morality in a special way; even an immoral person (as a donor on the occasion of his son’s novitiation) is likely to observe precepts with no difficulty; and charity is easier to practice. (Though it may be difficult for one to keep the precept, one can find it easy to give alms). According to Buddhism, human actions are performed through body, word and mind. (A. III. p. 415). The Kammically wholesome actions are said to spring out of ‘greedlessness’ or ‘liberality’, ‘hateless-ness’ or ‘loving-kindness’ and ‘undeluded-ness’ or ‘wisdom’. These are the three roots that purify the human actions. Thus Buddhism recognizes that whatever action is performed through the above three Kammically wholesome roots is a good one, and an action done through their opposites is a bad one. It is true that Buddha’s moral attitude is
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centered around the idea of purifying oneself, thereby, he thinks that social harmony and happiness can be maintained.

It is quite natural that those who do not understand well the essence of Lord Buddha's teachings will give priority to personal gain rather than goodwill. In reality, the essence of Buddha's teachings is to be able to appreciate the honor of the monks who are working so hard to attain Enlightenment and to donate in honor of that work. That kind of selfless donation gives the honorable monks a subject for reflection and meditation on Sīla Visuddhi, meaning Purification of morality, which is what all monks have to strive for. However, it does not necessarily mean that the Buddha neglected to pay adequate heed to the problems related to society. His moral teachings are well summarized and crystallized in the Singālovāda Sutta. Further he mentions the Four Objects of Sympathy which are the culmination of the Buddha's teachings to maintain a happy and harmonious society. The four objects of sympathy are; giving (dāna), kind speech (peyyavajja), a life of usefulness (atthācariyā) and equality or impartiality (samānattatā). (A. IV. p. 31, p. 253). The virtues of day to day life are the concrete expressions of such human qualities as friendliness, compassion, love, etc. Within the framework of the three karmically wholesome roots, generosity or charity expresses itself in the form of giving away to others.

In Buddhism, virtue has special qualities to help others. All these virtues are explained in the Path of Purification (Visuddhi Magga) which stated virtues as volition, as consciousness-concomitant, as restraint, and as non-transgression. Virtue means the volition which helps abstain from killing living things, etc., or in one who fulfils the practice of the moral duties. Virtue as consciousness means abstinence from killing living things and so on in one who has non-covetousness, non-ill-will, and the right view. Virtue as restraint should be understood here
as restraint in five ways: restraint by the rules of the community, restraint by mindfulness, restraint by knowledge, restraint by patience, and restraint by effort. Virtue as non-transgression is the non-transgression of precepts.

When the second precept comes into mind, there will always be ‘giving’ and it is an easy way to establish one’s own happiness. So, not stealing others’ property is a noble characteristic that is directly related to charity (Dāna) at the same time. A virtuous person through keeping the precepts can get benefits, happiness and delightful satisfaction. The act of giving serves to make the mind conducive to observance of the precepts, for cultivation of the mind, and for development of insight wisdom when we make a generous offer of some gift. Some Buddhists experience a feeling of embarrassment whenever they visit temples for the purpose of keeping precepts and of listening to the Dhamma talks.

The Buddhist morality aims at the emancipation from suffering and it is not to be followed only with the idea of one’s benefit and happiness, and his salvation at the end, but it is to be followed with such human feelings as love, compassion, kindness, considerateness, etc. in mind, which should be extended to all living beings. The five precepts should be regulated by Buddhist lay men. These constitute the minimal requirements for ethical behavior in day to day living that must be beneficial to both the individual and to the community. One of the Suttantas of the Dīgha Nikāya explains that there are five benefits out of being virtuous and the first benefit mentioned in the Sutta is that a virtuous person gets great wealth through his industry. (D. II. p. 86)

Those who observe the minimum five precepts (abstinence from killing, stealing, misconduct, lying and drunkenness) can easily establish their mental concentration and wisdom. Observing the precepts brings welfare to all beings and also enables one to lead a peaceful life.
free from anxiety and worries. The good effects of keeping the precepts may not make one wealthy, but it will surely bring peace of mind. Charity will bring wealth in future lives and keeping the precepts will also bring health of body and peace of mind. It is stated in the Path of Purification (Visuddhi Magga) as follows:

Such virtue leads to non-remporse in the mind, to gladdening, to happiness, to tranquility, to joy, to repetition, to development, to cultivation, to embellishment, to the requisite (for concentration), to the equipment (of concentration), to fulfillment, to complete dispassion, to fading away, to cessation, to peace, to direct-knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. (Bhikkhu Ñanamoli, 1991, p. 141)

4.2. Charity as the basis for ‘concentration’ (Samādhi)

Our life begins with suffering and terminates with death at the end. Between the beginning and end of life, human beings while living have many problems like economic problems, political problems and social problems and so on. Difficulty comes to us in many ways. Therefore, our life is not associated with comfort as we would like to have. Having some difficult problems is the nature of life because our life is always associated with suffering. To overcome suffering, there must be concentration which leads to overcome many problems and difficulties. Penetration into the very nature of life problems can help us to understand and have a deeper meaning of life. The more we penetrate, the more we see worldly pleasure as an illusion. The more we see worldly pleasure as an illusion, the borrowing and increasing debts will cause increasing suffering. Regarding this, there is much information in the Buddha’s teaching to see the worldly happiness as an illusion.

Mindfulness will help to see worldly happiness as an illusion. One who wants to develop his mindfulness should possess the special qualities of faith, etc., evoked by means of the noble path, and he should go into solitary retreat and recollect his own special qualities of faith, etc in
order to concentrate on all things. However, it is said in the Sutta: ‘on the occasion, Mahānāma, on which a noble disciple recollects the faith, the virtue, the learning, the generosity, and the understanding that are both his own personality and of those deities’, on that occasion his mind is not obsessed by greed...’ (A. III, 287). The Path of Purification (Visuddhi-magga) also stated that a noble disciple should purify his consciousness by means of the recollections and so attain further purification in the ultimate sense thus: ‘Here, bhikkhus, a noble disciple recollects the Perfect One in this way: that Blessed One is such since he is accomplished...His mind has rectitude on that occasion. He has renounced, got free from, emerged from cupidity. (Bhikkhu Ānāmoli, 1991, p. 124)

Concentration through charity prevents the mind and mental factors not to associate with evil minds. Further, concentration can lead one to a happy and stable life. All efforts towards higher spiritual achievement must begin with charity (Dāna), for without charity (Dāna), mental concentration (Samādhi) and wisdom (Pañña) are not attainable. Mindfulness practiced in the contemplation of body, feelings, mind and mental objects, therefore, keeps the one who practices it, away from getting affected by erroneous views about the nature of things. And when mindfulness is well cultivated to the extent that one is aware of things as they really are, one is ready and fully equipped to be led to the practice of meditation (Samādhi) which is directly linked up with insight into the truth, the realization of Nibbāna. From the Buddhist point of view, the way of promoting mental concentration is by following the charity (Dāna). Charity makes the mind to be subtle and harmonious in keeping the precepts. Without charity, there is no possible way to concentrate. Without concentration, wisdom will not arise at all. So, charity (Dāna) makes people’s mind to be subtle and to be able to concentrate and then wisdom arises through sharp concentration.
4.3. Charity as the basis for ‘wisdom’ (Pañña)

Wisdom has the ability to make sensible decisions and give good advice to others. Thoughts regarding the ordinary worldly things such as carpentry, agriculture etc, and things concerning Dhamma like generosity, morality, and concentration and Insight meditation (Vipassanā) are included in this kind of wisdom. The development of concentration provides the benefit of direct-knowledge to occur. It is important to look into not only one’s intention, but also affects oneself and others. For example, the Ambalaṭṭhikā Rāhulovāda Sutta of the Mijjima Nikāya (M.I. p. 414 ff) speaks of good acts commended and encouraged by the Buddha. It is said that a deed which is conducive neither to the harm of self nor to the harm of others nor to the harm of both; such a deed is skilled. It yields happiness, its result is happy.

When we consider the practice of charity, it presupposes concrete relationship between the giver and the receiver. From the point of view of building up a harmonious society, it has been observed that friendliness, kindness, considerateness, compassion and similar human virtues found their concrete expressions in the practice of charity. From these two steps, the wisdom acquired by good things including volition associated with charity (Dānamaya Pañña), and the wisdom acquired by observing the precepts (Sīlamaya Pañña), people can have mindfulness (Bhāvanā) which later gives rise to the understanding of the real meaning of happiness. If we aspire to achieve ultimate peace and purity, we should develop ‘charity’ (Dāna) first, and then we should keep the precepts that lead to building up a lot of merit that will bear its fruit. With our attainment of enlightenment as we progress towards that goal, the volition involved in charity will assist us by contributing towards the pliancy of the mind, an essential asset in developing concentration and wisdom, the prime requisites of liberation.
All beings want to escape from all sufferings and search for the real happiness. To have genuine happiness, there must be insight wisdom developed through concentration. Wisdom can help the meditator to penetrate the real nature of mind and matter and to distinguish between what is good and what is bad. In the Path of Purification (Visuddhi-magga), it is explained that he can gradually understand not only all manner of sense-sphere consciousness but those of fine-material and immaterial consciousness as well by tracing one (manner of) consciousness from another. (Bhikkhu Ñanamoli, 1991, p. 405)

The most significant fact to note for genuine wisdom is to know the object as it really is. Charity is the first step to practice in Buddhism in order to have understanding of virtue and concentration. For those who accumulate many good things, virtue and concentration will make their meditation easy to practice and then wisdom can easily be gained through concentration. Here, wisdom is twofold, namely, wisdom as idea and wisdom as penetration. Wisdom as idea occurs through learning about the way leading to the cessation. Wisdom as penetration is acquired through meditation that penetrates the four truths. This is the basis for wisdom that charity can help to develop. Charity should be interpreted as a means of gaining supreme knowledge even at the cost of beloved ones. This can be seen in the Minlinda Paññha that ‘I forsook them all without a thought, simply because of enlightenment. (Miln. p. 117)

In a book called ‘Abhidhamma in Daily Life’, it is mentioned that everybody can do charity and other meritorious deeds. And then, he or she has to make a noble wish and says ‘May I gain intelligence and wisdom due to those deeds’. He or she should propagate goodwill whenever he or she performs good deeds thus: ‘May the monks be able to teach and learn the Dhamma every day and be crowned with wisdom’. Sometimes, Buddhists may not understand the difference between faith and wisdom. These two terms are usually similar meaning. Some
Buddhists give something with faith. Some Buddhists give with wisdom. The nature of is to be content with just giving and practicing charity with a view to be blissful in the Samsāra. Such devotion contains inspiring thoughts for the advancement of one’s country, race and religion. For wisdom, it develops good deeds with serious thoughts for one’s country, race and religion and does not put the forth the welfare of one’s own future existence, knowing full well that good deeds will produce good results. This is the fundamental difference between faith and wisdom. (U Ko Lay. 1999. pp. 93-94)

4.4. Charity as socially Engaged Buddhism

Most people understand that the social welfare can be measured with material achievements, but the Buddhists’ idea of understanding is different. It is impossible to do social welfare without having both material things and spiritual progress. For example, some may possess a lot of material things, but they do not wish to share their own property. Some have spiritual progress, but they do not have enough material supports. If one of them is lacking, surely both individual and the whole human society will not benefit. In Buddhism, if someone wishes to do social welfare, there must be material as well as spiritual support. Spiritual support is much beneficial than material support because spiritual support can help progress not only in this life but also in the next life.

Buddhist social work shows active compassion by practicing the Buddha’s teaching and following the Buddha’s way. Most of the social work done by the religious persons is done out of compassion and there is seldom professional or specialist knowledge in the field. The definition of social work from the Buddhist perspective can be seen in the Encyclopedia of Religion, thus, the response to suffering humanity should be active compassion, and the direct result of this has been the formation of social service ministries (i.e. hospitals, schools,
orphanages, and other benevolent institutions). Compassion also dictates such individual virtues as generosity, morality, patience, vigor, concentration in meditation, and wisdom. But these virtues belong to a fundamental emphasis upon the primacy of individual consciousness; this is understood in stricter Theravāda Buddhism as communion with the Buddha and in Mahāyāna Buddhism as the vow of the human spirit to become a Buddha (Vol. 13, 1987, p. 377).

The Buddha did not allow the monks and nuns to keep material things. The Burmese Buddhist monks and nuns in ancient time simply lived at their own temples where they could distance themselves from worldly affairs. They just encouraged people by supporting with spiritual acts only. Burmese Buddhist monks and nuns at that time spent most of their time in meditation practice only. In this context, can Buddhist monks and nuns carry on social welfare for others without having material things and wealth? With their heart filled with loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, monks and nuns can carry on social welfare for others.

Therefore, they themselves were not involved in worldly affairs. Monks and nuns under the developed countries like Burma, Laos, spend their time developing their spiritual progress. It is very important to know that keeping material things for them should be in a good way in order to share with others. Therefore, Burmese Buddhist monks and nuns in the present modern age understand that the practice of meditation is not enough to propagate the teachings of the Buddha. For social welfare, monks and nuns should establish free hospitals for all and they should establish free monastery education centers for children at monasteries and also should set up free Buddhist universities for adults and free meditation centers for all especially for the aged.

Monks and nuns in this present modern age have two duties to perform: moral education and modern education. Modern education means solving social problems and moral education
means giving guidance to the needy people to do what is right and wrong. The monk’s duty in Burma is to save himself and the laymen’s duty is to provide him with the physical requirements by which he can devote his energies to that end. From their point of view, the monk-layman relationship, so far as salvation is concerned, is the obverse of the priest-layman relationship. (Spiro, 1982, p. 287). Sometimes, monks and nuns can give guidelines to the people saying: ‘this is the good way, this is the wrong way’. This is a kind of spiritual support for them. Socially speaking, Buddhism encourages constructing harmonious co-existence between the Bhikkhus and laymen based on friendliness, benevolence, love and other similar human qualities. Most people understand that social work is only for the poor who need material support.

The important aspect of Buddhist ‘charity’ to note here is that everybody should be obligated to establish a harmonious society based on friendliness. Here, the words of Buddha’s three declarations should be noticed: all beings would surely know about the Four Noble Truths like I know, all beings must be liberated from all bondage of mental defilements as I was liberated from all suffering and all beings must reach Nibbāna, the opposite of samsāra, as I reached the final goal. Regarding the Buddha’s three declarations, the Buddha did all good things he believed in. So, in the discourse on the precious jewels (Yatana Sutta), for getting free from dangers caused by disease, evil spirits and famine, the Buddha holds three modes of practice as a basic role to develop through repeated acts again and again till the attainment of Buddha-hood: the welfare of the world (lokattha-cariya), the welfare of the relatives (nītattha-cariya) and the benefit of the Buddhahood (Buddhattha-cariya).  

The concept of social work is not foreign to the Buddhist monks and nuns. Acts of charity and service to others have a direct reward in the form of mental satisfaction for both

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1 It is a Burmese Book called ‘Ayeyarwady diary’ printed by Sitagu International Buddhist Academy, Yangon, Myanmar.
persons, the one rendering the service and the one being served. While helping the lay devotees in their spiritual progress or worldly benefits the monks think their acts as means of their own spiritual gain. However, there were some who did not agree to be involved in social work in Burmese history. Nevertheless, Buddhism has tied both the monastic order and the lay society to a common aim, the realization of the merit of Dhamma through service to each other. However, there has been instances of rejection of the monks' involvement in social work in Burma, for example, Mendelson in his book called "Sangha and State in Burma: A study of Monastic Sectarianism and Leadership", pointed out that "...the principal aim of monks should be their own search for enlightenment. They should not be distracted from this by any worldly pursuits albeit of the most charitable kind".

However, the prominent Buddhist monk, Sītagu Sayadaw who is the leader of the Sītagu Association in Burma and the elected chairman of the International Association of Theravāda Universities, states that Buddhists monks have to do social welfare work for humans like the missionary work in order to promote the Buddha's Sāsanā. In social activities, there must be compassion (Karunā) and wisdom (Pañña) equally for compassion is the quality of the heart and wisdom is the quality of the mind. Love, kindness, sympathy, tolerance, charity etc, are included in the compassion and right reasoning, critique, investigation, collection of information, designing, planning for projects, calculation, construction and the evaluation of results are included in wisdom.

If one has only compassion, he may become a good-hearted fool. If one has to learn only, he may properly neglect loving-kindness, compassion and the development of insight. So, these two noble qualities, compassion and wisdom, should be developed equally in order to become a perfect man in society. Today, Buddhist monks work for the welfare of the human world even
though they are people who have renounced the world. Thus, the acts of social service are not subjected to tradition alone. If the acts are done with an ethical mind, people living inside and outside the country would become respectful countrymen in the world.

Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratic leader of Burma and the Nobel Prize laureate, in her book *The Voice of Hope*, also explains as follows:

Engaged Buddhism is active compassion or active Mettā. It is not just sitting there passively saying, ‘I feel sorry for them’. It means doing something about the situation by bringing whatever relief you can to those who need it the most, by caring for them, by doing what you can to help others. Of course, ‘the sending of loving-kindness’ is very much a part of our Burmese Buddhist training. But in addition to that we have got to do more to express our Mettā and to show our compassion. And there are so many ways of doing it’. (1997, p. 17)
CHAPTER V:

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1 Conclusion

The Buddha expressed his great experience of Enlightenment in two ways; one is the Four Noble Truths and the other is the nature of dependent origination (Paticcasamuppāda). Between these two, people understand more about the Four Noble Truths than the nature of dependent origination (Paticcasamuppāda). The nature of dependent origination is concerned more about the life and about the world which is built on the sets of relation in which arising and passing away depends on the other factors which conditioned them. In this study, the researcher presents different points of views on the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ from many Pāli texts and its commentaries. The Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ has many kinds and it has different levels of productive quality of its result.

Although the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ is not included directly in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path and the nature of dependent origination, the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ (Dāna) needs to be practiced first in order to have mutual understanding and spiritual progress. There are many ways to practice concerning the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ (Dāna) and if there is one quality that is essential to the character of man, it is the virtue of charity. Nothing can be more important than the ability to give and give wholeheartedly. Charity truly elevates the giver. The Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ does not depend on the monetary value but more on the intention to help and serve. It could rather mean sharing of knowledge or giving moral support.

The greatest act of charity is the virtue of forgiveness, the ability to pay back with goodwill to an act of transgression. Charity should be done without expectation of anything in
return and we should not even expect gratitude. Besides, it requires to be selfless while performing the act. It should be performed purely by heart and not determined by its magnitude. However, the magnanimity with which it is delivered is the most important thing. Buddhists believe that charity acts like a bridge between religious congregations and secular societies, and also between the individuals to reform. To reform social approaches and religious spirit, there must be mutual understanding that leads to real happiness. The usefulness of the practice of ‘charity’ can gradually lead to establish morality, concentration and wisdom.

The Buddhist concept of ‘charity’ advocates an ideal act on social perfection. Its ultimate goal is to root out the selfish desires such as causing harm to others, the misappropriate act of taking other people’s belongings and wrongful enjoyment of sensual pleasures, etc. When human beings do not care to pursue the principle of the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’, social development and mental stability cannot be gained. One of the most important features for humans is that human beings desire not only to live, but also to live well. People must search for the meaning in life, and seek to attain justifiable moral ideals and goals. The goal of Buddhism is a modification of a person’s behavior and a transformation of a person’s emotive and cognitive constitution. The consequence of a person’s emotive and cognitive constitution is to help a person to overcome the ills of existence. Consequently, one must stop from causing harm and suffering to others.

The Buddha’s teaching gives a theoretical framework for focusing on the practice of charity, morality, concentration and wisdom. Although some scholars deny that the Buddha is a social reformer, there is a great wealth of literature on social engagement in the Scriptures. It is this idea in Buddhism that has made Buddhism socially inclusive. It is the same process of social and economic ostentation through the practice of charity that came into vogue in the later times,
especially on the part of the rich. Although the Buddha may have been aware of the inevitability of this kind of misunderstanding and misconception of charity to crop up in the history of its development, he had to emphasize that charity should be given to the needy. (Itiv. 75 G).

Basically, greed, hatred and delusion are proliferating at all levels of social interaction in modern society. The lack of proliferation for cultivation of sympathy for the well-being of others is leading to increased social conflicts and tensions. The ultimate goal of the Buddhist way of life is the eradication of greed, hatred and delusion. The Buddha taught that life should be founded upon spiritual principles and governed by spiritual laws that are inflexible and eternal. The Buddha’s teachings are very essential for everyone to follow. According to his teaching, we are makers and partakers of our destiny. He pointed out the way we should release ourselves from the mortal existence to achieve the ultimate goal of Nibbāna.

5.2 Recommendations for further research

Further research is open to all to contribute to the field of knowledge about the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’. Buddhist literature can be studied from different perspectives and should highlight the achievement, the commitment and the significance of the Buddhist concept of ‘charity’. The Buddhist scriptures themselves are a great wealth of wisdom and so in the life stories of the Buddha, in the monastic rules, and in the philosophical doctrines, Buddha’s sacrifices for mankind, his leadership ability, his compassion towards the weak are models for us to learn by imitation. However, the following specific research topics are recommended for those who are interested in this subject and would like to pursue further studies.

1. What is the Buddhist basis for active work among others?
2. A critical study on this theory either from the Buddhist perspective or other religious perspectives or philosophical perspective.

3. What teachings can respond most easily and beneficially to skillful behavior by and within international communities?
References:

A. Primary Sources


**B. Secondary Sources**


C. Articles and Internet sources:


D. Burmese books:


AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This researcher was born in Ta Phyu Kone village, Dedaye Township, Ayeyarwadee division, Myanmar. He became a novice under the patronage of his parents and preceptor, Ven. U Jotika, in Saphyukone village. He was ordained as a Buddhist monk in Khandasima which is a special place for only monks-to-be-ordained. In 2004, he obtained his Sasanadhaja Dhammacariya Degree after sitting for the Government exam and then decided to join the Sitagu International Buddhist Academy for further education. In 2009, he received his Bachelor degree in Arts majoring in Buddhism from the Sitagu International Buddhist Academy, Myanmar. He joined Assumption University in 2010 for the Master’s degree in Philosophy and Religious studies. He is currently learning English to promote Buddha Sasana in the world.