**Generosity’s Perfection**

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The cultivation of generosity is the beginning of awakening.

Generosity has tremendous force because it arises from an inner quality of letting go. Being able to let go, to give up, to renounce, and to give generously, all spring from the same source, and when we practice generosity, we open up to these qualities within ourselves. Letting go gives us profound freedom and many loving ways to express that freedom.

If we practice joyful giving, we experience more confidence, self-respect and well-being because we continually test our limits. Our attachments say, “I will give this much and no more,” or “I will give this article or object if I am appreciated enough for this act of giving.” In the practice of generosity, we learn to see through our attachments. We see they are transparent, that they have no solidity. They don’t need to hold us back, so we can go beyond them.

This practice of generosity is about creating space. Think about what its like when the opposite happens, when the mind feels brittle, narrow, confined and dark. AT that point, you feel on edge, uneasy, and you don’t like yourself very much. With all that going on, how easy is it to accept calmly a painful or difficult experience…to be with the experience without judging it, to accept it as it is, to allow it to be there? It’s not very easy because of the narrowness of the mind that is receiving it. By contrast a vast spacious mind doesn’t feel so bound, contracted and self-denigrating.

Conversely, when a pleasant experience arises, we don’t lunge at it with desperation, because we don’t really need it. We don’t have that sense of needing it to feel good about ourselves. When an unpleasant experience arises, we don’t fear that its going to diminish us in some way, that were going to be a lesser being because of it. We are whole and we are happy. What better way to look at the vast array of experiences that come and go than with a spacious, generous heart.

The aim of generosity is twofold. To free our minds form the conditioned forces that bind and limit us; craving, clinging and attachment bring confinement and lack of self-esteem. IF we are always looking for some person or thing to complete us, we miss the degree to which we are complete in every moment. It a bit like leaning on a mirage only to find that it can’t hold us - there’s nothing there!

When we are continually looking for the next experience and the next pleasure, its like going form one mirage to another. We have no security. Nothing is holding us up. We practice generosity to free the mind from that delusion, to weaken the forces of craving and clinging so we can find essential happiness.

We also practice generosity to free others, to extend welfare and happiness to all beings, to somehow, as much as each of us can, lessen the suffering in this world. And when our practice of generosity is genuine, we learn to extend boundless caring to all living beings. The movement of the heart in practicing generosity mirrors the movement of the heart that lets go inside.

If we cultivate a generous heart, we can unconditionally allow things to be the way they are. We can accept the truth of the present moment, rather than continually imposing conditions on what’s going on; it must be this way or that way or you can’t be happy. The strength of our generosity is a primary factor in our ability to accept change. In any single act of giving the fear and attachment that make us hold onto a pleasant experience, that make us think we need them tin order to be happy - becomes diminished.

So there are 4 qualities in any single moment of giving:

1. Love
2. Compassion
3. Sympathetic joy
4. Equanimity

**Love** is there because we feel goodwill in that moment toward the person who is receiving; we feel a sense of oneness with them; rather than alienation. We feel friendship, which is the meaning of love. We want them to be happy.

We feel **compassion** in that moment because we wish that being to be free from pain or suffering, to be happy. There is tenderness, that trembling of the heart that responds to a being.

We also experience **sympathetic joy.** That means we rejoice in the happiness of someone else, rather than feeling what we can so easily feel; envy, jealousy and wanting them to be just a little bit less happy so we can feel a little more happy about our own state. In an act of giving we want another being’s happiness to increase, and so we feel sympathetic joy for them.

And lastly, **equanimity.** That’s also found in the act of giving because we have an object of craving that we are willing to let go of, to be without it ourselves and let it belong to others, to everybody.

All four of these qualities are found in that one moment. In this one moment of giving we are abandoning desire and grasping. We are abandoning ill will and aversion. Aversion creates separateness and withdrawal, a sense of not being at one with the other. Giving is an act of moving forward, of coming closer. And we’re abandoning delusion as well, because when we perform a wholesome or skillful action, we understand that what we do in our life, the choices we make, the values we hold- matter.

The quotation from the Tao Te Ching says, “One who knows that enough is enough will always have enough.” One of the great joys that comes from generosity is the understanding that no matter how much or how little we have by the world’s standards, if we know we have enough we can always give something. Then we can share, we can open, we an express loving-kindness. Realizing, however, that our conditioning does not emphasize this. The dominant emphasis in our conditioning is wanting, getting and holding on. It doesn’t emphasize the opposite qualities - of yielding, letting go and relinquishing.

That’s why the practice is about turning around, deconditioning, getting out of that mind-state and discovering a radically different kind of happiness that is not so vulnerable, that does not lead to endless dissatisfaction. We need to loosen our grasping and our clinging, and we need to have the courage to defy our conditioning.

So ultimately the primary question to ask ourselves is, “What do I really need right now, in this moment, to be happy?” The world offers us many answers to that question: “I need a new this and a new that.” But do we really? “What do I lack right now? What do I really need?” These are powerful questions.

When we look closely, we will find that we get fed much more by other's joy and delight than by getting what we think we need. Other’s joy and delight being much more nourishing!

When we practice this quality of generosity again and again it will grow very strong. If we do it externally towards others, we can do it internally as well. We will develop a generosity of spirit so when a painful state arises with us, like depression or anger or desire or jealousy, we can let them go. We are happier with their passing, so we allow them to follow their natural path of coming and going. We see we are not served by their staying.

So, the question remains, “What do I really need right now to be happy?” If we hold this question as the guiding light, we will experience many different things: delight, surprise, chagrin, shock, all kinds of feelings.

But what we come to - is that only something as vast and deep as the truth will really make us happy, to see it as it is, as it actually is, and to be able to let go.

None of us can do this perfectly; it’s a practice. We practice generosity with others and with ourselves, over and over again and the power of it begins to grow until it becomes almost like a waterfall, a flow. This is who we become, this is what is natural and this is why we continually are able to touch on a deep, true and genuine happiness.