

NEWSLETTER
December 3, 2002
Revised December 2005
Number 6

ON GENEROSITY

So, why should we come to a Priory workday? Why would we want to give up a Saturday morning to work on a property that isn't our own? It seems hard enough these days to find the time and energy to keep our own home clean and maintained. And there always seems so much that needs to be done. Why add another item to the list? After all, what are we going to get out of it? Well, those are good questions and they lead into the practice of Buddhism.

In Buddhism we train for self and other, as my Master would often say, so it is fine to keep our own benefit in mind, although our idea of what that might mean will probably change as our training continues. To better understand the benefits of generosity, we first need an understanding of the Four Noble Truths, one of the earliest teachings of the Buddha. The First of the Four Noble Truths teaches that all beings experience suffering (or discontent, or dissatisfaction, or disease...). The Second Noble Truth teaches that our clinging, or attachment, is the cause of our suffering. The Third Truth offers hope by proclaiming that we can actually do something about our suffering, and the Fourth shows us the way, i.e. The Noble Eightfold Path. (For more on the latter, you may wish to click on the link on our home page on the right, under **Teaching: The Eightfold Path of Buddhism**, by Rev. Daizui MacPhillamy).

Our generosity's perhaps greatest benefit to us is helping us to let go of our clinging, the very cause of our dissatisfaction. If clinging can be experienced as a clenched hand, generosity can be experienced as a relaxed, open hand. Practicing generosity begins to chip away at, to convert, our deeply ingrained karmic habit of clinging. As we try to willingly work on doing this, we eventually come to find that not only do we feel no loss from our generosity, but that we begin to feel that we are, in fact, the beneficiaries of that generosity (unless we do it only or mainly for this benefit, in which case it, like all things done for selfish reasons, simply leads to more suffering). Willingly practicing generosity helps us to be aware of the very process of clinging within us, and this promotes our ability to recognize and deal with all of our multitudinous ways of clinging.

When practicing generosity, we must do our best to be Preceptually responsible, not promoting clinging or confusion in those who benefit from our offerings. Eventually we also need to try to let go of any expectations for our generosity including, even, of how it may be used or that we will be known as the giver. Otherwise we are still clinging to something.

Early in our training we may have a tendency to think of the Priory as "not ours," not our responsibility. As we go deeper in training we come to recognize the Priory as a source of spiritual sustenance and support. We find it to be a gathering place for others who are trying to do the same thing that we are. We gain perspective and insight from their training, from their actions, from their questions, from their teaching, from their simple perseverance. As we allow the gratitude that arises from this recognition to become a part of our training, we may naturally begin to feel that the Priory is, in fact, a part of our lives and our responsibilities. Then the question of doing work for, or of being generous to, others loses its meaning in relation to the Priory. Until we reach that point, until we begin to actually experience the benefits of generosity for ourselves, we are asked to try to be willing just to proceed on faith that our willingness to make an offering of ourselves and our time is helpful to our training; that we are not somehow losing something in this activity.

Keeping the Precepts is an expression of that faith. The Precepts are guidelines for avoiding choices that lead to suffering, and choosing ways of behaving that eventually lead to liberation from suffering. One of the 10 Great Precepts of our tradition particularly urges generosity. (For a fuller description of the Precepts, you may wish to click on the link on our Home Page.) Offering your help and your time on workdays is an excellent way to practice and develop generosity in your training; and generosity, as we have seen, is a way to let go of,

to convert, clinging and attachment which produce that suffering, thus benefiting you and ultimately all beings. (For more on this, please see under the heading *SUPPORT* on our website.)

Rev. Rokuzan Kroenke

Copyright © 2002, 2005 Columbia Zen Buddhist Priory