

11-10-2024, Dharma-talk12, pages 34 top to 37 bottom

### **“Upaya – Skilful Methods” and “Giving teachings”**

Norman explains that the instructions sound easy but are difficult to live by. The way he has been talking about “generosity” so far, it is an expansive and impressionistic (?) path, which he basically approves of because bodhisattvas should be expansive and impressionistic. (Impressionistic as: receiving with awareness? Expansive as: focused on expansion?) However, from a rational and practical point of view, it is quite confusing. Therefore, the practice of the bodhisattva cannot easily be codified (laid down in legal terms). For exactly this reason, one must practice “skillful methods”.

Literally at the beginning, more freely translated below: This term is meant to express an intuitive, practical, flexible understanding of how the perfection of generosity can be applied in the many nuanced and specific situations that arise in a messy world. When it comes to making material gifts, we take care to proceed slowly and carefully. Perhaps you should make a gift to yourself first. One of my teachers taught me to take an object in my left hand and give it to my right hand, which seemed a little stupid to me.

But then Norman describes, how he discovered different, auction-like, contradictory feelings within himself. The inner details of actual giving are more complicated than we assume, he says.

He then explains that we should really start the exercise with ourselves. Because we learn a lot when we approach it with honest self-respect. Often we swing back and forth between extremes, between self-attachment and self-denial. But this exercise requires us to treat ourselves the same way we treat others. And that's hard.

Then you start giving to others as you usually do, but now with more attention, with declared intention and mindfulness. You perceive the recipient's happiness in detail. An original feeling of love fills you, you really want to give the best with good wishes for the other person. And that takes practice.

What about complicated gifts? Such as money? Or time? How much is enough? If you give until it hurts, do you end up feeling resentful? Can you give a grain of sand, as Buddha offered, and feel happy? What if it never feels enough?

Norman does not consider giving to the needy to be generous. (I see it differently, even though his vision is the more beautiful one). Why? Because according to Norman, sharing is a matter of course. (I think it should be. But it is not. You can overlook need and great hardship throughout your life.) It is about our responsibility to who WE really are.

The perfection of generosity requires a social vision.

Understanding and reflection are called for to explore this topic more and more deeply. We should also never let up in practicing an attitude of abundance, kindness and openness. Why exactly? To bring forth the best of joy and allow a minimum of pain to arise, according to our abilities.

## **Giving Teachings**

Such complexities as mentioned above may not seem applicable to this point. But is that true? (I am summarizing here a bit more freely than in the previous topic.) Often it is not about YOU telling a person what you think would help them, but saying nothing at all. Other times, you may trigger pain and confusion with your supposedly helpful actions. The way you say something also plays a role. And how you ACT. How you really feel about it is definitely communicated. We ourselves are often unaware of this.

Besides, we can be so in love with our voice that the care for the other person cannot be felt.

When it comes to traditional teachings: To what extent will you adapt them to the listener? Am I obliged to say more or less what all the teachers before me taught?

(Especially here I allow myself to summarize and omit in favor of faster progress, because I know or think I know Norman's points of view and understand them and assume that you can easily follow them too: But maybe that's not true at all? I struggled with myself to stop after the chapter "Skillful Means" for several reasons. Also to deepen the "ONE THING".

To be honest, I would like to insert a term here that I am missing: risk appetite. In my view, risk appetite and thus the ability to deal with conflict and flexibility are part of the process of weighing up. Maybe I have known too many people who were too afraid of making mistakes to take action. Maybe a stricter, more traditional teacher than Norman would look at my actions, our actions, with

skepticism, maybe slow me down or be suspicious of a language he doesn't know. What can I say... life can be over soon, tomorrow. But at least here in our group we have still heard this. At least I hope so, because I think and want to emphasize that we are all constantly giving “lessons”, we are role models for people we know and don't know, and we have something to say, something to give, something to teach. From my point of view, teaching is the same as “giving of yourself”. This makes the question of how and whether I understood Buddha and Norman in their sense redundant. I deeply appreciate both of them and am extremely grateful for their devotion - one could also call it love - diligence, depth and inspiration. I believe it is a fiction that everyone should understand the same thing, but perhaps it is more a matter of everyone optionally reflecting on the same thing - I am concerned that we want to control what cannot be controlled.)

Norman asks himself and us many important questions, as I do and differently than I do, but ultimately also skeptically and at the same time encouragingly to feel and think for ourselves.

*Thank you very much.*