

Dana

By Christopher Gladwell

Sri Lakshmi the consort of Vishnu is honoured in India, Thailand and wherever there are Hindus as the Goddess of Wealth, Abundance and Prosperity.

One of her right hands is opened facing outwards in the gesture of giving. Under one of her left arms is held a pot. Poring endlessly out of both the pot and her palm are streams of golden coins. Lakshmi perpetually benevolent, as the consort of Vishnu who is responsible for the preservation of the universe, is the very author of wealth, the source and fount of prosperity from whom all blessings flow.

In our modern technologically advanced and supposedly civilised world, 3% of the planetary population own and control 90% of the planetary wealth. This tragedy is reinforced by the simple fact that there is more than enough resource to feed, clothe and house everyone, for all needs to be met. Yet, half of our planetary population

go hungry and thirsty every day, many even die from lack of basic food, clean water and simple healthcare.

Such exploitative organisation might be considered criminal if it were not enshrined in economic, political and social arrangements that continue to favour the concentration of wealth in the hands of those that already have.

Sri Lakshmi's abundance acts as a potent reminder prosperity is perhaps better measured by how much we can remain in the flow of life, how much we can give, rather than how much we can accumulate, how much we can (temporarily, since we all die!) lay claim to, amass or hoard, or how many possessions we have or what we believe we control.

The essential teachings of Buddhism include the potent understanding of complete and endless interdependence of all things, that all material, sensory, emotional, and intellectual phenomena are part of a complex web of interconnection through time and space. Our feelings depend on the relationships around and our upbringing; our thoughts are dependent on what we read or see, our

schooling or the influences in our life; our breath is dependent on plants who are themselves dependent on sunlight, soil and water. Plants also depend on insects for their reproduction and on all creatures to produce carbon dioxide in their outbreath. Plants are the primary producers of all food on this planet, from these our bodies are made. All things composed are originally starstuff spinning in space, all starstuff and all matter is dancing energy and so on. As our contemporary science of ecology teaches us, we are never not in connection, never not interdependent, never not in relationship with everything before us, around us and in the future fields of time and space.

Some spiritual teachings dismiss this realm of incarnation as irrelevant illusion, as the ever changing realm of deceptive nature that is not relevant to our 'spiritual' growth. Dismissed this miraculous complexity becomes dishonoured, dissociated from and denigrated as meaningless.

There are, fortunately, many integral spiritual teachings that balance this realm of miraculous and complex

interdependence with the realm of the absolute ground of being. In this recognition the changing flow of nature is seen as the feminine pole of the totality of the absolute. This is like the Yin balancing and supporting the Yang. This relative realm becomes then the celebration of the ineffable absolute in its eternal dance of Self-discovery in the play of subject and object. Some teachings go so far as to say that the absolute and the relative are both the same, right here, right now!

Teachings that honour and celebrate incarnation as special see this realm of the changing and relative nature as a fertile space to explore, understand and develop simple kindness and compassion.

Rather than being interested in 'liberation' that gets us 'out of here' as quickly as possible. It then becomes a powerful possibility to really know interdependence; part of our reconnection to this Great Chain of Being is through the giving of both resources and service as much as we are able and in this way we connect and celebrate the flow of abundance and prosperity.

Many religious traditions historically promote giving as a fundamental tenet of their beliefs.

Both Christians and Muslims were exhorted to give one tenth (a tithe) of their net profit to charitable works.

Indeed under the laws of these religions it was until the advent of contemporary capitalism, illegal to make money through interest on money lent!

Guru Nanak who founded Sikhism included the practice of Dana (charitable giving) and Seva (service) as the responsibilities of any follower to lead a righteous life as a disciple of the divine.

The Bhagavata Purana written in the tenth century (C.E.) and celebrating the Yoga of Devotion includes the Ashtanga system as codified by Patanjali yet adds in five more yamas (practices of moral discipline) and five more niyamas (practices of self-restraint). One of these niyamas is Dana, the act of charitable giving.

Looking through the Chandogya Upanishad the great Vedic work in which the Gayatri mantra is expounded, we find Dana as a sacrificial gift, giving to other beings is giving to the divinity, to the source of all. The Chandogya

sees one's life behaviour including charitable giving as the best recompense for the priceless gifts received from one's teachers. As Guru Ram Das the Sikh leader affirmed,

“My true Guru is eternal and everlasting
free from birth and death, the immortal spirit,
the all pervasive”

Being all pervasive, in all things means when we give we, as eternal source, give a gift (which is also eternal source) to this eternal source as a receiver.

This essential generosity is seen by Haribhadra Suri in his Jaina text, Yoga-Bindu from 750 (C.E.) as preparation for Yoga.

Of course Buddhists are encouraged to give Dana. This generosity of Spirit culminates in the ideal of the Mahayana tradition, the Bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas are beings dedicated to the spiritual awakening of other beings. Bodhisattvas then make every effort to understand, experience and attain their own complete awakening so that they can more effectively and

completely serve others. As Shantideva wrote in his Bodhi-Carya-Avatara...

“ I am medicine for the sick, may I be their physician and their nurse till their sickness (literally as sickness and metaphorically as ego-obsession) is gone.

May I be a protector for those without protection, a guide for travellers, a boat, a bridge, a passage for those desiring the furthest shore.

For all embodied beings, may I be a wish granting jewel; a miraculous, never emptying urn; a magical science; a panacea; a wish fulfilling tree; a cow of plenty!”

This gift of life through the grace of the ‘As it Is’ (Atman), we also give, and in giving receive the gift of generosity. We consciously reconnect and celebrate the Great Chain of Being by allowing life’s energies and resources to flow through us as Dana and Seva. It is our responsibility to welcome wealth so we can give more. This Yoga of Prosperity is celebration of the abundance of life and is clearly a basic even preparatory aspect of a Yogic lifestyle.

Support, supporting and supported; Giver, giving, gift and receiver; Love, lover and beloved; all are interconnected, interdependent and potentially One.

Practice.

Sitting in Sukkhasana, Ardha Padmasana, Siddhasana or Padmasana, feel your body resting, separate yet connected to the earth. Rest your left palm facing upwards on your lap in the gesture of receiving. Place your right palm so that the wrist rests over the right knee with the palm facing outwards. This is dana mudra, the gesture of giving. Sit and become aware of the realm of interconnection and interdependence, of giving and receiving. Take some time to sit quietly and allow thought to settle, soft Ujjayi breath may help to achieve this.

If you choose to repeat a mantra then the mantra,

Om Shree Maha Lakshmyai Namahaa

can work for those who are not averse to using Hindu mantras. Otherwise using the intention of connection is also perfect. You might like to repeat,

' This being breaths, as all beings do, but for a short time; This heart beats as all hearts do but for a short

time; awakening this heart, this body, this mind and
fully reconnecting to the Great Chain of Being'

This practice needs to be supported by actual giving of as much charity in the material world as you can comfortably give, 10% of net profit is recommended!. In this way the practice is actualised and does not remain merely as a 'cushion practice' of feeling good.

Christopher Gladwell

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