

11.5 What is the Most Difficult Thing to Give Up?

Buddhists are generally known to be amongst the most generous people around. When there is an earthquake somewhere, we generously send help there. When there is a tsunami somewhere, we readily donate for their relief funds. We go to Myanmar or Kampuchea and help the poor and the needy. In fact, helping and giving to others are meritorious and fun.

There are a number of suttas that address the question of why we really give: See for example the (Maha-p,phala) Dāna Sutta (A 7.49)¹. In all such teachings, there is one clear message: The best thing you can “ask” for is “a beautiful mind” that helps in mental focus, for, this is what will really help you to overcome suffering in this life itself. Other wishes, no matter how noble, only keep you within samsara and suffering.

However, you can never get this “beautiful mind” without giving up something. That is, wrong view, or keep the mind open and not stuck to an indeed no matter how noble, whether this is about liberating all beings, or becoming a future Buddha, or becoming a monk or nun (think carefully what really is your motive for this), or receiving the approval (positive strokes) of others.

So what is the most difficult thing to give up? Our opinions. When you begin to let go of your opinions (it becomes easier as you start doing it), you begin to understand why people (Buddhists especially) behave the way they do. This knowledge is very painful at first, but with growing wisdom, the pains lessen and the ability to help grows.

One of the easiest ways of letting go of opinions (not all at once, understandably), is through reflecting on the Suttas. When this study goes with mindfulness practice, a lot of wonderful things happen: the best is gaining streamwinning in this itself.

Whatever you are thinking now, try letting that go for a while, and ask yourself: “What is this message trying to say?”

The brahmin Kūṭa,danta² was open enough to ask the Buddha about something that is central to the brahmin’s life, that is, the ritual sacrifice. His openness brought him greater blessings than all his status and opinions could.

True giving help in the letting go of the idea of the self.

¹ (Maha-p,phala) Dāna Sutta (A 7.49 = [SD 2.3](#)).

² See Kūṭa,danta Sutta D 5 = [SD 22.8](#).