

Sappurisa Dāna Sutta

The Discourse on the True Person's Giving

[True giving, wealth and their benefits]

(A 5.148/3:172 f)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008

1 The true individual

A true individual (*sappurisa*) may refer either to a saint of the path (other than the Buddha), or to a true practitioner (that is, one aspiring for awakening in this life).¹ **The Sappurisa Sutta** (A 8.38) declares that a true individual arises for the good of all beings: the family, society, religion, and even the gods.² **The Dhammaññū Sutta** (A 7.64) defines the seven skills of a true individual as follows:

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| (1) he knows the Dharma [the teaching] | (<i>dhammaññū</i>); |
| (2) he knows the meaning [purpose of the Dharma] | (<i>atthaññū</i>); |
| (3) he knows himself | (<i>attaññū</i>); |
| (4) he knows moderation | (<i>mattaññū</i>); |
| (5) he knows the time | (<i>kālaññū</i>); |
| (6) he knows the group | (<i>parisaññū</i>); and |
| (7) he knows (the difference in) the individual | (<i>puggalaññū</i> or <i>puggala,parovaraññū</i>). |
- (S 7.64/4:13-117) = SD 30.10

The true individual, in other words, is one who knows himself and others and, above all, he knows true reality, at least in some measure³. In fact, he is one who contributes greatly to the common good, even if he is still unawakened, but he consequently brings even greater general good if he is awakened.

The Sappurisa Dāna Sutta (A 5.148) lists the five qualities of a true individual's giving and their benefits. On how the true individual gives priority to spiritual training, see **the Sappurisa Sutta** (M 113).³

2 The true individual's giving

The Sappurisa Dāna Sutta is a definition of the true individual's giving in terms of five qualities and their attending benefits, thus:

- (1) Because he gives in faith, he becomes very wealthy, and is of great beauty.
- (2) Because he gives with respect, he becomes very wealthy, and his family and workers listen well to him.
- (3) Because he gives at the right time, he becomes very wealthy, and benefits come to him at the right time, and in abundance.
- (4) Because he gives with a hospitable heart, he becomes very wealthy, and he is able to truly enjoy sense-pleasures.
- (5) Because he gives without harming anyone, he becomes very wealthy and suffers no loss of his wealth in any way on account of fire, water, the king [the authorities], thieves, or unloving heirs.

Just as early Buddhism sees moral duties as being reciprocal,⁴ karmic action is also viewed as working in a quid pro quo manner, that is, as long as there are no other supervening factors.⁵ Let us examine each of the five conditions a little closer.

¹ For details, see **Dhammaññū S** (A 7.64/4:113-117) = SD 30.10 Intro (2).

² A 8.38/4:244 f = SD 30.10 (embedded).

³ M 113/3:37-45 = SD 23.7.

⁴ On reciprocal social duties, see **Sigāl'ovāda S** (D 31.27-34/3:188-192) = SD 4.1; where also see Intro (1) for other such suttas.

⁵ On the complex nature of karma, see **Karma** = SD 18.1.

(1) Because he gives in faith, he becomes very wealthy, and is of great beauty. Giving in faith is fully defined in **the (Sumana) Dāna Sutta** (A 6.37) as the six-limbed gift (*cha-ḷ-aṅga,samannāgataṃ dakkhiṇaṃ*), that is,

- (a) the giver is happy *before, during and after* the giving (this is the giving with joyful faith, *pasāda*); and
- (b) the recipient is one who has abandoned greed, hate and delusion, or practising to do so (this is the giving with wise faith, *avecca-p,pasāda*).

The spiritual basis for this six-limbed gift is known as discriminate giving (*viceyya,dāna*).⁶

Such a giving is said to bring the karmic fruits of wealth, beauty and grace. The reason for this is easy to understand: since we make it a habit of being happy in our actions, this manifests itself as constant personal joy and exuding a wholesome ambience around ourselves so as to attract good friends and effective communication.

(2) Because he gives with respect, he becomes very wealthy, and his family and workers listen well to him. Here, “respect” (*sakkacca*) means care, thoughtfulness, deference, and mindfulness, that is, we are circumspect with regards to ourselves, the recipient and the gift. In short, we pay great attention to *how* we give. In **the Velāma Sutta** (A 9.20), the Buddha explains to Anātha,piṇḍika that it is not *what* we give that counts, but *how* we give, that is, of the five conditions of the true individual’s giving:⁷

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| 1. one gives with care | (<i>sakkaccaṃ deti</i>), |
| 2. one gives after some thought ⁸ | (<i>citti,katvā deti</i>), |
| 3. one gives with one’s own hands | (<i>sahatthā deti</i>), |
| 4. one gives not as if throwing something away | (<i>anapaviddham deti</i>), |
| 5. one gives with regard to the future ⁹ | (<i>āgamana,ditṭhiko deti</i>). |

The karmic benefit of such a giving is that we are not only blessed with wealth, but also the opportunity of actually enjoying them,¹⁰ and we have good communication with our family members and at work.¹¹ Since we show great respect when giving alms, this respect is likely to continue into our daily lives, so that we enjoy respect from others in return.

(3) Because he gives at the right time, he becomes very wealthy, and benefits come to him at the right time, and in abundance. Because the giver gives at the right time, he becomes very wealthy, and benefits come to him at the right time, and in abundance. Giving at the right time is defined in **the Kāla,dāna Sutta**, which is a short discourse and is here translated in full:

⁶ See **(Sumana) Dāna S** (A 6.37/3:336 f) = SD 22.1.

⁷ An almost identical list of 5 conditions of giving is found in **Cūḷa Punnama S** (M 100.23/3:24) = SD 45.4.

⁸ **(Aṭṭha) Dāna Ss 1-2** (A 8.31-31/4:236 = SD 6.6) advise here thus: “One gives thinking, ‘This is an adornment for the mind, a support for the mind’,” ie to facilitate one’s spiritual development.

⁹ *Āgamana,ditṭhiko deti*, lit “he gives with the view of the coming,” ie with a view of its karmic wholesome results. Cf *ayaṅ ca etad-agga,sannikkhepo nāma catūhi kāraṇehi labbhati: atth’uppattito āgamanato ciṅṇa,vasito guṇātirekato ti*, “and as regards this laying down of the foremost position, one gains it in four ways, namely, on account of the arising of the goal (*attha*), on account of regard for the future (*āgamana*), on account of the virtue of habit (*ciṅṇa*), on account of one’s exceptional virtue (AA 1:125,6); on *āgamanto*, see AA 1:128,23, 132,17, 133,15, 134,5.

¹⁰ For cases where one’s karmic fruit comes in the form of great wealth but one does *not* enjoy it, see **Paṭham-āputtaka S** (S 3.19/1:89-91) = SD 22.4 & **Dutiyāputtaka S** (S 3.20/1:91-93) = SD 22.5.

¹¹ A 9.20.3/4:392 f = SD 16.6.

Kāla,dāna Sutta

The Discourse on Timely Giving

[The five occasions for giving]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 5.36/3:41)

1 Bhikshus, there are these five timely gifts.

What are the five?

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| 2 (1) He gives to those who have come [guests] | (āgantukassa dānaṃ deti). |
| (2) He gives to those travelling | (gamikassa dānaṃ deti). |
| (3) He gives to the sick | (gilanassa dānaṃ deti). |
| (4) He gives when food is hard to get | (dubbhikkhe dānaṃ deti). |
| (5) He places the first harvest, the first fruits in those
who are morally virtuous | (yāni tāni nava,sassāni nava,phalāni,
tāni paṭhamam sīla,vantesu patiṭṭhāpeti). |

These, bhikshus, are these five timely gifts.

*Kāle dadanti sappaññā
vadaññū vīta,maccharā
kāle dinnam ariyesu
uju,bhūtesu tādisu
vipassannamāna tassa
vipulā hoti dakkhiṇā.*

The wise give at the right time,
bountiful, without any stinginess,
what is timely given to the noble ones,
those who are by nature upright:
to those who do so with insight,
the gifts become abundant.

*Ye tattha anumodanti
veyyāvaccam karonti vā
na tesam dakkhiṇā unā
te pi puññassa bhāgino*

Who therein rejoice,
or give personal service,
their giving is not wanting,
for, they have a share in the merit.

*Tasmā dade appaṭivāṇa,citto
yattha dinnam maha-p,phalam
puññāni para,lokasmim
patiṭṭhā honti pāṇinan ti*

Therefore, give with an untiring mind,
for what is given is of great fruit:
there is merit in the after world,
as the support for living beings.

— evam —

(4) Because he gives with a hospitable heart, he becomes very wealthy, and is able to truly enjoy sense-pleasures. To give with a hospitable heart (*anuggahita,citta*), is to give with an untrammelled [open] mind, with generous charity (*aggahita,citto mutta,cāgo hutvā*, AA 3:291). Such a giving is often described in the discourses as follows:

Here, bhikshus, <the son of family> <the noble disciple> dwells at home with a heart free from the stain of stinginess, devoted to charity, open-handed, delighting in giving, devoted to alms-giving, delighting to have a share in giving.¹²

In the **Dīgha,jānu Sutta** (A 8.54), this is called “the accomplishment of charity” (*cāga,sampadā*). There are at least two important points worth here. Firstly, charity begins at home (and this is its locus

¹² *Idha bhikkhave <kula,putto> <ariya,sāvako> vigata,mālā,maccherena cetasā agāram ajjhavāsati mutta,cāgo payata,pāṇī vos sagga,rato yāca,yogo dāna,samvibhāga,rato*, S 1:228, 229, 231, 5:352, 392, 395, 401; A 1:150, 226 (×2), 227, 2:66, 3:53, 287, 4:6, 268, f, 284, 289, 5:331, 336; cf It 101. Commented upon at Vism 7.101-106: see **Cāgānussati** = SD 15.12.

classicus). We shall look at the second important point in the next section, (5). As a result of such a wholesomely generous mind, his sense-faculties are so well-developed and acute that he is able to truly enjoy whatever he experiences, that is, in a wholesome manner.

(5) Because he gives without harming anyone, he becomes very wealthy and suffers no loss of his wealth in any way on account of fire, water, the king [the authorities], thieves, or unloving heirs.

The phrase, “without harming himself or others” (*attānañ ca parañ ca anupahacca*),¹³ is explained by the Āṅguttara Commentary as “not destroying self or others by damaging their virtues others on account of self-praise, other-belittling, and so on.”¹⁴ One might add that this implies the keeping to the five precepts, any breach of which entails harming self and other.

In this connection, an important corollary to the true individual’s giving is that the gift is properly obtained. The best example would be that one has worked for it or justly obtained it. **The Anaṇa (or Anna,nātha) Sutta** (A 4.62), in its exposition of the four joys of wealth, defines this in terms of “the joy of ownership,” thus:

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| (1) the joy of ownership | the joy of having | (the result of diligence), |
| (2) the joy of enjoying | the joy of being | (the result of watchfulness), |
| (3) the joy of debtlessness | the joy of giving | (the result of balanced livelihood), and |
| (4) the joy of blamelessness | the joy to come | (spiritual friendship and spirituality). |

And what, householder, is **the joy of ownership**?

Here, householder, a noble youth¹⁵ has wealth gained by work and zeal, gathered by the strength of arm, earned by the sweat of the brow, justly obtained in a lawful way. At the thought, ‘Wealth is mine gained by work and zeal, gathered by the strength of arm, earned by the sweat of the brow, justly obtained in a lawful way,’ happiness comes to him, joy comes to him.

(A 4.62/2:69-71) = SD 2.2

Buddhism is not against accumulating wealth by the laity,¹⁶ so long as this is harmonized with the quest of true happiness as shown above in the Anaṇa Sutta. **The Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31), for example, after advocating investing 50% of our income, and saving 25% of it, exhorts us to divide the remaining 25% into “the five uses of wealth,” thus:

- (1) personal and family use;
- (2) for friends and guests;
- (3) for security and insurance;
- (4) the fivefold offering (social duties); and
- (5) for Dharma-spirited work.

Assuming an equal (but overlapping) division, each sub-sector will be 5% of our income or wealth. That is, under (5) “Dharma-spirited work,” we should set aside 5% of our income for the support of worthy religious. Giving (or, sharing of our wealth), as such, is not only to renunciants and charity, but to all who need or deserve, beginning with those living in our homes.

3 Wealth and wellbeing

3.1 CAPITALISM AND GREED. Capitalism is today found in practically every urbanized society in the world. The basic principle of capitalism is the private or corporate ownership of production and capital, whose value is determined by the market (basically, supply and demand of goods and services). However, where capitalism is based on greed, it only benefits a few individuals and corporations to the disadvantage

¹³ **Sappurisa Dāna S** (A 3:172+173); **Udāyī S** (A 3:184).

¹⁴ *~ā ti att’ukkamsana,para.vambhan’ādi,vasena attānañ ca parañ ca guṇ’upaghātena anupahantvā.* (AA 3:293)

¹⁵ “A noble youth,” *kula,putta*, sometimes “the son of a good or noble family, young noble youth (V 1:15; D 1:93; M 1:85, 192; A 2:249; Kvu 268); cf (German) Haussohn.

¹⁶ True monastics, as a rule, eschew wealth, and have no dealings with money, commerce and property: see **Money and Monastics** = SD 4.19.

of the majority. Such a system in the end destroys the individual (who becomes merely a cog in the money machine), society (the impersonal market) and the environment (resources to be exploited). It becomes economics without a heart, and ultimately becomes self-destructive.

Capitalism can be said to be neither good nor bad, but when it is greed-based, it is certainly exploitative and destructive. The Buddhist stand on the wholesome uses of wealth is very clear:

- (1) Wealth properly obtained is good, with ample savings and healthy investments.
- (2) Wealth is to be enjoyed, and surplus wealth to be shared with others.
- (3) Wealth should come from right livelihood and should promote it.
- (4) Wealth can be used to promote a moral society and healthy environment.

This is the Buddhist economics of “small is beautiful,” that is, economics *as if people, life and the environment matter*.

The laity's task therefore is the cultivation of economic energy. Here, *economics* (from Greek, *oikos*, “house, household, habitation” + *nomos*, “manager”) and *ecology* (Greek, *oikos* + *logos*, “word, reason, speech, account”). As such, the root meaning of economics and ecology are intertwined, while *economics* is the management of the “household,” *ecology* is the management of the “habited sphere, or living space,” that is, the world itself. At least, this is the way it should be. Such theoretical approaches are useful when we are faced with damage control over the weaknesses and failures of our current economic systems and situation, and in reminding us of how to rethink the issues so that we have a healthy society in a healthy world.

3.2 THE TRUE WORTH OF WEALTH. The Dīgha,jānu Sutta (A 8.54) contains this well known exhortation on how we, as lay practitioners, should enjoy our well-earned wealth, that is, “the accomplishment of watchfulness” (*āraṅkha,sampadā*):

Here, Vyagghapajja, whatever wealth the son of family receives through work and zeal, gathers by the strength of his arms, earn by the sweat of his brow and justly obtains by right means—such he guards and watches over so that

kings	would not seize it,	
thieves	would not steal it,	
fire	would not burn it,	
water	would not wash it away,	
unloving heirs	would not take it away. ¹⁷	(A 8.54.5/4:281 f) = SD 5.10

The meaning of this statement is that the best way to guard our wealth is to do acts of charity, so that we do not lose it through bad karma.

We can take every precaution to guard our wealth so that fire, water, the authorities, thieves, or unloving heirs would not take them away, but the situation is not so simple. In **the Cūḷa Dukkha-k,khandha Sutta** (M 14), practitioners and renunciants are reminded that the laity may work very hard to protect their wealth in the ways mentioned, but their wealth can still be lost in various ways:

Mahānāma, if wealth accrues to him from his striving, exertion and effort, he feels pain and displeasure on account of having to protect his wealth, thinking: ‘What (shall I do) now so that kings would not seize it, thieves would not steal it, fire would not burn it, water would not wash it away, nor unloving heirs take it away?’

Even as he guards and protects his wealth, kings seize it, thieves steal it, fire burns it, water washes it away, unloving heirs take it away.¹⁸ He sorrows, suffers, weeps, beats his breasts, and becomes distressed, crying: ‘What was mine is no more!’

¹⁷ For a list of destruction of families, see **(Asi,bandhaka,putta) Kulā S** (S 42.9.10/4:324) = SD 7.11. Cf **Cūḷa Dukkha-k,khandha S** (M 14.9/1:92) = SD 4.7, where renunciants are told things are not so simple!

¹⁸ This quotation occurs in **Dīgha,jānu S** (A 8.54.5/4:281 f), where a lay follower is instructed how to guard his wealth. Here, however, where the teaching, being addressed to a saint, has a more realistic tone. See also **(Asi,-bandhaka,putta) Kulā S** (S 42.9) = SD 7.11.

Now, Mahānāma, this is the disadvantage with regards to sense-desires, ... the cause being simply sense-desires. (M 14.9/1:92) = SD 4.7.

The point is that nothing is certain in this world; everything is impermanent. However, there is a way out where wealth is concerned. We cannot bring it along with us, but we can send it ahead, as it were. This sober exhortation is found in a few texts:

When the house is ablaze, | the vessel that one saves
Is of use to one, | not the one left to burn therein.

Even so, is the world ablaze | with decay and death:
One should save (one's wealth) by giving: | what is given is well saved.

(S 1.41/1:31 f=A 3.52/1:156 = J 424.11/4: 471)¹⁹

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The Discourse on The True Person's Giving

(A 5.148/3:172 f)

- 1 Bhikshus, these are the five gifts of the true individual.²⁰
 2 (1) He gives with faith (saddhāya dānaṃ deti).
 (2) He gives with respect (sakkaccaṃ dānaṃ deti).
 (3) He gives at the right time (kālena dānaṃ deti).
 (4) He gives with a hospitable heart (anuggahita, citto danaṃ deti).²¹
 (5) He gives without harming himself or others (attānañ ca parañ ca anupahacca dānaṃ deti).²²

(1) Because he gives with faith, wherever the result of that giving arises, he becomes rich, wealthy, and affluent, and is handsome, comely, graceful, endowed with perfect beauty of complexion.

(2) Because he gives with respect, wherever the result of that giving arises, he becomes rich, wealthy, and affluent, and his children and wives, his slaves, messengers and workers are obedient, lend their ears to him, focus their minds to understand him.²³

(3) Because he gives at the right time, wherever the result of that giving arises, he becomes rich, wealthy, and affluent, and benefits come to him at the right time, and in abundance.

(4) Because he gives with a hospitable heart, wherever the result of that giving arises, he becomes rich, wealthy, and affluent, and his mind inclines [is disposed] to the enjoyment of exquisite objects of the five cords of sense-pleasures. [173]

(5) Because he gives without harming himself or others, wherever the result of that giving arises, he becomes rich, wealthy, and affluent, and no loss of his wealth ever occur in any way, whether from fire, water, the king [the authorities], thieves, or unloving heirs.

These, bhikshus, are the five gifts of the true individual.

— evaṃ —

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¹⁹ (Agāra) Āditta S (S 1.41/1:31 f = SD 2.8) = (Āditta) Jana S (A 3.52/1:156) = Āditta J (J 424.11/4: 471 = SD 22.10a).

²⁰ Pañc'imāni bhikkhave sappurisa, dānāni.

²¹ Anuggahita, citto dānaṃ deti.

²² Anupahacca dānaṃ deti.

²³ Añña, cittaṃ upaṭṭhapenti.