

Different Types of Dana

Dana means charity or generosity. It is the act of giving to help one who is in need. It may be by way of material wealth, knowledge, moral or physical support. The importance of Dana in Buddhist ethics is very clear.

There are three main types of Dana recognized in Buddhism. They are Amisa dana, Abhaya dana and Dhamma dana.

Amisa Dana

This is the most basic practice of generosity. It includes the following:-

1. Providing the four basic needs of a Bhikkhu (member of the monastic order) like food, shelter, clothings and medicines.
2. Providing the above four basic needs, money and all material things to fellow lay people.
3. Offerings made in veneration of Buddha like flowers, incense, lighted lamps and such other offerings
4. Offering of services, time and skills for helping people and institutions, voluntary work for social and religious organizations, relief work and fund-raising projects for religious programs and institutions.

Benefits of performing Amisa Dana:

The giver is able to get rid of greed and selfishness. He acquires happiness, strength, and a good and peaceful life.

Abhaya Dana

This includes an act of saving lives of animals taken for slaughter, giving refuge to one who is in distress, releasing prisoners in jails and those under arrest in camps, healing patients in pain and discomfort or even a small act of freeing a bird or a pet in a cage.

Benefits of performing Abhaya Dana: The giver lives a long life and is freed from enemies.

Dhamma Dana

Dhamma dana is helping or assisting one in the spiritual development. It is by knowing the Dhamma that a person understands what is good and what is bad. Therefore this gift is considered to be the noblest. Preaching the Dhamma, conducting Dhamma classes and schools, writing books on religious subjects and assisting in any way to propagate religion is Dhamma dana.

The observation of the precepts and the engaging of meditation can be included in the above.

Dhammapada Stanza 354 states:-

Sabbadanam Dhammadanam jinati -Sabbarasam Dhammaraso jinati
Sabbam ratim dhammarati jinati tanhakkhayo sabbadukkham jinati

The gift of Dhamma surpasses all gifts. The flavour of Dhamma surpasses all favours. The delight of Dhamma surpasses all delights. The destruction of craving overcome all suffering.