



SUMMER RETREAT & PUBLIC TALK WITH...



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&



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DANA

by **Kamala Masters**

Dana is the practice of developing the qualities of generosity, kindness, and letting go. We develop these qualities because they make fertile ground for liberating wisdom to grow deep in our hearts. Often our practice of generosity and kindness comes from our routine habitual tendencies, because it is the custom, through a feeling of guilt, or simply because it's the "nice" thing to do. Taking the opportunity to make dana a practice of awareness brings it out of the realm of unconscious habit and into the realm of wise attention. In this awareness practice of generosity, we begin to see how our lives can be elevated when we bring a conscious awareness around opportunities to be generous, to be kind, and to let go.

Because dana is a "practice," with awareness and honesty we allow ourselves to experience how liberating and happiness-producing it feels to let go, and where it is painful because it is challenging to let go. We call dana a practice, and that implies that we are doing just that... practicing letting go, which also implies that it is not easy to do sometimes.

When we practice generosity, many supportive qualities of mind are being developed that lead us to ever-deepening happiness and freedom. We are cultivating loving kindness, because we are caring for the welfare of others. We are cultivating compassion because we want to alleviate any suffering. We are cultivating the understanding of inter-connectedness because we realize that we depend on the generosity and kindness of others, and they also depend upon ours. Most of all, we are cultivating non-attachment, the ability to let go, which is essential to understanding and experiencing freedom from suffering.

Dana is one of the Three Pillars of the Dhamma. The other two pillars are Sila and Bhavana. Sila is the cultivation of harmonious living through moral and ethical conduct. Bhavana is the mental development of tranquility through samatha (concentration) practices and wisdom through vipassana practice. During the time of the Buddha, and up to this time in Asian countries, the teachings begin with the cultivation of generosity, the first pillar of the dhamma. But when the Teachings of the Buddha came to the West, the teaching of bhavana came first, without much emphasis on the two other foundation pillars (generosity and harmonious living). Many of us are beginning to see the importance of sharing the practice of dana and sila, otherwise those pillars will be weak in our Western culture. It is important for all Three Pillars of the Dhamma to support the continuation of the Teachings of the Buddha in the West in a strong and balanced way.

At the end of the retreat, there is an opportunity to practice dana towards the teachers who have offered the dhamma. The teachers' offering of the dhamma is their practice of dana. The Buddha said, "The gift of the Dhamma is the highest gift." When one considers how precious the Dhamma is, one understands how priceless it is. We can't even put it in quantitative terms.

We must understand dana in terms of "practice." Dana is not a tip, nor is it in exchange for receiving the Teachings of the Buddha. It is a way in which we can express gratitude and practice kindness, generosity and letting go with awareness.