

# COLUMBIA ZEN BUDDHIST PRIORY

## NEWSLETTER

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Dear Friend,

As we approach the end of the year, Rev. Leon and I want to take this opportunity to communicate with those who have shown an interest in the Buddha-Dharma, and also to express our gratitude for any material or spiritual support that you have offered. Your generosity enables us to continue to maintain our temple as a refuge for the teaching and practice of the Buddha-Dharma in South Carolina.

We also hope that we may see you again. You would be truly welcome. We remind you that you may find our Schedule and Calendar Summary on our website in the sidebar. Those who have had an orientation to our practice, here or at any other OBC temple, are always welcome to any of our scheduled activities. We do ask that you make a reservation for our retreats and potlucks. Others who may be interested are invited to an orientation. Please call or see our website for details.

Finally, I was recently asked, by the Journal of our Order, for permission to reprint an article that I had written. It had been the very first 'Offering' I included in a letter to those on my then quite short mailing list in South Carolina. That was essentially the beginning of our very sporadic newsletter. I gave my permission to reprint the article in an upcoming edition of the OBC Journal, and realized that this was an opportunity to make some revisions. In doing that, I basically completely rewrote it. I would now like to offer it to you, and I hope that you may find it useful. For more information about the OBC Journal see <http://obcon.org/journal/>. It is the best periodical about Buddhist training of which I know.

Yours in the Dharma,  
Rev. Rokuzan Kroenke

## OFFERING

### ON GENEROSITY II

Rev. Rokuzan Kroenke

The Buddha highly recommended generosity as one of the most important spiritual practices. Yet, we might wonder how giving something away can be of benefit to us—and that is an appropriate question. In Buddhism we train for ourselves as well as others, as Rev. Master Jiyu would often say, so it is fine, and even wise, as well as compassionate, to be concerned for our own benefit—just be aware that our idea of what our own benefit might mean may well change as our training continues.

To better understand the benefits of generosity, we first need an understanding of the Four Noble Truths, one of the earliest teachings of the Buddha. The First of the Four Noble Truths teaches that all beings experience suffering (or discontent, or dissatisfaction, or dis-ease...) at some time. The Second Noble Truth teaches that craving, arising from our clinging, or attachment, is the cause of that discontent. The Third Truth offers hope by proclaiming that we can actually do something about our dis-ease, and the Fourth shows us the way, i.e. The Noble Eightfold Path. (For more on the latter, you may wish to visit the OBC website: [obcon.org](http://obcon.org), and click on the link “The Eightfold Path” under **Essays in Practice**.)

One of the greatest benefits of generosity is to help us begin to let go of the Second Truth’s craving—the very cause of our dissatisfaction. One way craving can be experienced is as holding back, or holding on—a kind of tension. We might think of it as a clenched fist, tightly ‘grasping’ our wealth, or time, or personal space, etc., apparently safe from the ‘depredations’ of others. To practice generosity, we literally have to begin to relax something, to let go. We might experience this as an open, offering hand. Thus generosity begins to chip away at, to convert, our deeply ingrained karmic habit of this type of tension. Willingly practicing generosity over time has a profound effect on our ability to let go, and thus on our ability to go deeper in our training. If we do our best to work on generosity, we eventually come to find that we not only feel no loss from it, but that we begin to understand that we are, in fact, its beneficiaries.

Willingly practicing generosity helps us to be aware of the very process of craving within us, and this promotes our ability to recognize and deal with all of its multitudinous forms. A synonym for generosity is unselfishness. The practice of generosity then, helps us to become less selfish, thus helping our awareness of the basic delusion of the ‘selfish self,’ and to begin to let go of that fundamental delusion.

Our fear of loss, or of not having enough, can make generosity difficult to undertake. To help us start, the Buddha-Dharma assures us that it is through simple acts of giving that we can begin to build a foundation for our religious training. When we are

able to grasp the will and embrace that assurance in faith, taking the first steps, we begin to know the benefits of generosity for ourselves. Whether we live the homeless life of monks or the life of a householder, generosity makes the heart grow brighter and helps us to open our hearts. It is a necessary element in the growth of kindness and compassion, which in turn are necessary for real peace of mind, as well as for deepening any religious practice, and the growth of wisdom.

You don't have to take my word for any of this, just try it and see what happens. You should know, however, that, as with any other aspect of training, you may need to do it more than once, and not just grudgingly, to begin to experience some of the benefits.

When practicing generosity, it is important that we do our best to be Preceptually responsible, being careful not to promote clinging or confusion in those who benefit from our offerings. In other words we need to be mindful of what we give, and to whom, and to do our best to take their circumstances into account. Sometimes it is 'generous' to say "no" to what someone wants. We would otherwise be selling the wine of delusion.

Eventually we will also need to try to let go of any expectations from our generosity including, even, of how it may be used, or that we will be known as the giver. Otherwise we are still clinging to something. If we try to practice generosity with the expectation of getting something in return, that is a form of greed, and not truly generous.

It is also wise to practice generosity toward ourselves: offering compassion, non-judgmentalism, acceptance (in the true, Preceptual, meaning of these words), as well as enough to eat, a reasonably comfortable place to live, etc. For this and other reasons, accumulating and preserving wealth, if done Preceptually, is not necessarily spiritually problematic. Craving wealth is.

The Buddha established a practice of mutual dependence between the monastic and lay Sangha. To oversimplify, the monks offer the Dharma, the Buddha's Teaching, to those who ask, and the laity offer material support to the monks. This helps all involved in Buddhist training, whether monastic or lay, to experience the benefits of generosity for ourselves, and thus grow our faith and trust in the Buddha-Dharma. So, offering our help, our time, our money, needed items, etc. at our local temple is an excellent way to practice and develop generosity in our training; and generosity, as we have seen, is a way to let go of, to convert, some of the craving which produces our suffering, thus benefiting us and ultimately all beings.