

ก้าวไปในบุญ

สมเด็จพระพุทธโฆษาจารย์

(ป. อ. ปยุตฺโต)

Growing in Merit

P. A. Payutto

(Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya)

Growing in Merit

by P. A. Payutto (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya)

translated by Robin Moore

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Anumodana – Appreciation

About five years ago, the Buddhist congregation at Wat Nyanavesakavan, both monastics and lay supporters, deemed that it was a fitting time to put concerted effort into translating Dhamma books into English and to publish them in a determined, systematic fashion. At that time, Mr. Robin Moore was entrusted with the responsibility of doing the translation work, with Khun Peeranuch Kiatsommart faithfully and generously providing all financial assistance.

Before long, in 2016, two Dhamma books translated into English were completed, namely: *The Unheralded Value of the Vinaya* and *True Education Begins with Wise Consumption*.¹ In the next two years, these were followed by another two books: *Honouring the Claim: ‘We Love the King’* and *Education Made Easy*.²

This year, 2018, four new books have been completed and are being prepared for publication, namely:

1. *May the Days and Nights Not Pass in Vain*
2. *Perfect Happiness*
3. *Growing in Merit*
4. *Prelude to Buddhadhamma: Noble Life – Healthy Society – Delightful Nature*³

The study, teaching, and propagation of the Dhamma, along with its accompanying practice and realization, whereby the Dhamma becomes embodied in individuals and society, lies at the heart of Buddhism. Translating and publishing the Dhamma are key meritorious deeds enabling this process to reach success and fulfilment.

I wish to express my appreciation to Mr. Robin Moore for performing this important work with diligence and determination.

This wholesome work has been accomplished as a ‘gift of the Dhamma’ (*dhamma-dāna*) by way of the patronage and supervision of Khun Peeranuch Kiatsommart. She has acted with devotion to the Triple Gem, enthusiasm for promoting the study and dissemination of Dhamma, and great goodwill and kindness towards practitioners of Dhammavinaya; indeed, towards all people. May I express my gratitude to Khun Peeranuch Kiatsommart for her dedication and assistance, which has enabled this gift of the Dhamma to come to fruition. These efforts and achievements promote wisdom and truth, leading to long-lasting value and benefit.

Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (P. A. Payutto)

21 September 2018

¹ Original titles: วินัย เรื่องใหญ่กว่าที่คิด & การศึกษาเริ่มต้นเมื่อคนกินอยู่เป็น.

² Original titles: ทำอย่างไร จะพูดได้เต็มปากว่า “เรารักในหลวง” & การศึกษานับง่าย.

³ Original titles: คืนวันไม่ผ่านไปเปล่า, ความสุขที่สมบูรณ์, ก้าวไปในบุญ & บทนำสู่ พุทธธรรม, respectively.

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Growing in Merit¹

Paying Respects to the Principal Buddha Image

The lay community has organized today's merit-making ceremony in honour of my birthday, but I ask that we expand the aim and purpose of this event to include Wat Nyanavesakavan in its entirety. Five years have now passed since the Ministry of Education formally designated Wat Nyanavesakavan as an official Buddhist monastery, on 19 May 1994. And recently, an important new monastic building has been built, namely the Uposatha Hall, which has come into existence as a result of all of your cooperation and collective efforts.

Moreover, the principal Buddha image was recently cast as well; it was formally enshrined on January 7th and gilded on January 12th.

This Buddha image was almost not completed on time as representatives from our monastery were so particular about what they wanted. It took many survey trips to inspect and make alterations before they were satisfied. The sculptor made about five moulds before this image was accepted. Now everyone seems to be happy.

Until recently, there has been some disagreement about this Buddha image. When it was cast and first installed in the Uposatha Hall, it was painted white and had not yet been gilded. Many of the laypeople thought that it looked very beautiful like this.

But once the gilding began, some people were disappointed; they felt that as the 'Sacred White Buddha,'² the image had been much more attractive than the gilded version, since the latter cast a problematic reflection owing to the spotlights.

The architect is now trying to address this problem by introducing three or five new spotlights. On a related note, there is the need to build a permanent pedestal for the image, as the existing plaster base is only temporary. There is the hope that fixing the new spotlights into bright reflection.

¹ See endnote A

² *Luang Por Khao.*

The essential purpose of a Buddha image is to convey the Buddha's chief attributes:³ the virtue of wisdom, the virtue of purity, and the frequently emphasized virtue of compassion.

When we bow and pay respects to the principal Buddha image, our minds can become bright and happy. People may enter the Uposatha Hall agitated, distressed, or despondent due to matters at home or issues in the outside world. But when they enter the monastery and see the Buddha image, their minds can be put at ease. The Buddha's virtues can thus bear fruit in our own hearts; the Buddha's loving-kindness generates blessings. We experience joy, contentment, satisfaction, and peace.

Generally speaking, we create Buddha images with serene, tranquil features; and most Buddha images, by way of their smile, express a quality of kindness. Moreover, they symbolize liberation and deliverance—a freedom from attachment to the world. The Buddha transcended the world, and yet he still acts as our refuge. If a Buddha image is able to convey the chief attributes of the Buddha, then it resonates in the hearts of devotees. Goodness and wholesome mental states are generated. At the very least, people can experience joy,⁴ which is one of the preliminary factors of goodness (*puñña*)⁵ arising in the hearts of Buddhists when they encounter the Buddha's teachings. For many, this includes occasions of meeting with monastics, as accords with the idiom: *Samañānañca dassanaṃ ... etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ*—‘Seeing renunciants is the highest blessing.’ Encountering monks and nuns uplifts the heart.

This initial factor of joy and clarity of mind is vital. If the mind is confused, sullen, or defiled, it is very difficult to generate and develop goodness. Moreover, joy and brightness of mind are already forms of goodness.

³ *Buddha-guṇa*.

⁴ *Pasāda*. [Trans.: can also be translated as ‘devotion,’ ‘confidence,’ ‘faith,’ ‘respect,’ ‘delight,’ ‘calm,’ ‘clarity of mind,’ ‘brightness.’]

⁵ See endnote B

Understanding the Term *Puñña*

There are many ways to generate goodness (*puñña*). The essential conditions for generating goodness lie within our own hearts. So what can we do to give rise to this initial meritorious factor of joy and brightness of mind? Today, we are reflecting on using the principal Buddha image as a source of this joy. The Buddha, however, described numerous practical methods for generating goodness and merit.

The word *puñña* is very important in the Buddha's teachings. These days, however, the understanding of this term is very limited, and sometimes even distorted.

An example of this restricted form of understanding is evident by people's interpretation of the phrase 'making merit and performing charitable acts.'⁶ Many people will understand this phrase to mean making offerings to monks. The word *puñña* here is thus limited to the concept of simply giving or making donations (*dāna*). Moreover, people believe that for the act of giving to be truly meritorious, the offerings can only be made to monks. In the Thai language, when people give to the poor or destitute, it is called merely 'charity.'⁷

In modern Thai, making merit and making charitable donations have thus been separated into two distinct concepts. Making merit (*puñña*) is giving to monks; being charitable (*dāna*) is giving to laypeople, especially to the poor.

It is important to look at these deviations in the meanings of terms, because, after a while, these new definitions become widely accepted as the norm. Yet, when one examines these terms in the original context of the Buddhist teachings, one discovers that the new definitions are incorrect. This is also true for the term *dāna*, which originally had a more broad application.

⁶ In Thai: 'tam boon tam tahn.' 'Boon' = *puñña*; 'tahn' = *dāna*.

⁷ *Dāna*.

In the Pali Canon, making offerings to the monastic *sangha* (which in modern Thai is called ‘making merit’)⁸ is simply referred to as ‘giving.’⁹ This is even true for donations made on a larger scale, whereby offerings are made to many monks, e.g.: offerings dedicated to the community of monks as a whole;¹⁰ offerings of *Kaṭhina* cloth;¹¹ and offerings of ‘forest cloth’ to the *sangha*.¹²

Anything that is given is referred to as *dāna*. Even offering construction materials to build a monastery—or offering an entire monastery—is called a ‘dwelling *dāna*’¹³ or a ‘monastic residence *dāna*.’¹⁴

Here, it needs to be remembered that giving is simply one form of making merit, of performing meritorious or virtuous deeds. We should not limit the meaning of ‘merit’ to making offerings to monks. There are numerous other methods of doing good.

This restricted way of thinking—that making donations to the poor or giving things to laypeople is only ‘giving’ and not ‘merit’—leads to all sorts of problems. In truth, all forms of giving—all forms of generosity—are classified as *dāna*; but, unquestionably, they are also forms of merit—of doing good. The difference only lies in the degree of merit.

In the scriptures, there are criteria or standards for measuring the degree of merit. In the context of giving, these criteria are as follows:

1. The intention of the giver.¹⁵
2. The virtue of the receiver.¹⁶
3. The cleanness, suitability, and value of the gift.¹⁷

⁸ ‘Tam boon’ (ทำบุญ).

⁹ *Dāna*.

¹⁰ *Saṅgha-dāna*.

¹¹ *Kaṭhina-dāna*.

¹² *Paṇṣukūlacīvara-dāna*; known as *tort pha pa* (ทอดผ้าป่า); *paṇṣukūla-cīvara* = rag-robbs; discarded cloth.

¹³ *Senāsana-dāna*.

¹⁴ *Vihāra-dāna*.

¹⁵ *Dāyaka/dāyikā*.

¹⁶ *Paṭiggāhaka*.

¹⁷ *Deyya-dhamma*; literally: ‘something suitable to be given,’ ‘something worthy as an offering.’

If the recipient is endowed with virtue and moral conduct, then the merit is increased. But if the recipient is immoral (e.g. he is a thief) the merit is little. This is because it is likely that he will rely on the gift (e.g. food) to gain strength, hereby only supporting him in his unscrupulous activities. The gift thus can potentially lead to harm.

If the gift is clean and useful, has been righteously obtained, and is appropriate and valuable to the recipient, the merit is great. For instance, regarding appropriateness: one gives robes to monks and ordinary clothing to laypeople.

In respect to the donor, the essential criterion is wholesome intention, matched with sincere commitment. And if the intention is accompanied by wisdom, the deed becomes increasingly meritorious.

In sum, all forms of giving, irrespective of whether the recipients are monks or laypeople, are classified as *dāna*. We should thus reassess the true meaning of 'merit,' thus:

1. Merit is obtained through all forms of generosity, not only by making offerings to monks.
2. There are many other means, besides giving, to make merit.

Consummate Giving

Let us now examine the scope and reach of the term *puñña*. In Pali, ‘merit-making’ is referred to as *puñña-kiriya*, or in full: *puññakiriya-vatthu*—‘basis of meritorious action.’ Those laypeople who frequent the monastery will probably remember the three bases of meritorious action:

1. *Dāna*: giving; sharing, generosity.
2. *Sīla*: moral conduct; maintaining kind, non-harmful social relationships.
3. *Bhāvanā*: mental cultivation; wisdom development; meditation.

Generosity, moral conduct, and meditation are all forms of ‘merit.’ And they represent three different stages of spiritual refinement and accomplishment.

Although moral conduct is ranked higher than giving, and mental cultivation is ranked higher than morality, it is possible for us to cultivate these three forms of merit simultaneously.

Why is it that, in Thailand, making offerings to monks called ‘merit-making,’ while giving to others is simply called ‘making a donation’? There may be several reasons for this.

When people go to the monastery, their actions are not limited to making offerings to monks. They also engage in virtuous conduct;¹⁸ in line with social customs and traditions, they compose themselves in body and speech. Restraint in body and speech, and honouring social manners and decorum, are all matters pertaining to virtuous conduct. While behaving in this way, people are abstaining from immoral, indisciplined, and harmful conduct by way of body and speech. Instead, they are acting with care and dignity, with composure and self-restraint.

¹⁸ *Sīla*.

Here, as a result of the positive atmosphere of merit-making and by establishing faith and devotion, the mind is also made wholesome and dignified. It becomes endowed with calm, joy, brightness, and contentment. At this point, mental cultivation¹⁹ has begun to be set in motion.

It helps when the monks explain the purpose and benefits of giving and how it is connected to other forms of merit-making and Dhamma practice. If we recognize these benefits and blessings of giving, and gain a deeper understanding of the truth and interconnectedness of things, wisdom will naturally arise.

The upshot of this is that, when people go to the monastery to make offerings to the monks, they end up practising all three kinds of merit: they practise generosity, observe moral precepts, and become accomplished in spiritual development—both mind development and wisdom development.²⁰ By attending to these matters correctly, their spiritual practice is unified and fully integrated.

People may initially go to the monastery with the sole aim of making offerings, but when they depart they are fully equipped with the three kinds of merit.

This being so, declaring that one is going simply to make a donation does not cover the full extent of one's activities. It is more accurate to say that one is going to make merit.

To bring the true spirit of merit to fruition, when laypeople go to the monastery to give offerings, they should thus practise all three forms of merit: besides practising generosity, they should also observe moral conduct and engage in spiritual cultivation.

¹⁹ *Bhāvanā*.

²⁰ Trans. *citta-bhāvanā* & *paññā-bhāvanā*, respectively. *Citta-bhāvanā*: training the mind, resulting in increased virtue, stability, joy, and tranquillity, accompanied by energy, mindfulness, and concentration; *paññā-bhāvanā*: developing wisdom, resulting in clear discernment of things as they exist according to truth, until the mind is liberated and no longer overshadowed by mental defilement and suffering.

Threefold Merit-Making

Here, we have the opportunity to examine whether our acts of generosity are complete. We begin by inspecting the quality of our intention.

In the scriptures, intention is separated into three kinds:

1. Initial intention:²¹ before giving, one's determination is wholesome—the mind is imbued with joy, satisfaction, and steadfastness, and is instilled with strength and confidence.

2. Intention while giving:²² during the act of giving, one is wholehearted; one establishes the mind in a sense of ease and one aspires to act with clarity and understanding.

3. Subsequent intention:²³ having made an offering or given a gift, whenever one recollects this act of generosity, one experiences delight. One reflects: 'This was well done. The gift was beneficial.' For instance, one may have made an offering to the monks, thus supporting Buddhism as a whole. One considers: 'The monks will be fortified by these offerings. They will be able to perform their religious duties and will thus help the religion to prosper. As a result, our society will abide in peace.' Whenever one remembers one's generous deeds, one is delighted and content. A traditional expression used in this context is: 'recollecting with delight.'²⁴ If, after making merit, one recollects it with delight, one obtains merit with every moment of recollection, thus increasing one's merit.

In respect to the donors, these are the three time periods when they establish and sustain intention.

²¹ *Pubba-cetanā*.

²² *Muñcana-cetanā*.

²³ *Aparāpara-cetanā*.

²⁴ See endnote C

In respect to the recipients, if they are morally upright and richly endowed with virtue, the act of giving to them will be highly meritorious because it is likely to generate great blessings, both for the donor and for the wider society.

Take the example of virtuous monks well-versed in the three trainings. They are able to use offerings to spread blessings throughout society, assisting the manyfolk. They help to propagate the Dhamma, enabling people to live at peace and to preserve the Buddha's teachings in a truly effective way.

In terms of the gift or offering, as mentioned earlier, it should be clean, useful, appropriate for the recipient, and originally obtained by righteous means.

These are the criteria we use for examination and inspection. Even though one's primary aim may be to go to the monastery to make offerings, one should strive to fulfil the other two forms of merit (i.e. moral virtue and cultivation of the heart). If one accomplishes this, one has truly made merit, in the fullest sense of the word. Otherwise, one will have merely made a donation while claiming in an indistinct and ambiguous way that the deed was 'making merit.'

When you go to the monastery to make offerings, ask yourselves: 'Have I simply made a donation, or have I truly fulfilled and consolidated the true meaning of having made merit?'

If one has genuinely engaged in merit-making, one will have accomplished all three forms of merit: the cultivation of generosity, moral virtue, and spiritual cultivation.

Comprehensive Merit-Making

At this point, let us examine some of the formal definitions of the Pali term *puñña*:

1. Purifying the mind: generally speaking, our minds are subject to contamination and impurity. When we engage in meritorious deeds (e.g. giving a gift) even at the initial moment of intention—our minds are cleansed and purified.

Purifying the mind refers to eliminating mental defilements.²⁵ Already at the first stage of merit-making (i.e. of giving) one begins to abandon greed, selfishness, miserliness and obsessive attachment to material things. The mind begins to be liberated and becomes ready to advance to higher stages of goodness. One opens the door for other wholesome qualities to be integrated into one's life. The heart is elevated.

For those people making merit and performing good deeds, their hearts increase in virtuous qualities; their lives are enriched. The more we perform meritorious deeds, the more we increase in wholesome qualities.²⁶

These days, people commonly use the expression 'quality of life.' In the past, this expression was not necessary; people already had the word 'merit.'²⁷

²⁵ *Kilesa*.

²⁶ There are numerous forms of merit, besides those already mentioned. Additional forms will be discussed below.

²⁷ See endnote D

The meaning of *puñña* encompasses all spheres of our lives. Every occasion of merit-making adds virtue and dignity to our lives. These virtues extend to our body, speech, and mind. Our bodies, speech, mind states, and even our knowledge and wisdom, are steadily refined and enhanced through the performance of meritorious deeds.

2. Fostering respectability: performing good deeds leads to respectability and venerability. People who have made much merit are worthy of respect and honour, because they are endowed with virtue and goodness. In contrast, a person void of merit is unworthy of veneration.

People who have engaged in many meritorious acts are praiseworthy and admirable. Their minds are pure and wholesome; they are brimful of virtue. Not only are they praiseworthy as individuals; the fruits of their actions are also commendable and worthy of respect.

3. A synonym for happiness. This is a definition used by the Buddha. Having performed good deeds, the mind is happy and content; this is a subtle and profound form of happiness.

Merit is a long-lasting happiness. This differs from food that we consume or external things that stimulate our senses; once we have experienced such things, they are lost and gone, and the pleasure they provided also quickly comes to an end. Sometimes, even recalling these pleasurable things brings unhappiness, because they have disappeared and are out of reach; they must be sought out anew.

Merit, on the other hand, is a happiness that reaches deep into our hearts. It is replete. It generates a delight in goodness. When we have performed meritorious deeds, the accompanying happiness is not depleted. Whenever we recollect our good deeds, we feel continuous joy and contentment. This is a durable, long-lasting happiness.

The Buddha encouraged people to study and train in goodness, saying succinctly: ‘Train in goodness’ (*puñña-sikkheyya*).²⁸

The word ‘train’ (*sikkhā*) here refers to becoming accomplished in merit; to cultivate it, bring it into being, and develop it. Merit is to be continually increased and refined.

Merit is equivalent to goodness and virtue performed via body, speech, and mind (including wisdom and understanding), and it is to be developed through training and practice.

When we cultivate these various aspects of our lives (through physical behaviour, speech, etc.), our lives become increasingly polished and dignified. This can be referred to as ‘life-development’ or ‘self-development.’ The wholesome result of such cultivation is epitomized by the term ‘merit’ itself.²⁹

Do not underestimate the scope of the term ‘merit.’ We should study this matter carefully. What goodness, what virtuous qualities, do we possess that should be developed so that the quality of our lives is enhanced and the blessings spread far and wide? Recognizing our good qualities, we make progress. For if we fail to make this effort, we get stuck and bogged down at the same old place.

Instead of getting stuck and resting on our laurels, we should strive to develop in goodness.

Although one could easily expand on all of these subjects, this basic outline on the essential principles of merit in the Buddhist teachings is designed to give people a preliminary understanding.

²⁸ It. 15-16.

²⁹ *Puñña*.

Opportunities for Making Merit

As mentioned above, there are numerous forms of merit; giving is not the only form. The most concise summary the Buddha presented on merit is the teaching on the three bases of meritorious action:³⁰

1. Giving (*dāna*)
2. Moral conduct (*sīla*)
3. Spiritual cultivation (*bhāvanā*)

Later commentators, most likely wishing to present the lay community with additional examples of merit, elaborated on this teaching of the Buddha.³¹

In order to describe further opportunities for merit-making, they added seven more factors, resulting in the ten bases of meritorious action. Following on from giving, moral conduct, and spiritual cultivation, the additional factors are:

4. Merit made by way of respectful behaviour:³² humility, courteousness, mutual respect, showing deference to elders in the community and to those who are endowed with virtue, etc. In Thai society, respect is traditionally given to ‘elders by age,’³³ ‘elders by birth,’³⁴ and ‘elders by virtue.’³⁵ Buddhism considers the final criterion, that of being an elder by virtue, to be of utmost importance.

³⁰ *Puññakiriya-vatthu.*

³¹ See endnote E

³² *Apacāyana-maya.*

³³ *Vaya-vuddhi.*

³⁴ *Jāti-vuddhi.*

³⁵ *Guṇa-vuddhi.*

Respectful behaviour is considered meritorious because it is a means by which we incline towards self-training and self-discipline. And it helps to foster a social atmosphere of benevolence and mutual assistance, leading to peace and wellbeing in society.

If there is a lack of mutual respect and deference, society becomes troubled and tumultuous. People will tend to be severe and rigid, and they will have a proclivity towards disparagement, aggression, and hostility.

In contrast, if there is courteousness and respect, people's minds will be soft and gentle. These qualities are conducive to spiritual training. Moreover, they lead to harmonious co-existence and a happy and virtuous social environment. Wholesomeness takes root, both in the individual and in society.

5. Merit made by way of serving others:³⁶ offering assistance; helping others. This factor is a good example of how making merit is not dependent on material wealth; everyone, both rich and poor, has the opportunity to be of service to others.

In former days, it was common for people to combine their efforts and cooperate when communal work needed to be done. In Thailand, the centre of these activities was very often the monastery. Whenever there was building work or a communal event at the monastery, people would pool their resources and help out; everyone would offer their services in one way or another until the task was completed successfully.

Today is a good example. Many individuals have turned up to make merit through wholesome service, in countless ways. Soldiers, policemen, ordinary citizens, and even children, have come to help out, offer service, and perform good deeds together.

Looking back, there have been many people who have helped plant trees, clean up the monastery, build the roads and paths, and taken archival photographs, for example. All of these deeds count as acts of wholesome service.

In sum, this mutual assistance based on an intention to do good, help out, be of service to others, and bring communal deeds to successful completion, is a form of merit.

³⁶ *Veyyāvacca-maya*.

6. Merit made by way of sharing one's goodness with others:³⁷ enabling others to share in one's goodness and to participate in one's merit-making activities.

Here, when we engage in good deeds, we are not possessive of this goodness. We encourage others to share in the goodness by participating in these acts. Both these secondary participants and the original person offering the opportunity to participate can increase in goodness as a result.

The goodness of the person who opens the door for others to participate does not decrease. One may assume that others are competing for our goodness, but this is not true. The opposite is true: our merit is only amplified.

The Buddha therefore stated that, of two people, one who does good deeds alone and another who both does good deeds and encourages others to help, the latter person obtains greater merit. By enabling others to share in our good actions, our merit and blessings increase.

7. Merit made by way of rejoicing in the goodness of others:³⁸ one acknowledges, delights in, and applauds the good deeds of others. When other people perform wholesome deeds, we rejoice and express our appreciation.

In former times, there was a custom for laypeople who were on their way to perform meritorious deeds at the monastery, to pass by the homes of their neighbours and say to them: 'I'm off to make merit. I'll share this merit with you.' Those who heard these words would answer: 'Thank you. I rejoice and express my gratitude!' Rejoicing in the goodness of others is a means to exercise and train one's disposition of mind. Instead of reacting to others' good deeds by way of envy or irritation, one experiences appreciation and delight.

By rejoicing in and appreciating the goodness of others, we thus grow in merit.

³⁷ *Pattidāna-maya.*

³⁸ *Pattānumodanā-maya.*

Merit Fulfilled by Wisdom

8. Merit made by way of listening to the Dhamma:³⁹ Dhamma here refers to those key teachings that engender wisdom and provide us with essential principles for skilful living and wholesome behaviour.

If we are deficient in listening skills and unskilled at seeking out knowledge—if we fail to make inquiries, listen to Dhamma teachings, read Dhamma books, etc.—our spiritual progress may be stunted or reach a dead-end. It will be difficult for us to grow in merit.

This principle of listening to the Dhamma helps us to understand important spiritual principles and to discover new opportunities, including additional methods of making merit. Furthermore, it induces us to seek out useful knowledge and to develop in wisdom.

9. Merit made by way of teaching the Dhamma:⁴⁰

Although teaching the Dhamma to others is a form of merit, the accompanying intention needs to be correct. The scriptures confirm that, if one's intention is tainted by seeking personal profit (e.g. material gain or fame) the positive results will be diminished. If, on the other hand, one determines to teach the Dhamma so that the laypeople might acquire a proper understanding, establish right view, derive genuine benefit, and truly prosper in their lives, then the person teaching the Dhamma also receives blessings.

This factor also applies to the laypeople. They can practise it by sharing and teaching the Dhamma to their children and grandchildren, introducing them to what is upright and virtuous, and enabling them to develop generosity, moral conduct, and meditation. This form of merit-making begins at home.

³⁹ *Dhammasavana-maya.*

⁴⁰ *Dhammadesanā-maya.*

If the subject we are imparting is abstruse or is a topic that our listeners have never before taken an interest in, we must hone our skills at finding effective ways to teach and advise. By doing so, our students, children, etc. can gain wisdom, establish themselves in righteous conduct, and mature into virtuous human beings. By witnessing this, we ourselves will rejoice. The more we develop this form of merit, the happier we become.

10. Merit made by way of making one's views upright:⁴¹ this refers to developing proper ways of contemplation, correct understanding, and right view.

Right view needs to be continually developed. While engaged in any activity, we should reflect and consider whether our deeds are performed with correct understanding. For instance, when giving a gift, we ask ourselves whether our act of giving is being done correctly. We may be surprised by how often charitable acts are performed in a faulty or incorrect fashion.

Another example is moral conduct. People sometimes observe moral precepts by grasping on to the letter of the rule or by following traditional models without any genuine understanding. When we listen to Dhamma teachings, we have the opportunity to adapt and rectify our views and understanding. By doing this, all the other factors of merit-making will also be aligned in a correct manner.

Making one's views upright is of vital importance. We should attend to this matter constantly. All of our actions should be accompanied by right view and right understanding.

These are the ten bases of meritorious action. Of these ten, the fundamental factors are *dāna*, *sīla*, and *bhāvanā*. The remaining seven factors are merely an extension of these three, provided to elucidate the meaning of merit-making and reveal additional ways in which merit can be developed.

⁴¹ *Diṭṭhju-kamma*.

True Merit Radiates Happiness

Here, we can examine how the additional factors of merit are classified. Factors four and five⁴² are classified as part of moral conduct (*sīla*). This is because the qualities of courteousness, respect, and deference, and the act of serving others, pertain to our relationship with other people in society.

The sharing of merit with others or offering others the opportunity to participate in merit-making⁴³ is classified as a part of giving (*dāna*).

The definition of ‘giving’ here is broad. It does not refer merely to giving material things. Here, meritorious acts of generosity also encompass including others in wholesome deeds—giving them the opportunity to be involved in doing good. Moreover, rejoicing in the goodness of others is similarly a meritorious act of generosity and is classified as part of giving.⁴⁴

Factors eight and nine—listening to the Dhamma and teaching the Dhamma—are classified as part of spiritual cultivation (*bhāvanā*). They pertain to both mind development and wisdom development, in particular to the latter, which has a direct bearing on the final factor of straightening out one’s views.

Making one’s views upright is linked to all the other factors. Right view is required when engaging in all forms of meritorious actions. Without right view, our good actions will be lacking.

⁴² *Apacāyana-maya* & *veyyāvacca-maya*: merit made by way of respectful behaviour and by way of serving others.

⁴³ *Pattidāna-maya*.

⁴⁴ *Pattānumodanā-maya*.

How may good actions be lacking? Occasionally, while performing good deeds, one part of a person's heart is wholesome, while another part is tainted (e.g. by covetousness). A person may set his or her mind to doing good, but part of the mind is still confined by greed, anxious about obtaining some form of personal reward. Granted, one still makes merit, but it is tied up with negative, unwholesome states. This subject thus requires care and caution.

If, however, right view accompanies our actions, this problem is avoided; we perform good actions with clear understanding. For instance, we know the true objectives of giving. Endowed with right view and clear understanding, our merit is complete, encompassing all spheres of life, i.e. extending to our body, speech, mind states, and to our faculty of wisdom.

We use our bodies to perform meritorious actions. Similarly, we use our speech, say by providing encouragement and counsel. Our minds become peaceful and bright, as our intention is imbued with faith and other good qualities. Our wisdom is engaged, reflecting on the reasons for acting and on the best means to accomplish our goals. The deeper our understanding of the intentions, objectives, and benefits of our actions, the more spacious our minds will be and the greater the goodness that we will realize.

Take the example of offering food and scholarships to the monks. When making these offerings, laypeople should understand the responsibilities of the *sangha*—the monastic community.

Upon reflection, the laypeople will recognize that the monks have three main responsibilities, namely: to study the *Dhammavinaya*, to practise according to the principles of *Dhammavinaya* they have learned, and to teach and propagate the Dhamma.⁴⁵

The reason for offering requisites to the monks is to enable them to perform these three religious duties. Having performed these duties, the monks themselves develop and grow in the three trainings, and the knowledge they have acquired benefits many other people in society.

⁴⁵ See endnote F

The upshot is that Buddhism as a religion is sustained and maintained for the true welfare and happiness of the manyfolk. Our offerings thus help to maintain the stability and prosperity of Buddhism.

With this recognition, laypeople will see that their good actions do not affect merely the individual monk to whom they have made offerings. Rather, it extends out and affects the entire religion.

When the religion as an institution is stable, the Dhamma—the Buddha’s teachings—are sustained. When the Dhamma is disseminated far and wide, it is a boon for the people in the wider society. When people understand and practise the Dhamma, there is peace in society.

The structure and wellbeing of society is sustained because there are enough people who understand the Dhamma and apply this understanding in their lives, at least sufficiently so to sustain and preserve the Buddha’s teachings.⁴⁶

When laypeople recognize that the offerings they make to an individual monk have positive repercussions extending out to Buddhism as a whole and to the wider society, they will experience a greater sense of expansiveness and delight. Whenever they recollect their generous acts, they will be happy. This is the meaning of making one’s views upright.⁴⁷ By having wisdom engage with the process, merit and goodness are augmented.

Right view enables us to discover new and improved ways of making merit. We are equipped with the tools for discerning how our good actions can generate ever expansive blessings. In this way, laypeople can become accomplished in what is called ‘giving born of investigation’;⁴⁸ they reflect and inquire before giving.

Although there are many more facets to merit-making, what has been presented here provides a suitable introduction to the various means by which people can grow in goodness.

⁴⁶ Here, the author is talking about Thai society; it could be claimed, however, that every society is sustainable because there are members of the society who have an understanding of Dhamma, in the sense of an understanding of truth.

⁴⁷ *Diṭṭhiju-kamma*.

⁴⁸ *Viceyya-dāna*.

Laypeople & Monks – Appreciation vs. Inducement

After laypeople have performed meritorious deeds, it is customary for the monks to express their appreciation (*anumodanā*): they acknowledge, applaud, and rejoice in these wholesome deeds.

Part of showing this appreciation is mentioning to the laypeople the favourable results⁴⁹ springing from their good actions: the results stemming from giving, moral conduct, and meditation. The monks point out that these positive results may occur in this life or the next.

The Buddha too would frequently illustrate the advantages and blessings accrued through meritorious actions. He would begin by describing those advantages and blessings that are visible in the immediate present. Only then would he conclude by pointing out the fruits ripening in the future, e.g. that after death one may go to heaven.

One instance of this teaching method can be found in the Buddha's description of the five blessings accrued by virtuous conduct (*sīla*), namely:

1. Prosperity: by means of vigilance and perseverance, virtuous individuals generate material wealth.

Those people devoid of moral conduct, e.g. those addicted to the 'paths of ruin,'⁵⁰ indulge in depravity and allow their lives to fall into decline. They are negligent and idle when it comes to making a living. They succumb to heedlessness, lose their wealth, and end up in hardship.

⁴⁹ Trans.: *ānisaṃsa*: 'favourable result,' 'blessing,' 'advantage.'

⁵⁰ *Apāya-mukha*.

Virtuous people, on the other hand, abstain from immoral and dissolute behaviour. Diligent and industrious, they work hard and focus on their profession. They therefore are likely to generate wealth.

2. Praise: a good reputation spreads far and wide. Honest, virtuous people are admired and praised by others. In present times, great importance is given to finding honest and trustworthy people to help govern the country. Such sincere, virtuous people will find a degree of good standing in the eyes of others.

Although a person's good reputation does not rest solely on moral conduct, the support and validation one receives by acting virtuously can function as an important foundation for people's lives.

3. Courage: upright, virtuous people can enter any assembly undaunted and with confidence.

4. Mindfulness: at the time of dying, virtuous people possess mindfulness; they are not swept away by delusion at the moment of death.

5. Rebirth in heaven: after death, virtuous people are reborn in heaven.

This is an example of how the Buddha pointed out the advantages of a specific spiritual quality. Monks sometimes use this theme of moral conduct as a teaching for the laity, describing the positive results of making merit. When the laypeople comprehend the benefits of virtuous behaviour, they are gladdened and delighted. Their merit increases, because wisdom and understanding have become engaged in the dynamic. They grow in confidence, determination, and inner radiance.

If, however, the monks speak to the laypeople before they act, by urging them to perform meritorious deeds so that the monks themselves may obtain some form of reward in the future, the consequences are potentially the opposite.

If the laity perform good deeds, and the monks later describe the advantages of these deeds, this acknowledgement and appreciation is referred to as *anumodanā*. This is the monks' usual response. But if the monks speak prior to these actions, with a wish that they themselves may be the recipients of offerings, there is a risk that the monks' behaviour falls under the category of *anesanā*.

Anesanā may be defined as 'pursuit of material gain' or 'earning a living improperly.' In respect to monks, this term is used to refer to wrong livelihood.⁵¹

The term 'wrong livelihood' can be used in respect to both laypeople and monks. In respect to monks, it refers to various forms of *anesanā*, e.g.: cajoling, inveigling, or hinting with the wish that the laity offer gifts or make donations. Such behaviour is perilous.

In sum, later appreciation is *anumodanā*; prior inducement is *anesanā*.

⁵¹ *Micchā-ājīva*.

Making Merit is Possible in Every Situation

As mentioned earlier, it is possible—and suitable—to perform all three kinds of merit-making together. It is not the case that we need to focus exclusively on either giving, moral conduct, or meditation alone.

When laypeople go to the monastery, besides making offerings, they should also undertake moral conduct and carry out spiritual cultivation. Only then can we say that merit-making has been accomplished in the fullest sense. Otherwise, people will only obtain a fraction of the available merit.

No matter what activity people are engaged in, they are able to perform these three kinds of merit jointly and simultaneously. Some people choose to go to the monastery, with the conviction that the *sangha* is the supreme ‘field of merit.’⁵² Yet the scriptures confirm that even within the context of one’s daily work and occupation, these three kinds of merit can be developed.

While engaged in work, laypeople may consider using their earnings in the following way: ‘Ah, we’ve made some more money. Let’s use a portion of this money to make offerings, do good, and perform charitable acts, helping our fellow human beings.’ This very thought—this ‘intention to give’⁵³—brightens and purifies the mind. While making a living, people are thus able to simultaneously practise generosity.

When engaged in work, we should determine to accomplish our tasks honestly and uprightly, to fulfil our professional responsibilities, and to conform to an established code of ethics. If we can perform our work with this kind of integrity, we are, in effect, observing virtuous conduct.⁵⁴

⁵² *Puññakkhetta.*

⁵³ *Dāna-cetanā.*

⁵⁴ *Silaṃ rakkhati.*

When working, we can train our minds. We develop perseverance and concentration, making our minds more peaceful and attentive. Despite the interference and disturbance of sense impressions, we are still capable of training the mind to be calm and stable, and to maintain kindness and mental clarity. This is called engaging in mental cultivation.⁵⁵

On a higher level, we are able to cultivate wisdom, i.e. we engage in work with discriminative knowledge,⁵⁶ reflecting on those causes that will lead to beneficial results; we recognize what sort of actions lead to genuine wellbeing.

In this process of wisdom cultivation⁵⁷ within the context of work, one observes the dynamic of change in regard to external circumstances and to those people with whom one interacts. Developing skill at contemplation and reflection, one understands oneself and the entire world with greater insight and clarity. Moreover, one gains a better understanding of how to relate to life in general.

Take the medical profession for example. Doctors constantly meet with and observe various patients. For instance, one person has certain symptoms, another person has other symptoms; one person is scowling, another person is smiling; one person's words are easy to understand, another person's words make no sense; one person is strong at heart, another person is despondent. This is how doctors observe the lives and conditions of their patients.

When one is skilled at observation—using experiences to gain knowledge and insight, rather than responding to external encounters purely in an emotional and reactive way—one begins to see things as they truly are: life is this way; the world is like this. Instead of getting caught up in unpleasant emotions and feelings, one gleans wisdom from these encounters, and one learns how to relate to things properly. This is yet another stage of wisdom cultivation.

⁵⁵ *Citta-bhāvanā*.

⁵⁶ *Vicāraṇa-ñāṇa*.

⁵⁷ *Paññā-bhāvanā*.

Or take the example of journalism. When journalists go out in search of news stories, even be it to a monastery, they should observe the following principles:

1. They should aspire to broadcast news—knowledge and information—in order to benefit the wider public. Making this aspiration is a form of generosity (*dāna*). They do not simply go through the motions of doing their job, thinking only of their paycheque or trying to get rich. If their acts are based exclusively on these selfish intentions, no merit will arise.

If journalists establish a spirit of providing help and goodwill, aiming to discover useful and beneficial news stories that will inform and edify the public, the factor of giving has been accomplished.

2. They should do their work honestly and uprightly, printing news which is fair and true. They should ensure that there is a minimum amount of distortion or inaccuracy in their news reports. Here, the factor of virtuous conduct (*sīla*) has been accomplished.

3. Having submitted a news report, there are occasions when it adversely affects certain individuals or parties, giving rise to animosity. But, no matter how much flak they get, journalists should make their minds steadfast and composed. If they are able to establish this inner stability, which accepts whatever criticism or disapproval comes their way, to establish firm mindfulness, and to maintain wholesome conduct, they have accomplished the factor of mental cultivation (*citta-bhāvanā*).

Every profession requires a body of knowledge and the use of intelligence. Each person's occupation is the domain for their development of wisdom.

If journalists prepare their news reports by drawing on discriminative knowledge—selecting appropriate issues and stories—their media presentations will surely be useful and beneficial to the public. The more wisdom they apply, the more benefit will people derive. Here, they have accomplished the factor of wisdom cultivation (*paññā-bhāvanā*).

More than most other people, journalists and reporters have the opportunity to meet a wide range of people: people from different groups and factions, of all ages, genders, and social classes, and from all walks of life, with varying dispositions, conventions, ethical standards, beliefs, etc.

In these circumstances, if they are able to examine and discern these encounters correctly, they will develop a deep understanding of people, leading to insight into the world at large. They will also acquire the general skill of dealing with situations positively. As a consequence, their minds will be spacious and at ease, which is a blessing for themselves and will be an advantage for undertaking their work.

This demonstrates how journalists can develop giving, moral conduct, and spiritual cultivation in a unified way.

There are many ways to practise generosity. And there are multiple ways of making merit pertaining to all dimensions of human life. Even the expression ‘quality of life’ is incorporated in the term ‘merit.’ As mentioned earlier, Thai people in former times used the term ‘boon’ (บุญ) as an umbrella term for all forms of goodness. Accordingly, we should beware not to overly limit the definition of ‘merit.’

If we have a clear understanding of the meaning and significance of this term, and if we correspondingly act wisely, the fruits of our good actions will multiply.

Supreme Merit

In summary, I wish to reiterate that ‘making one’s views upright,⁵⁸ so as to align with right view, should accompany every act of merit-making, because it functions to harmonize with every other factor mentioned above.

Applying right view begins with generosity. We ask ourselves: ‘Do I have a proper understanding when giving and offering things?’ At the very least, we understand the real purpose and benefits of giving.

The Buddha taught the laypeople that, when they offer a gift to the *sangha*,⁵⁹ they should recognize the genuine value and objective of such an offering. If the laypeople are able to reflect in this way, they will derive the following benefits:

1. The mind will be expansive and radiant, and goodness will increase.
2. Their meditation will advance and progress, not getting stuck or stagnating.

Right view is thus of paramount importance. Here, only a basic outline of this principle has been presented, enough to illustrate how one should attempt to integrate it into every kind of meritorious action, ensuring that these actions are performed with correct discernment and understanding. Moreover, we should be prepared to constantly adjust our views and beliefs in order to align them closer to the truth of things.

This adjustment and fine-tuning of views is accomplished by steady and consistent learning, by regularly listening to and reading Dhamma.

On a final note, the Buddha additionally separated merit (*puñña*) into two kinds: *opadhika-puñña* and *nirūpadhi-puñña*.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *Diṭṭhju-kamma*.

⁵⁹ *Saṅghadāna*.

⁶⁰ Also spelled *anopadhika-puñña* or *anūpadhika-puñña*.

Opadhika-puñña can be translated as ‘merit comprised of *upadhi*’⁶¹ or ‘merit which generates the five aggregates.’ This refers to the merit of worldly beings, who still wish for various forms of reward; it is still adulterated by mental impurity. The Buddha generally used this term in respect to laity.⁶²

The Buddha reminded his disciples, however, that they should advance to the stage of ‘blameless goodness,’⁶³ which is equated with ‘undefiled merit.’⁶⁴

This is a merit that is pure and free of entanglement; it stems from intention completely purified of all mental defilement—from a bright and luminous mind. Here, a person’s actions are perfectly aligned with the aims and objectives of doing a good deed. No greed, hatred, or delusion lurks in the shadows or exerts any influence whatsoever.

To be free of delusion, we must make persistent, continuous effort. The important thing is not to falter. Do not give up. If we can do this, we will surely reach the state of goodness which results in utter freedom from entanglement and suffering.

A vital factor involved in the cultivation of merit is wisdom. One definition of *puñña* is ‘that which purifies the mind.’ But for goodness or merit to effectively purify the mind, wisdom must be engaged: true purification occurs by way of insight.⁶⁵ The supreme kind of merit issues in wisdom, or it could even be said that the supreme merit is wisdom. In the end, merit (*puñña*) and wisdom (*paññā*) converge and are united as one.

If, while engaged in an activity, you accomplish both the making of merit and the cultivation of wisdom, Buddhism will be developed within yourselves, and you will develop in Buddhism.

When performing a meritorious deed, ensure that you acquire more than simply merit; make sure you also grow in wisdom. This way, merit and wisdom are combined.

⁶¹ See endnote G

⁶² Trans.: this would be in respect to unenlightened laypeople.

⁶³ *Nirūpadhi-kusala*.

⁶⁴ *Anopadhika-puñña*.

⁶⁵ *Vipassanā*.

Wisdom enables merit to be perfected and to be truly effective to the point of evolving into the supreme form of merit, that is, merit that is blameless and pure.⁶⁶

This talk has aimed to show some of the important facets of merit-making, both in terms of the linguistic background of the word *puñña* and in terms of traditional Buddhist manifestations of this virtue.

As mentioned earlier, the Buddha encouraged people to study and train in goodness. In the sutta where he teaches the three bases of meritorious action⁶⁷ (namely: meritorious action consisting in giving,⁶⁸ meritorious action consisting in moral conduct,⁶⁹ and meritorious action consisting in spiritual development⁷⁰) he finishes with a series of verses that begin: *puññameva so sikkheyya* = ‘Let that person train in doing good....’⁷¹

We should study and practise so as to grow and advance in all things virtuous. But do not be content with simply doing good; our good deeds should be seen as a foundation, as capital with which we can grow ever further in spiritual wealth. Our goodness will thus lead to fulfilment and perfection, as described above.

May I express my gratitude to all of the laypeople who have come today to join in this auspicious event—which we can call a ‘rice-flour doll’ celebration—and to participate in making merit.⁷²

⁶⁶ *Nirūpadhi.*

⁶⁷ *Puññakiriyā-vatthu.*

⁶⁸ *Dānamaya puññakiriyā-vatthu.*

⁶⁹ *Sīlamaya puññakiriyā-vatthu.*

⁷⁰ *Bhāvanāmaya puññakiriyā-vatthu.*

⁷¹ It. 15-16.

⁷² See endnote H

Endnote

- A Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (Ven. P. A. Payutto; at the time he held the title Phra Dhammapīṭaka) gave this talk at a merit-making ceremony organized by the lay community at Wat Nyanavesakavan, Buddhamonthon, Nakhon Pathom, on Sunday 17 January 2000, marking his fifth 12-year cycle (60th birthday), and also marking the 5th Anniversary of the formal establishment of Wat Nyanavesakavan, along with the completion of the Uposatha Hall with its principal Buddha image.
- B Trans.: it is valid to say that this entire talk is about *puñña*, which is traditionally translated as ‘merit.’ In my experience, the English word ‘merit’ is sometimes used in a slightly derogatory sense, referring to people who want to ‘cash in,’ either in the present or in the future, on some good deeds that they have performed—a form of *quid pro quo*. For this reason, I usually translate *puñña* as ‘goodness.’ Other translations include: ‘meritorious action,’ ‘virtue,’ ‘happiness,’ ‘joy,’ ‘boon,’ and ‘good fortune.’ On a related note, the author often uses the compound ‘boon-guson’ (บุญกุศล; *puñña-kusala*; literally ‘goodness & wholesomeness’) to refer to this quality of merit or goodness. In this book, when encountering the words ‘merit’ and ‘goodness,’ the reader can imply that *puñña* is being referred to.
- C Note the commentarial explanation of the bases of meritorious action (*puññakiriyā-vatthu*):
Pubbabhāge pariccāgakāle pacchā somanassacittena anussaraṇe cāti tisu kāleṣu vuttanayeneva pavattacetanā dānamayaṃ puññakiriyāvattu nāma.
The mind operating in the aforementioned manner in the three time periods, namely, the beginning interval, the time of giving, and when recollecting afterwards with a mind of delight, is called “meritorious action consisting in giving”. E.g. ItA. II. 23; DhsA. 157; VbhA. 143.
Here, instead of the complete ‘recollecting with a mind of delight’ I have used the abbreviation ‘recollecting with delight.’
- D Trans.: the author is referring to the Thai language: ‘quality of life’ = คุณภาพชีวิต; ‘merit’ = บุญ.
Here, a quote from a webpage at Factum.at: ‘Quality of life is a concept, which in recent years, has generated a great deal of interest but it is not only a notion of the twentieth century. Rather it dates back to philosophers like Aristotle (384-322 BC) who wrote about “the good life” and “living well” and how public policy can help to nurture it. Much later, in 1889, the term quality of life was used in a statement by Seth: “...we must not regard the mere quantity, but also the quality of the ‘life’ which forms the moral end” (in Smith, 2000).’
Although the original definition of the English term ‘merit,’ namely: ‘what is deserved,’ ‘something that entitles one to recompense,’ ‘spiritual credit received for good works,’ etc., is most commonly used, its connotation as ‘worthiness,’ ‘excellence’ is quite old, stemming from the early 14th century. In this text, to correspond with the Thai and Pali, I have often equated it with the term ‘goodness.’
- E The commentators interpreted and elucidated the meaning of the Buddha’s words in the Tipiṭaka. [Trans.: the Pali word for commentator is *aṭṭhakathācariya*; the word for commentary is *atthakathā*. Technically, the term *atthakathā* is reserved specifically for explications of the Buddha’s words or of words contained in the Tipiṭaka. This begins with the Buddha’s elucidations of his own teachings. It also includes explanations

provided by the Buddha's great disciples. In brief, there are three generations of commentaries, from three time periods:

- *Pali Aṭṭhakathā*, which was passed down from the Buddha's time. It was brought to Sri Lanka by Ven. Mahinda Thera in the 3rd century BE (343-243 BC). It has now been completely lost.
- *Sinhalese Aṭṭhakathā* translated from the original *Pali Aṭṭhakathā*. It too has vanished.
- *Pali Aṭṭhakathā* translated from the *Sinhalese Aṭṭhakathā*. It was begun by Ven. Buddhaghosa circa 950 BE (407 CE). This is the commentary existing at this time.

The texts referred to by Theravada Buddhists as 'Commentaries' (i.e. those texts containing the essential *atthakathā*) also contain supplementary material, including opinions by later commentators and additional stories, historical accounts, and information.]

- F Trans.: the *Dhammavinaya* is another name for the Buddha's teachings as a whole. It is sometimes translated as the Dhamma & Discipline. It encompasses his formal teachings on absolute truth and the way this truth can be applied to social conventions. When capitalized, the *Vinaya* refers to the monastic set of rules, but the term *vinaya* applies equally to all people, both monastics and laity.
- G Trans.: the definition of *upadhi* in Phra Payutto's *Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology*: 'entanglement, something contaminated by mental defilement (*kilesa*), something mixed up with mental defilement. 1. the body; 2. a basis and support for suffering, i.e.: sense desire (*kāma*), mental defilement (*kilesa*), the five aggregates (*pañca-khandha*), and volitional formations (*abhisankhāra*).' Ven. Nāṇamoli Thera translates *upadhi* as 'essentials of existence.'
- H Trans.: the author here is referring to a story from the commentaries (the *Piṭṭhādīhālikapetavatthuvannaṇā*; PvA. 4). In sum: A granddaughter of the wealthy merchant Anāthapiṇḍika had a doll made out of baked rice-flour that she adored, treating it as her own child. One day, the doll fell on the floor and broke. The young girl was in terrible distress and was inconsolable. When Anāthapiṇḍika heard what had happened, instead of trying to console her by saying he would have another doll made, he told her that he would make merit on the doll's behalf. He subsequently invited the Buddha and a large gathering of monks to come to his house on the following day in order to partake of a meal. When the meal was finished, the Buddha spoke verses of appreciation and explained the benefits of performing meritorious deeds and dedicating the merit to the deceased.

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