THE SUPREMACY OF DANAPARAMITA FOR THE BUDDHIST LAITY IN DAILY LIFE

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Abstrak:

Budhisme mengundang setiap pengikutnya untuk ikut menghentikan kesengsaraan melalui jalan pencerahan. Dalam tradisi Budhisme pencerahan tidak dapat tercapai hanya dengan tindakan baik yang biasa. Pencerahan mengandaikan kesempurnaan tindakan baik ("*Parami*" or *Paramita*"). Karena salah satu syaratnya adalah meninggalkan harta benda duniawi dan "menarik diri", bagaimana kaum awam (bukan *sangha*) dapat memenuhi kewajiban keagamaan mereka di tengah masyarakat dan tanggungjawab hidup seharihari?

Key Words:

Cattari Ariyasaccan, Parami, awam, dana, Pencerahan

1. Introduction

The center or the heart of the teaching of the Buddha is the Four Noble Truths (*Cattari Ariyasaccani*), namely: 1) *Dukkha* (all sentient beings are subject to suffering), 2) *Samudaya* (the arising or origin of suffering), 3) *Nirodha* (the cessation of suffering), 3) *Magga*, the way leading to cessation of suffering. All forms of suffering and the continuity of sentient beings arise from "thirst, desire, greed, and craving, which manifest themselves in various ways.¹

Every faithful Buddha's followers will try to cease the suffering, the round of birth and death, by realizing *Nibbana* or Enlightenment. According to Buddhist tradition, the Enlightenment cannot be realized through an ordinary meritorious act. The Enlightenment assumes "*Parami*" or *Paramita*," perfection of meritorious acts for attaining it.² The condition of the *Paramis* is *Abhinihara* or the great aspiration.³ There are eight qualifications necessary for someone who makes this great aspiration: 1) be a human being, 2) be a male, 3) be able to attain Arrahantship in that life itself, 4) meet Buddha personally, 5) be one who has renounced the household life, 6) have attained to *Jhana*, 7) be self-sacrificing in dedication, and 8) be of great determination to become a Buddha.⁴

Since the emergence of Buddhism, there is problem on how the Buddhist laity can fulfill their religious duty in their daily lives, especially regarding to the requirement of renunciation of life. Their lives are meant to be actively involved in societal life.⁵ How can they practice to renounce life, while they must live and more over serve the mundane social lives? What kind of value system that they must live on to carry out this religious duty in their lives? There are many difficulties that the laity must face, when on one side they must live in such mundane society, yet on the other side they must live out such a precious value system, which society will not always accept the value, or even they themselves aren't always familiar with.⁶

Although there is such problem in the history of Buddhism, it does not mean that Buddhism is not suitable for those who do not have plenty of time for practicing meditation and contemplation. Nor it is true that there is not any Buddhist teaching for the Buddhist laity to be able to live out Buddha's teaching in their daily life. The first part of this paper will deal with this problem and try to present the development of how the Buddhist tradition answers this problem.

Based on the history of Mahayana Buddhism Tradition, this problem seems to be easier to find its answer. The nature and the characteristics of Mahayana Buddhism can be summarized as a vision of attaining Buddha-hood, the ultimate goal, for the benefit of all sentient beings. It is also called as "Bodhisattva ideal". The renounced life has been interpreted in wide view and nicely integrated with altruistic trust, which in some degree, certainly assumes a real encounter with others and an active involvement in social life.⁷

Based on Bodhisattva idea in Mahayana Buddhism tradition, this paper therefore dare to consider that all persons, including the laity, who are willingly to serve, to practice, and to promote the benefit of others in their society should be understood as Bodhisattva in nature, or at least they are living on the step of *Bodhisattvamarga* (Bodhisattva Path). This paper then will focus itself to the idea ever presented by Santideva on *Budhisattvamarga*, especially on *Danaparamita* (Perfection of Giving) as the most important step of *Paramitas* in *Bodhisattvamarga*.⁸ The idea of Santideva, one of great Buddhist thinkers, on *Danaparamita*, in his books "*Siksasamuccaya* and *Siksasamuccayakarika*", is wonderfully presented by Richard Mahoney in his Master thesis.⁹ Santideva's idea apparently will be the most inspiring, meaningfull, and affirming for the life of the laity, especially when they must actively serve the need of the social life. By focusing itself on issue of the laity, it does not mean that this paper look down on the role of *Sangha* in the social life. The *Sangha* certainly can learn from the presented idea of *Danaparamita*. It is impossible for this paper to provide a comprehensive answer for such "altruistic" question ever raised. Therefore this paper is still very open for further comment, information, and inspiration. Although this paper can be viewed as merely a first step of its kind, hopefully this paper will be fruitful for (the writer) further research on this matter.

2. The Development of the Answer to the Problem of Renunciation for the Laity

2.1. The Earliest Answer

In the early Buddhism, it was realized that for some people it is easy to practice renunciation of life, going to the forest of remote area and concentrate themselves on practicing their religious duties. At the same time, some might have practical difficulties. Although a renounced life has a certain value, Venerable Sariputta ever said that it is totally wrong if this religious duty of renunciation just being narrowly understood as physically fleeing of one's own self from society. According to him, living in a forest and devoting oneself to ascetic practice, yet full of impure thought, is much inferior compare to those who live in city or village, without practicing any ascetic discipline, but with pure mind.¹⁰ In the Buddhist thought, the main important thing is realizing the pure mind for enlightenment, not physical escapism.

Moreover, it is clearly understood that based on the purpose of the Buddha Gautama himself, enlightenment as the goal of Buddhist life, is not for self-enjoyment but more for the salvation of others. One of the basic teachings of the Buddha Gautama is compassion, love, and service for others. Therefore the main value of Buddhism is not in the act of renunciation itself.

2.2. Dana as a Religious Act

After the rapid agricultural surplus, there are at least three functions of Dana in Indian society: 1) as a means of paying off debts to the ancestors, gods, or sages; 2) as one of the anti-dotes against impure motive of accumulation of wealth and its social evil impacts; 3) as a means of re-distribution of social wealth. In this context, "*Dana*" or "giving"¹¹ is then considered as an important virtue and method of spiritual training, especially on training of the laity from detachment.¹²

Richard Gombrich noticed that in ancient Buddhism the nature of the Buddhist laity could be described as those who have duty to respect and to provide material support for the *Sangha* community, the holy men of whatever "path".¹³ Dana had become the nature of the laity and the major religious

duty that the laity has to perform. Chun, Jang-Kil said, "to be a Buddhist lay person in ancient India, lay Buddhist did not necessarily engaged in studying Buddhist doctrines or activities in a strict sense."¹⁴ It is well appreciated if the laity pronounce vow of refuge to the three jewels of Buddhism, practicing five percepts or eight-fold rules (or ten rules).¹⁵ However all of these practices are voluntarily compliances, without any attempt to enforce as rules for the laity, nor imply any penalties to those who violated the precepts.

It is the duty of the *Sangha* to preserve and study the *Dharma*. In return for the service of the laity, the *Sangha* provided them with spiritual assistance and education. This mutual support has been practiced up to nowadays in many places.

2.3. The Development of the Idea of Dana in Mahayana Buddhism

In the course of time, especially during the early period of the emergence of Mahayana Buddhism, the laity had also a skill of reading and writing. *Dharma-Sangraha* text speaks of three categories of *Danas*: material objects, religious instruction, and friendliness.¹⁶ The role of the laity is no longer limited on providing material donation, but also in preserving and spreading Mahayana teachings. They are called "good sons and daughters" or even revered as "Lay Bodhisattvas, *Dharma-bhanakas*".¹⁷ *Dana* then has become one of the *Paramitas* of *Bodhisattvamarga*.

There is a striking change of meaning of the enlightenment and a challenge to the necessity of renunciation,¹⁸ although the early texts of Mahayana movements still prefer to keep a "low profile" in this issues.¹⁹ The *Dasabhumika-Sutra* more clearly acknowledges the role of the laity in Buddhism,²⁰ and give three categories of *Dana*: personal *Dana*, external *Dana*, and partly personal and partly external *Dana*.²¹

The Mahayanist has developed the idea of Dana in many ways, even some of them ever colored by the avarice and selfish motive of the mendicant monastic order.²² After the Mauryan period, the idea of "Dana" was understood as a means for generating spiritual merits.²³ The concept of transferring merits in the doctrine of Bodhisattva, according to Har Dayal²⁴ and D.T. Suzuki²⁵, is certainly a revolutionary idea in Buddhism. In the Santideva's *Siksasamuccaya* and *Siksasamuccayakarika*, the concept of *Dana* reach its supremacy, since it is considered as the prime virtues and trainings for enlightenment. Santideva explained that the essence of *Bodhisattvamarga* is "*Danamarga*" (the way of giving).²⁶ The center of the Bodhisattva training is the practice of giving.²⁷

The idea of supremacy of *Dana* is closely related to the nature or characteristics of Mahayana Buddhism, namely "its vision of attaining Buddha-

hood as the ultimate goal for the benefit of all the sentient beings. This is called also as "Bodhisattva ideal"²⁸. D.T.Suzuki noticed that one of the reasons that have made Mahayana different from Theravada, is: "While one (Theravada) has a most submissive confidence in the Buddha, the other (Mahayana) endeavors to follow his example by placing himself in his position."²⁹

From the development of the idea of *Dana* in Buddhist tradition, especially in the tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, we can find out that the difficulty of the laity for practicing religious duty of a renounced life could be solved by the idea and practice of *Dana*. According to the teaching of Santideva, moreover, the practice of *Bodhisattvamarga* has made the practice of *Dana* to be the utmost *Paramita*, which the laity must practice.

3. Supremacy of Danaparamita in The Bodhisattvamarga³⁰

3.1. Bodhisattva Must Practice Paramitas

Persons who are in the *Bodhisattvamarga* must practice *Paramitas*, which are varied in their numbers. Some say that *Bodhisattvaparamitas* are six, or seven, even some say ten.³¹ According to Har Dayal, there are actually only six *Paramitas*. The other four are merely supplementary in character.³² The ten *Paramitas* are as follows³³:

- 1. Dana (giving, generousity, liberality);
- 2. Sila (Virtuous conduct, morality, righteousness);
- 3. Ksanti (Forbearance, patience);
- 4. Virya (Enegy);
- 5. Dhyana (Rapt musing);
- 6. Prajna (Wisdom)

The four supplementary:

- 1. *Upaya* or *Upaya-kausalya* (Skilfulness in the choice or adaptation of means of conversion);
- 2. Pranidhana (Aspiration or resolution);
- 3. Bala (Strength, power);
- 4. Jnana (Knowledge).

The formula of *Paramitas* is originally from the early Buddhist triple *Skandhas* (factors of spiritual progress) or *Siksas* (trifold training and discipline), namely *Sila* (virtuos conducts), *Samadhi* (concentration) and *Prajna* (wisdom). The formula actually has passed several processes of evolvement, selection, and experimentation.³⁴

3.2. Santideva's Idea on Danaparamita as the Supreme Paramita³⁵

From the idea of *Bodhisattvaparamitas*, it is clear that "*Dana*" actually is the first step of the six *Paramita* practices of the *Bodhisattvamarga*. Santideva, however, has put it as the most important *Paramita* over others. For Santideva, the only "*raison d'etre*" of Bodhisattva is for the benefit of other sentient beings, through their acts of giving.³⁶Therefore, the *Bodhisattvamarga* is essentially the way of giving (*Danamarga*). Since *Dana* must be a perfect act, *Danamarga*, therefore becomes a perfect giving (*Danaparamita*).³⁷

To be able to understand the idea of Santideva on *Danaparamita*, we will follow Santideva's instructions to the Bodhisattvas. Those who are in *Bodhisattvamarga* must:

- 1. Give everything what they have in order to attain perfect enlightenment (*Samyaksambodhi*);
- 2. In order to be able to give everything that they have, the bodhisattvas must make a worthy (*Utsarjana*) of the three gifts: their person (*Atmabhava*), their enjoyments (*Bhogas*) and their merits (*Punya*);
- 3. In order to make the gift worthy, the Bodhisattvas must do three-fold acts: preserving (*Raksana*), purifying (*Sodhana*), and increasing (*Vardhana*) the quality and quantity of their gifts;
- 4. In order to preserve, purify, and increase the quality as well as the quantity of their gifts, the Bodhisattva must practice the second of the seven-fold of the conditions favorable to enlightenment or liberation (*Bodhipaksa dharmas*), namely the four strivings (*Samyakpradhanas*).³⁸

From these instructions, it is clear that, for Santideva, the ultimate priority of the practice of *Bodhisattvamarga* must be *Danaparamita*.³⁹ For him, giving is an act of renunciation (*Tyagacitta*), the act of giving therefore must be understood as the most effective enemy of attachment (*Parigraha*).

In *Siksasamuccaya* and *Siksasamuccayakarika*, moreover, Santideva gives other reasons on the act of giving that must be practiced by the Bodhisattva. For example, all sentient beings are subject to suffering. Because of the establishment of faith (*Sraddha*) and the aspiring of mind of enlightenment (*Bodhiprandhicitta*), sentient beings can defeat their suffering and their fear. Furthermore, the process of transgression (*Apati*) in the life of sentient beings will not take place if the Bodhisattvas practice the essential principle of Mahayana, which consists of threefold giving: giving their person, giving their enjoyment, and giving their merit to other sentient beings.⁴⁰ The Bodhisattva, therefore, must learn how to preserve, protect, purify, and increase the quality and the quantity of their gifts for the beneficial of the recipients.

For Santideva, from the perspective what has to give, the preservation of *Dana* is effected by the non-production of non-existing bad *Dharmas*. The destruction of existing bad *Dharmas* will bring effects to the purification of gifts. The production of non-existing good *Dharmas* and the development of existing good *Dharmas* will increase the quality of the gifts.⁴¹ Although Santideva highly emphasizes the supremacy of *Danaparamita* over others, he still asks the Boddhisattvas to embrace firmly all other *Paramitas*, especially when they must purify the giving of persons. All of the *Silaparamita*, *Ksantiparamita*, *Viryaparamita*, *Dhyanaparamita*, and *Prajnaparamita* are to be applied as the antidotes for the destruction of the bad *Dharmas*.⁴²

3.2.1. Bodhisattva Must Give What Ever They Have

From the Santideva's concept of *Bodhisattvamarga*, which is mentioned above, we can see that the Bodhisattvas must render everything they have: 1) of one's person (*Atmabhavotsarga*): wealth, property, family,⁴³ body, limbs, life, etc; 2) their enjoyments (*Bhogotsarga*); 3) and even their merits (*Punyotsarga*).

In level of *Danaparamita*, the Bodhisatva must do it without any reservation or impure motive. The act of giving of their person (*Atmabhavotsarga*) is totally for the welfare of all sentient beings. The Bodhisattva practice *Danaparamita* just for the benefit of others, and see it as a sacrificial act, offering, not as loss, but as of taking the essence of human life for the sake of liberation.⁴⁴ Bodhisattva must be able to preserve (*Atmabhavaraksa*) and to apply the right antidotes for the degenerating bad *Dharmas*. Bodhisattva, therefore, must constantly search the proper effort so that the unprofitable *Dharmas* are degenerating from the life of the sentient beings. On the other hand, because of the practice of *Danaparamita* of Bodhisattva, the profitable *Dharmas* of the condition suitable for enlightenments will grow and regenerate.⁴⁵

In the *Danaparamita*, giving perfectly their enjoyments and pleasures (*Bhogotsarga*), the Bodhisattva must be able to enjoy it, in the sense that they are doing it without any hesitation. When the Bodhisattvas practice the act of giving their enjoyments, they must follow the order of priority of the receivers: the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, the *Sravakas*, the *Pratyekabuddhas*, the Buddhists, and the non-Buddhists.⁴⁶

According to Har Dayal, from the perspective of the recipients, Bodhisattvas are abode to bestow their gifts to three groups: 1) friends and relatives; 2) the poor, the sick, the afflicted, and the helpless; the Buddhist monks and the Hindu priests as considered as the deserving recipients of charity.⁴⁷ Regretfully some authors only speak about the donation to the monks and the priests, and neglecting the duty of giving donation to the poor. Even some of them over emphasize that "the merit of the charitable acts depend on the spiritual

status of the recipient, and not on the greatness of his need or the nature of the social service rendered by the donor." 48

Based on the *Upaya Paramita* principles, Bodhisattvas must give them in such high discretion, so that the acts of giving and the gifts themselves will not cause injury to the receiver or to other sentient beings. The quality of enjoyments (*Bhogaraksa*) that the Bodhisattva must give, is meant for the greatest possible advantage of the recipients. Bodhisattvas must know the whole course, conditions, reasons, and purpose of what, how, and why to give. Therefore they should not lose sense of measure and proportionality of the acts of giving. Even more the act of giving must in fact make them happier than the receiver.⁴⁹ By purifying their gift of their enjoyments, the Bodhisattvas will eventually not have any sense of attachment, both in giving and receiving gifts. For Bodhisattvas, then, the differentiations regarding the giver, the receiver, and the gift, will no longer exist.⁵⁰

In the step of *Danaparamita*, Bodhisattva must not retain all merits that they have collected in the past, present, and future, for their own benefits.⁵¹ All of their merits must be given (*Punyotsarga*) for the benefit of all sentient beings, without any exception, including for the benefit of the non-Buddhists.⁵² There are mainly two gifts of merit: the meditation on the gift and the actual gift itself. The main purpose of *Danaparamita* of merit is that the sentient beings will possess of good *Dharmas* and lost of their bad *Dharmas*. The sentient beings, therefore, will be able to successfully practice of the right strivings on the Mahayana.⁵³ The Bodhisattva must alert or carefully pay attention to the effect of his *Danaparamita* on their merits. Bodhisattva must constantly purify the merits by practicing the great compassion (*Mahakaruna*) and emptiness (*Sunyata*).⁵⁴

3.2.2. Bodhisattva Must Increase the Quality and Quantity of Their Gifts

For Santideva, the *Danaparamita* of *Bodhisattvamarga* must be increased both in terms of quality and beneficial quantity for others. Their self-denial must increase their strength (*Bala*), so that they will be able to constantly active doing many things for the benefit of others. Motivated by *Mahakaruna* (great compassion), led by right understanding and wisdom (*Pranja*) of *Sunyata* (emptiness), the bodhisattva will be able to see clearly that there is no distinction between their self interests and the interest of others.⁵⁵

The duty of increasing quality and quantity also influence mental condition of the Bodhisattva: resolution (*Vyavasaya*) of practicing *Danaparamita*, good intention (*Svasaya*) and compassion (*Karuna*) to others. The increase of merits, for Santideva, is closely related to the supreme forms of worship

(*Anittarapujas*), the four *Dharmas* leading to specific attainment (*Visesagamita*), the five faculties (*Indriyas*) and powers (*Balas*), and the recollection of the three jewels (*Ratnatrayanusmrti*).⁵⁶

From the description of Richard Mahoney, we can see that for Santideva, the importance of *Danaparamita* is certainly above other *Paramitas* in the *Bodhisattvamarga*. It is because of the fact that the main reason of the existent of Bodhisattva is for the benefit of the whole sentient beings.

The whole concept of *Bodhisattvamarga*, in Mahayana Buddhism Tradition, basically based on the fabricating the *Dharmas*: 1) the bad *Dharmas* must be destroyed through the preservation and purification of giving of one's persons, enjoyments, and merit; 2) the good *Dharma* must be produced and secured through increasing the same things.⁵⁷

4. Conclusion

The "invitation" of answering the problem of the present society, in the light of Mahayana Buddhism Tradition, certainly assumes an altruistic compassionate act of love. This is the essence of *Bodhisattvamarga*, which should be the choice of the way of life of the Buddhist followers. As far as religious duty of serving others is narrowly limited in the oppositional approach between renouncing life versus an active involvement in mundane life, the laity will certainly face an endless dichotomy. However, when the idea of renunciation is broadly interpreted, especially in terms of *Danaparamita*, the laity will fully be able to take part in the religious mission of serving and answering the suffering of the present society. The idea of the supremacy of *Danaparamita* in *Bodhisattvamarga* can provide a strong motivation for the Buddhist laity to pursue the ultimate goal, the enlightenment, or the state of Buddha-hood.

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- 2 *Analysis of Perfection*, (2003). Rerukane Chandavimala Mahathera. Kandy-Srilanka: Buddhist Publication Society. 5-7.
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- 4 Analysis of Perfection, (2003). 12-13.
- 5 A Study of The Dasabhumika-sutra: Its Relation To Previous Buddhist Traditions And The Development of Bodhisattva Practice. (A doctoral thesis). (1993). Jang-Kill Chun. Wisconsin-Madison: UMI. 63-88

- 6 It does not mean that this question is irrelevant to the Buddhist *Sangha* and its member. Since the laity does not renounce the world, in general it could be said that the laity are those who are directly facing or being easily affected the problem of modern world. This paper is meant for the lay readers. Actually it will be very interesting, or even be valid, if the Buddhist laity themselves answering this question.
- 7 According to Robert A. F. Thurman, actually Nagarjuna gave already the basic principle of Buddhist social action: the universal altruism of great love (*Mahamaitri*) and the great compassion, or great empathy (*mahakaruna*). See Robert A. F. Thurman, *Nagarjuna' Guidelines for Buddhist Social Action* in *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism.* (1988) Fred Eppsteiner (Ed.) Berkeley, California: Paralax Press, 120-144. Hopefully with more time and sources on this topics available, I will be to present it in proper way.
- 8 For Aryacura and Santideva, karuna is above all other virtues and attributes. See *The Boddhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*. (2004) Har Dayal. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas. p.178
- 9 Of The Progresse of The Bodhisattva: The Bodhisattvamarga in the Siksasamuccaya (2002) Richard Mahoney. A thesis submitted impartial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies University of Canterbury. P. 15. Assessed from http://homepages.comnet.co.nz/~r-mahoney/ma_thesis/ZS_MA_Thesis.pdf
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- 19 Cf. The Milindapanha 19-29, 242-265 or The Question of King Milinda, translated by T.W. Rhys Davids. 31-33.
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- 33 The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature. (2004) 168
- 34 The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature. (2004) 168.
- 35 Because of the limitation of the availability of the sources, in this part I will deeply rely on the Master Thesis of Richard Mahoney. See *Of The Progresse of The Bodhisattva: The Bodhisattvamarga in the Siksasamuccaya* (2002).
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- 37 In this paper these two terms some time interchangeably used.
- 38 In this paper these two terms some time interchangeably used. x.
- 39 In this paper these two terms some time interchangeably used. 90
- 40 In this paper these two terms some time interchangeably used. 90
- 41 In this paper these two terms some time interchangeably used. 89.
- 42 In this paper these two terms some time interchangeably used. 156
- 43 According to Bodhisattva-Bhumi, Bodhisattvas, however, are not allowed to sacrifice their parents. See. *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, 1175
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