Today I want to share a little about the Buddhist practice of Dana, in Mahayana Buddhism, it is called the perfection of generosity and it is one of the six paramitas.

For many Westerners, Buddhism is all about meditation but is a misperception. To only practice meditation would be like going to the gym and working out only the muscles on the right side of your body – The Buddha describes Dana as being part of the three
central practices of Buddhism, which are Dana, Sila and Bhavana, or generosity, morality, and meditation. Let me share with you a passage for the Sutras –

...thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying in Śrāvastī, at Jetū’s Grove, in Anāthapiṇḍāda’s Park. Then the Exalted One said to the monks:

“There are three kinds of meritorious actions. Which are the three? The meritorious action consisting (a) in generosity, (b) in Sila and (c) in wise reflection.

He goes on to describe what generosity means:

“What does meritorious action consisting in generosity mean? When there is someone, happily making donations to ascetics and brahmans, to the poorest of the poor, to the bereaved and uprooted; who, when food is needed, provides food, and when encouragement is needed, gives encouragement; who offers robes, alms-food, lodging, medicine for treating the sick, fragrant substances, flowers and temporary accommodation unstintingly, contenting himself with what he has on the body—this is what is called the meritorious action of generosity.

The practice of Dana of giving is a mindfulness practice because from the Buddha’s perspective the perfection of generosity is an intentional act. If you through food away with the intention of feeding small insects then the act is an act of Dana if you absent-mindedly throw your food to the ground, though insects will eat it, it is not the perfection of Dana. As with all things DANA, Buddhist it relates to training our minds.

What do you think the perfection of generosity is teaching us?

In Mahayana Buddhism the practice of generosity- this starts with the dharma which is freely given – it is the understanding that through the cultivation of generosity we let go of attachment, we open up to the world as our hands and hearts open to give to each other we cultivate connections, the practice of generosity helps us to acknowledge our inherent abundance – that everything is given everything is a gift. And the fruits of this practice are – the more we cultivate generosity the freer we become more connected – the Buddha talks about this in the Dhammapada
“If beings knew, as I know, the results of giving & sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would the stain of miserliness overcome their minds. Even if it were their last bite, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared, if there were someone to receive their gift. But because beings do not know, as I know, the results of giving & sharing, they eat without having given. The stain of miserliness overcomes their minds.”

Let’s shift a little here – I want to talk more about Dana about giving, but in a sort of backward way – because I think if we can work through the second part of Dana, our practice will be more fruitful. It is found in a phrase from our practice manual – Joyful Receiving

What does that phrase mean to you? To joyfully receive -We have been taught since were small, that it is

**better to give than receive.**

There is a problem with that economy – I mean think about it – receiving becomes problematic because my receiving of your gift will always be less than your giving of the gift -that’s jacked up I mean it gets the intent but what a mind-fuck?

‘What is interesting is that throughout the Buddhist sutras, The Buddhas and bodhisattvas joyfully receive our offerings, they have no issues receiving from us, that is because – it has little to do with them and everything to do with us –

In the Way of Oneness, the perfection generosity is non-dualistic – receiving and giving are one – the more we cultivate our ability to receive joyfully whatever is given us, the more we will be able to give wholeheartedly

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So let’s talk about the practice of receiving, and let’s bring it down to the everyday in look at receiving not from the perspective of gifts per se bet the giving of help – receiving, let alone even asking for help is challenging for many of us. Here is an insight from Brene Brown

> “Until we can receive with an open heart, we’re never really giving with an open heart. When we attach judgment to receiving help, we knowingly or unknowingly attach judgment to giving help.”
What do you think?

The first time I really, open-heartedly asked and accepted help wasn’t until I was in my late 40’s! All those Bodhisattvas in my life offering their merit and their compassion and me walking past them, sometimes with my head down, other times mocking them. In my delusional thinking, I believed that to need help was to be weak and to be weak was to be unlovable.

How many of you have felt this way – can you share?

I found this from Eido Rinehart (https://ancientwayjournal.wordpress.com/2016/11/01/the-virtuous-practice-of-receiving/) a Student of Shohaku Okumura Roshi

*It is easier for us to give than receive and we are reluctant to accept or receive or ask for support. Giving makes us feel good and actually fuels our ego, which likes to think of itself as good, virtuous and generous. Receiving can make us feel dependent, vulnerable, obligated, powerless or even ashamed. Yes, we may experience shame if was are in need. We don’t like to be needy or dependent and we don’t realize that we already are dependent and therefore have reason to be continually grateful. We deceive ourselves by thinking we are independent and self reliant and we reinforce this idea partly by our efforts to be self sufficient.*

Sometimes we confuse receiving with “taking. Eido Reinhart goes on to say that .”

*“We can judge receiving as selfish, or only suitable for certain people who we deem “needy” enough. How many of us do not practice the art of receiving, but simply regard it as something to fit it in “between” giving? “OK, I’ll accept your help,” we might acknowledge with defeat, while we figure out how we’re going to pay them back.”*

It is important to realize that receiving is different than taking. We take food, love, money all the time. The difference between the two is that when we take, our small-Self is saying, “I earned this!” When we get love from our wife or our children, when we get kudos at work, when we eat a lovely meal, we aren’t receiving the love, acknowledgment or food; we see ourselves as earning it. We take it because it is ours. A similar strain of this construct is when we see ourselves as unworthy to receive anything. This can manifest as self-doubt and shame. In both strains we are stuck in seeing giving and receiving as economic exchanges but how could it be any other way? I was never taught how to receive. How about you? Most of us have been taught that it is better to give than to receive but how can that be since to give you need to have someone to receive? Proportionally it doesn’t add up.
“Truly receiving is something different from simply taking what is given. There is an inherent humility. There is an openness of heart, an acknowledgment of our interdependence and an awareness of our dependence on a myriad of things. Receiving is a place of openness and courage in that it implies a vulnerability; we may ask for something in that open space and not get it. Yet in realizing our lack of control, our inability to earn love or joy, and embracing the reality of that, those very things arise naturally. Everything I receive is a gift, a gift to me and a gift to the giver. An ever-expanding circle of giving, where ultimately there is no giver, no receiver and no gift.”

No giver, No Receiver and No Gift –

In the Zen tradition, before meals in some temples, the following chant is said

“May we with all beings realize the emptiness of the three wheels, giver, receiver, and gift.”

I have always appreciated this line, though sometimes it ties my synapses in knots –

What does it mean to say that there is no giver, no receiver and no gift? This is the way Zen teaching shows absolute reality in language – Norman Fischer also a student of Shunryu Suzuki goes on to explain,

“no giver, no receiver and no gift” means that this giving isn’t a beneficent act one performs for another, an act you can take credit for or feel worthy or unworthy of. A Zen practitioner… remembers that giving is life—that everything is giving, everything is given. There are no separate givers, receivers, or gifts. All of life is always giving and receiving at the same time. This is our practice and our joy. So we practice giving—both receiving and giving gifts—in this spirit.”

This brings to mind the ideal of the Bodhisattva, the one who stays in the world of suffering to help others awaken, this act this wiliness to return to life, again and again, to help us is the Bodhisattvas gift of love – they wait patiently as they watch on in our attempts to control the world. When we insist on ‘doing it our self’ in our fear to let go and trust, so we do not receive the gift, the gift of learning, of compassion, of insight, wisdom and connection. In our insistence of ‘doing it our self’ of earning our keep, we miss out on the boundlessness of grace that is offered us by everything and by all of our patient Bodhisattvas waiting for us, they maybe be your neighbor, your dog, the full moon, the place you love to hike, they may even be the driver that cuts you off in traffic – as Gyomay Kubose teaches, there are teachers everywhere, and bodhisattvas everywhere we just need to receive the teaching, invite them in- I try to remember that even in the Dharma, what we receive from the teachings is so much greater, exponentially greater, than anything we put into the teachings.
Here are some way that we can cultivate receiving joyfully – I found this from one teacher

When you receive something, turn your attention to the giver and to the intention behind the gift – to the love or thoughtfulness that motivates the giving. If feelings of unworthiness arise, or the thought, “I don’t need/want/like this”, put them aside and move your attention to the giver and her generosity. Giving or receiving a gift, material or not, is an opportunity for deep connection. See the opportunity and open yourself to it. Acknowledge and appreciate the experience. Say “thank you” and whatever else is in your heart to share

Here are some basics from Dr. Anna Garrett (https://www.drannagarrett.com/2013/12/do-you-suck-at-receiving-6-simple-practices-to-jumpstart-the-flow-of-your-mojo/)

- Ask for help when you need it. This is not a sign of weakness. People WANT to help. Receive it gracefully.
- Accept compliments gracefully with a simple ‘THANK YOU.’
- Take time for yourself. Receive the gift of open space in your life.
- Make meals an event where you really pay attention to the nourishment you are receiving. Sit down at the table, light candles (I do this even when I’m alone...people think I’m crazy, but I don’t care). When you’re full, STOP and allow yourself to feel that satisfied feeling you’re receiving from your brain.
- When someone hugs you, receive it joyfully (instead of squirming away).
- Look around you and notice colors, smells, sounds....receive what your senses take in!

I would like to close with this quote by Alan Lewis

_ Receiving with grace is beautiful. It allows an opportunity to someone who wants to give, and it blesses both the giver and receiver and in some small way it beautifies the world._

May we beautify our world with our giving and our receiving –