



GREG GOODE

Greg has been a philosophical counselor since 1996 and has extensive experience with online consultation. After studying Psychology at California State University. Greg studied philosophy at the Universität zu Köln in Cologne, Germany, and received his M.A. and Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Rochester. His areas of specialization were decision theory, the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of George Berkeley. His doctoral dissertation was on the question, "Is it ever rational to be impatient?"

As a philosophical counselor, Greg is nationally certified by the American Philosophical Practitioners Association, trained by Prof. Lou Marinoff, author of the well-known *Plato Not Prozac!*; and by California State University, Fullerton's J. Michael Russell — a true pioneer in the philosophical consultation movement.

Nondual inquiry includes the powerful teachings of Western Philosophy, Advaita Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism. Greg studied Philosophy with Lewis White Beck, William T. Bluhm, Richard Feldman, Henry Kyburg, Richard Taylor, Colin M. Turbayne and Paul Weirich at the University of Rochester. He studied Advaita Vedanta through the Chinmaya Mission, the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, and Francis Lucille. He studied the Mahayana teachings of Pure Land Buddhism through Jodo-Shinshu, and studied Chinese Middle-Way Buddhism through the lineage of Master Wen Zhu

and the pre-eminent scholar of Chinese Buddhism, Master Yin-Shun of Taiwan, P.R.C., author of *The Way to Buddhahood*.

Greg has also been influenced by the teachings of many teachers he has never met, both Western and Eastern, ancient and modern. The Western teachers include Protagoras, Heraclitus, Gorgias, Sextus Empiricus, George Berkeley, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, Ludwig Wittgenstein, W.V.O. Quine, Nelson Goodman, Brand Blanshard, Jacques Derrida, Wilfrid Sellars, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Richard Lanham and Richard Rorty. Eastern teachers include Shankara, Gaudapada, Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti, Tsong-Khapa, Honen Shonin, Shinran Shonin, Sri Atmananda, Shunryu Suzuki, Thich-Thien-Tam and Chin-Kung.

Greg serves as Technical Consultant for Philosophical Practice, the Journal of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association. He has written *Standing as Awareness*, published by Nonduality Press, and many popular articles on spiritual, therapeutic and philosophical topics.

INTERVIEW

Q: There seem to be quite a few laypeople teaching all sorts of Buddhism these days who have not taken Buddhist vows or the precepts, but still ask for dana. What are your thoughts on this?

Greg Goode: Let me ask, what do you mean by “dana” in this context? Dana as a “free-will offering” (as they say in the Pentecostal churches), or dana as the “perfection of giving,” in the sense of being the first Buddhist “paramita” or perfection?

Q: I meant it in the sense of what if they ask for a “suggested donation”? Would this technically be dana or not?

Greg Goode: Again, whether a donation is dana depends partly on the use of the word. Dana in the Buddhist “paramita” sense is the cultivation of generosity. It’s one of the practices, virtues or ways of life that are taught as necessary for enlightenment or deliverance from suffering. In fact, it is the first paramita in the list. In this sense, it doesn’t make too much sense to ask another person for dana.

But as Buddhist culture comes into confluence with Western culture, lots of shading, mixing and drifting of meaning can happen. In the Western monotheistic traditions one speaks of “tithes and offerings.” When I was in the Pentecostal church, the pastor would occasionally ask for tithes (one-tenth of one’s income) to be given to one’s church. And almost any function organizer in the church would ask for offerings. It was natural and expected that the church make these kinds of requests.

So what happens when cultures meet? It seems natural that Westerners who grow up in a monotheistic context may come to learn the word “dana” and use it in the same way they would use the word “offering” and not in the sense of a Buddhist paramita. This sort of trading and borrowing happens whenever cultures meet. So we find someone “asking for dana” at a Buddhist spiritual event because in the asker’s sub textual background it’s OK to ask for offerings.

Q: The Buddha said, “One should not make Dhamma (teachings) a trade.” He also said the The "Dhamma is the highest gift": Gift - meaning dana. Ud 6.2 Jatila Sutta

Should this Buddhist dharma be reevaluated, or modified to set our times?

Greg Goode: How could someone legislate what should happen? Whose “should” would be used? Speakers, teachers and organizations will go different ways with it. For every 10 people, you’ve got 20 views!

There is a large and old orthodox Pali textual tradition that can be deployed to interpret dana, and which some people may treat as authoritative about what dana “really” means.

And at the same time, as Buddhism is settling into Western culture, we have lots of different relationships with giving and money. We have the monotheistic religious traditions, which use a variety of means (e.g., scripture, need, fear, guilt, and advertising) to support themselves. We’ve got the medical profession, with various ethos of free public health all the way up to expensive private boutique medical care for the rich. We’ve got the rhetorical and legal traditions, which traditionally charge a pretty penny for teaching how to convince and persuade others. We’ve got education, with its own complex relationship to money. It sort of parallels medicine, where people think that much of it should be free, but where we also allow that it can be quite costly as well.

And we’ve got the fields of spiritual and psychological therapy, satsangs, retreats, books, websites, nondual dinners, FaceBook and Youtube posts. John, this is the place where you and I met. Some of these things have an established price. Some are free. And some is by donation, where people say “Click here to go to PayPal and support my work.”

Who can say what happens when the orthodox meaning of dana encounters these currents?

Q: Traditionally it says in the Pali canon of Theravada Buddhism you had to be a dakkhineyya “gift worthy”. Meaning a receiver of gifts had to be of good moral habit and have self-control. Should some sort of standard also apply to teachers of non-duality?

Greg Goode: Again, whose “should” is this? Are you asking from an orthodox Buddhist perspective? I can’t answer from that perspective as well as, say, a Theravadin monk. I hope that view will be represented among your interviewees.

And I don’t have an idea that there is a “real,” “objective” sense to the term “dana” (or anything else) that is free from perspectives. I don’t have a view from nowhere.

I find that these questions that focus on the act of asking (as opposed to the giving), and on the recipient (as opposed to the giver), are associated with the dana-as-offering sense of the word, and not the dana-as-paramita sense.

In the paramita sense of the word, the emphasis is on the giver and motives for giving.

This emphasis can actually be found in Christianity too. In our church, there would sometimes be criticisms of certain other churches. They were seen as corrupt, greedy or overly materialistic. Our members would say that no one should give money to those churches. The pastor would always remind those making the comments that the act of giving is between the giver and God. The important part is to give with an open heart “as unto the Lord.” If the recipient mis-uses the gift, that is between the recipient and God. Each person must answer to God on these matters.

So there's an interesting parallel. In both of these quite different forms of spirituality, giving is seen to be more importantly related to the development of the giver than to the worth of the recipient.

END OF INTERVIEW