



39. BHIKKHU PASSANO

Ven. Pasanno Bhikkhu took ordination in Thailand in 1974, with Ven. Phra Khru Nañasirivatana as preceptor. During his first year as a monk he was taken by his teacher to meet Ajahn Chah, with whom he asked to be allowed to stay and train. One of the early residents of Wat Pah Nanachat, Ven. Pasanno became its abbot in his ninth year. During his incumbency Wat Pah Nanachat developed considerably, both in physical size and in reputation, and Ajahn Pasanno has become a very well-known and highly respected monk and Dhamma teacher in Thailand. Ajahn Pasanno moved to California on New Year's Eve of 1997 to share the abbotship of Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery.

INTERVIEW

Q: What is your view on Buddhist teachers that charge for the dharma?

Bhikkhu Pasanno: Well, the thing is that there is so much out there on dana. I don't try to have a view on what other people do. I know how I do it

and I know how our community does it and I feel comfortable with that. I would encourage an example hopefully for other people and there are starting to be more people within the lay community that are picking up on dana as a means of organizing retreats and organizing talks, so that's very heartening.

Q: How about the system of using suggested donation; is there a difference or distinction with suggested donation or with asking for dana?

Bhikku Pasanno: It's not much of a difference is it? A suggested donation is almost already a request for at least a certain amount of money. It's not quite a donation in the sense that one is giving freely.

Q: So the difference would be that with dana there isn't a suggestion of any kind whereas obviously with the other a clear suggested amount is being made?

Bhikku Pasanno: Yes on a certain level one could call it a semantic one, but it's also an actual feeling of it. As soon as you're saying suggested donation, you're actually expecting a donation rather than giving it freely. Another aspect of it though is, especially in the West, that there's a lack of understanding either of dana and sometimes how things actually work and function. So that there does need to be some education sometimes or actually letting people know what sort of need there is. That has to be handled gracefully also.

So it isn't as if one just sits back and says nothing, but it's also tough in terms of when someone says something. How one says it and under what

circumstance so that it's more trying to educate people as to how things work so that people will either feel comfortable or feel inspired to share or to offer support of things that are worthy of support.

Q: In your experience, has this method or this system of dana been successful in the West, like in the United States?

Bhikkhu Pasanno: Well, it depends where. I have seen places that have taken it on as a mode of how they run their center or their monasteries. For us, it's our tradition or means of existence. Everything is available for free, in the sense that we don't charge. So that's how it works when people come to stay at the monastery or come to listen to teachings or do retreats or receive publications. But we are in an old institution that has a momentum of history and knowledge about it, so then that works very well as a monastery. I think for lay centers, of course, it's a bit newer territory. The places that I know that have decided to do that, they've all found that it works very well. And there are other benefits that come with that. It's not just about being able to pay the bills, but what it is, is also about building communities. So that the opportunities are open for people to join in and participate, whether it's a material donation or a financial one or some kind of assistance in some other way. The spirit of generosity starts to inform how one interacts with the circumstances of the center or of the monastery and one is then building community with generosity as a foundational value

Q: What about down side with trying to use this system of dana, in terms of people abusing it or not understanding it, or taking advantage of it?

Bhikkhu Pasanno: The thing is, if we are using the model of dana – then our offering of the teachings is freely offered as well. So that if people want

to take advantage of it in some way, then on a certain level that's their problem because all we're doing is making the offering. If you accept what we offer, then it's natural. There will be those who understand it and appreciate it and there will be those who don't quite get it. The approach of dana isn't a business transaction.

END OF INTERVIEW