

# Use of Wealth for Happiness

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 17:53

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*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassam Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassam Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sambha Sambhodassam*

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened.

The advice the Buddha gives to lay people is interesting to see how he often phrases it, much the same as we did last week, but with a slightly different nuance to it. So first, I want to read out his advice on the proper use of wealth. Here he's talking to a householder called Anathapindika.

Anathapindika was one of the new classes of people, the merchants, and he was very rich. When he heard about the Buddha at one of his relation's houses, he had this sudden desire to see him, and when he did see him he really took him as a teacher and immediately offered to buy him his first monastery. As the story goes, he wanted to buy him a park owned by a particular prince, and the prince obviously didn't want to let go of this park. He said even if he covered it with gold, you know. So he offered to cover it with gold, and he did cover it with gold, and it became the Buddha's first monastery. That's how committed Anathapindika was.

He says, "With the wealth acquired by energetic striving, amassed by the strength of his arms, earned by the sweat of his brow, righteous wealth righteously gained, the noble disciple undertakes four worthy deeds." So this is what you do with your wealth.

"With the wealth thus gained, he makes himself happy and pleased and properly maintains himself in happiness." Often when you read the Buddha's teachings, it's all about suffering and misery. It goes on and on about suffering and misery. But he's quite clear here that if you're earning good money, then your first duty is to make yourself happy, pleased, and maintain yourself in happiness.

But then he says you also make your parents happy and pleased and properly maintain them in happiness. He makes his wife and children, his slaves, workers and servants happy and pleased and properly maintains them in happiness. He makes friends and colleagues happy and pleased and properly maintains them in happiness. This is the first case of wealth gone to good use, fruitfully applied and used for a worthy cause.

The idea of money being something in our society has a certain dirtiness about it. Filthy lucre and all that. But the Buddha's quite clear, there's nothing wrong with money, if it is righteously gained. And the first duty, according to him anyway, is to make yourself happy. And in making yourself happy, you then obviously have the opportunity to make others happy. So it spreads outwards, your happiness becomes

infectious.

Then he says, "Further, a householder with wealth thus gained, the noble disciple makes provision against the losses that might arise on account of fire and floods, kings and bandits and unloved heirs." Remember that one from last time, unloved heirs. "And he makes himself secure against them. This is the second case of wealth gone to good use."

That's something that we in our recent history have failed to understand. We're all, so many people have landed themselves in huge debt and have been happy to do so, living on the old never never. But he's quite clear that you have to hold something back just in case of fire and floods, kings, government always robbing us, and bandits, thieves.

Just on that case, a person who comes to meditate here had left the window open. She lived in a first-floor flat, left the window open, and some neighbor was able to sneak in and steal her laptop, her Mac laptop. And of course, being an honest person, following the teachings of the Buddha, she was quite truthful and said the window was open so she never got compensation, she never got her insurance. So luckily she had some money back and was able to get another one.

"Further, the householder with wealth thus gained, the noble disciple makes the five kind of offerings to relatives, guests, ancestors, the king and the devas." So on top of that you're making gifts. You actually do something more than just make people happy, you actually offer them things. So it's to relatives and guests, ancestors, so that's making some sort of, remember in those days you made sacrifice for the benefit of others. Often it was animal sacrifice. The great king's sacrifice was, I believe, hundreds of horses and cows. They were all slaughtered to create good karma for the person who died. I'm not so sure he'd actually want that.

Later on in another discourse, when this is put to him, whether they should kill animals for the benefit of other beings, he obviously was against it, and he suggested that they did good deeds for their ancestors and the king and devas. So that's a bit difficult for us these days to think of protecting deities. Well that's up to your personal beliefs really, whether you believe there are other beings, strong beings around who protect your property.

In ancient times you even had every house had its own little deity to which you offered your prayers. And if you go to Thailand, they've all got their little places in the garden, little houses for the devas. So that's completely up to you whether you want to do that or not. I mean, I do it. Every time I leave the place empty like this, I always ask the devas to protect it. You never know.

"Further, the householder with the wealth thus gained, the noble disciple establishes a lofty offering of alms for those ascetics and Brahmins who refrain from vanity and negligence, who are settled in patience and gentleness, who are devoted to taming themselves, to calming themselves, and to attaining *Nibbāna*, an offering that is heavenly, resulting in happiness, conducive to heaven." So it's making offerings to

ascetics. This is a bit strange for our society, a sort of northern European Protestant who got rid of all the priestly caste and especially monks absolutely. So it'd be difficult for people in these particular countries to explain why they should be supported.

As you know, if you've received my latest little e-reminder, I'm off on this pilgrimage following some of the places that St. Francis followed. So St. Francis took to its absolute degree this idea of poverty, of letting go of everything and living off the alms that people would offer him. So why would he do that? I mean, why would people offer to feed him and look after him? I mean, not that he needed very much. His clothes were just sackcloth stitched together. It was obviously because they thought that it would be a benefit to them to support somebody who was developing themselves spiritually.

So in the Buddhist tradition, the idea is that of course somebody who joins a monastery, who becomes an ascetic in that sense, really is trying to overcome that deeper sense of suffering that comes from seeking *Nirvāna*. So properly speaking, a good monastery is really a spiritual hospital, and so lay people offer gifts so that people can become healthy.

In return, of course, the monastic is supposed to be advanced enough in their meditation and understanding of the Dharma that they can guide lay people. So that's the benefit for both sides. But the lay person is supposed to be driven by making offerings out of compassion for this person who's trying to get out of suffering.

Not that it's always like that. It always becomes slightly corrupted because the person's making offerings for their own benefit. There was a case that I heard of, a person who came up from Bangkok with this delicious food in order to offer it to Ajahn Chah and his monastery. And if you offer it to somebody who is highly attained, you obviously get far more grace than somebody who has very little attainment. So when he got to Ajahn Chah's monastery he found that Ajahn Chah wasn't there, so he put all the food back in the van and went somewhere else. That's not quite the way it's supposed to work.

So anyway, "The householder, these are the four worthy deeds that a noble disciple undertakes with the wealth acquired by energetic striving, amassed by the strength of his arms, earned by the sweat of his brow, righteous wealth righteously earned. And for anyone whose wealth is expended on other things apart from these four worthy deeds, that wealth is said to have gone to waste, to have been squandered and used frivolously. But for anyone whose wealth is expended on these four worthy deeds, that wealth is said to have gone to good use, to have been fruitfully employed and used for a worthy cause."

For me what stands out is this idea that one has to make oneself happy and then others. Whenever we begin the *metta* practice I usually put to ourselves further along the line, but traditionally you start off with yourself because when you're happy you can make others happy. And we sometimes get confused with that, with being selfish. But it's not, it's self-care. So you have to make sure that just because you've treated yourself, that therefore you're being selfish. No, you might need to lift your heart a bit so you buy an ice cream or something.

Just to reinforce that, I'll just read this, it's a small discourse. So here, the Buddha is actually talking about what happiness is. So the Blessed One said to the householder Anathapindika, so it's the same person, "There are, householder, these four kinds of happiness, which may be achieved by a layperson who enjoys sensual pleasures depending on time and occasion. What four? The happiness of possession, the happiness of enjoyment, the happiness of freedom from debt and the happiness of blamelessness." So these are the happinesses. But the first one you notice is to do with sensual pleasure.

"So what is the happiness of possession? Here a family man possesses wealth acquired by energetic striving" and so on. "And when he thinks 'I possess wealth acquired in this way, righteously gained,' he experiences happiness and joy. This is the happiness of possession."

"And then what is the happiness of enjoyment? So with the wealth acquired by energetic striving" and so on, "a family man enjoys his wealth and does meritorious deeds." These two always come together, to enjoy your wealth and to do meritorious deeds. "And he thinks 'with the wealth acquired in this way, I enjoy my wealth and do meritorious deeds,' and he experiences happiness and joy. This is called the happiness of enjoyment."

"And what, householder, is the happiness of freedom from debt? Here a family man is not indebted to anyone to any degree, whether small or great. And when he thinks, 'I'm not indebted to anyone to any degree, whether small or great,' he experiences happiness and joy. This is called the happiness of freedom from debt."

"And what, householder, is the happiness of blamelessness? Here, householder, a noble disciple is endowed with blameless conduct of body, speech and mind. And when he thinks, 'I am endowed with blameless conduct of body, speech and mind,' he experiences happiness and joy. And this is the happiness of blamelessness."

"These, householder, are the four kinds of happiness that a lay person who enjoys sensual pleasures may enjoy depending on time and on occasions." I can only hope these words have been of some assistance and that you will continue to enjoy your life and do meritorious deeds and in such a way arrive at that lovely place sooner rather than later.

Does that come as a sort of surprise? That the Buddha is so clear about certain types of happiness and that he's not at all gloomy about people enjoying themselves? That's because the normal message is *dukkha, dukkha*, suffering, suffering, misery. Get the hair shirt out. Don't do this, don't do that. But he's quite happy with it. He's quite happy with people earning good money and enjoying life and making sure that they also do meritorious deeds.

In that, when we say this grace before meals, perhaps you can look at it when you go to the kitchen, it's distinguishing between indulgence and enjoyment, appreciative joy and indulgence. And these two are so close together, it's very difficult. The only, you only know that you've slipped into indulgence after the

event when you find craving arriving for biscuits again. Then you know, ah, you didn't just enjoy them, you were becoming psychologically dependent on them for happiness. That's a very fine distinction, a very fine distinction.

So how would you get over that? How would you find yourself, if you find yourself raiding the biscuit tin every ten minutes, how do you get over that? You get over that through renunciation. So that's when you place the biscuit tin in front of you and refuse to take one until all desires for biscuits have disappeared. When all desires for biscuits have disappeared, then you can start again and enjoy them. And you have to be very careful not to just go over that edge so you're indulging again. Difficult, isn't it?

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