

## DUTIES OF THE RICH<sup>1</sup>

The **Anaṅga Sutta** (A 4.62) comprehensively defines the Buddha's attitude towards wealth as follows:

- (1) The joy of ownership, that is, the satisfaction derived from having earned a living for ourselves so that we are economically secure; this is the joy of *having*.
- (2) The joy of enjoyment, that is, the opportunity of directly benefitting from the wealth we have rightly earned: this is the joy of *being*.
- (3) The joy of debtlessness, that is, all our debts are settled, so that we are now really working for our own happiness, doing what we wish with our wealth, and we are financially independent. We can now rejoice in the joy of *giving*.
- (4) The joy of blamelessness, that is, we have worked and conducted ourselves in a manner that no one can justly find fault with us. Our actions are in some way beneficial to others, too. This is the joy of *doing*. (A 4.62/2:69-71) = SD 2.2

Clearly here, in the teachings of early Buddhism, we see wealth not merely as something that we *have*, but as something that we *are*. Wealth, in other words, has a purpose, that is, to generate and sustain happiness in self and in others. We cannot be really happy, all alone, especially when there are those who are socially and economically deprived around us. We do not merely have houses, but a home that includes its environment. On a natural scale, that environment is society, if not the world.

It is therefore helpful in contributing towards a wholesome community, a good society and a better world. This becomes easier in a right livelihood context, where we are not just *being* good (keeping to the precepts, meditating, and so on), but also *doing* good works. This is not just doing what we are told, as in a corporation or in politics, but enjoying our work, and wanting to share that bliss with others.

The philosophy behind *the industrial revolution*<sup>2</sup> is profitable production, and humans are merely resources, producers and consumers. The philosophy underpinning *capitalism*<sup>3</sup> is that we have the right to own and enjoy the fruits of our work, or we could work for money. In both cases, we have become measurable producers and consumers, controlled by "wealth" and "market forces."

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<sup>1</sup> This is a slightly edited excerpt from **Right livelihood** = SD 37.8 (6.2.3.2).

<sup>2</sup> **The Industrial Revolution** (18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> cent) was a period of major changes in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, transportation, and technology, which had profound effects on our social, economic and cultural conditions to this day. As a historical turning-point, it affected almost every aspect of daily life in some way, esp average income and population, which saw unprecedented sustained growth. Its success was partly due to colonialism, whereby Britain (where the Revolution started), other European countries, and Japan conquered and colonized other countries to exploit their people, space, labour and resources. The Revolution's negative effects continue even today in terms of impersonalizing us (eg by way of consumerism) and promoting materialism, and a dominant Christian "heritage." For overview & refs: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial\\_Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution).

<sup>3</sup> **Capitalism** is an economic system that arose in western society after the demise of feudalism. Basically, its elements include private ownership of the means of production, creation of goods or services for profit, the accumulation of capital (wealth), competitive markets and wage labour. It is closely associated with the Industrial Revolution.

However, Buddhist economics -- the effective use of wealth as if life matters -- is not only be about a happy *household* (*oikos*) but must also support a wholesome society and healthy environment (ecology).<sup>4</sup> If we *have* sufficient wealth, then we *are* in an advantageous position to *act* in a proactive manner to bring about wholesome support, growth and changes around, even beyond, us.

Hence, it behooves the rich to help the poor and needy with compassion and wisdom. Poverty and need are not choices that the laity make:<sup>5</sup> poverty and need fall upon many individuals, who otherwise could be more productive or creative in some way. When such surplus wealth is *given* systematically, effectively and compassionately, we generate greater happiness in society. This is one important way of raising the happiness and quality of our community.

There is a range of wholesome giving for the benefit of others. The most basic is that of material giving, that of providing the four supports: food, clothing, shelter and health. Without these basics, it is hard for anyone to go beyond the routine of even surviving a human life. Yet, such giving must encourage and empower them to realize their personal potentials and talents so that their lives are rich and enriching in their own ways.

The greatest gift, as stated in the suttas, is the gift of the Dharma,<sup>6</sup> that is, the teaching and spreading of the Buddha Word for the sake of moral virtue, mental cultivation and liberating wisdom. With our wealth, we can initiate or support such **Dharma-moved initiatives**, as,

- social projects, especially related to personal health, social harmony and wholesome culture,
- individual-centred projects, especially mental health and personal creativity, and
- wisdom-based projects, that is, the nurturing of Dharma understanding that is personally liberating and socially uplifting.

## Revisioning Buddhism 46

[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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<sup>4</sup> See **Sappurisa Dāna S** (A 5.148) @ SD 22.15 (3): Wealth and wellbeing.

<sup>5</sup> Monastics, as renunciants, are by definition economically "poor" and insecure; for, their task is spiritual security and awakening in this life itself, and to be an inspiration to us, the worldly, who in turn support them out of wise faith.

<sup>6</sup> (**Saṅgha**) **Bala S** (A 9.5.6/4:364 f) = SD 2.21 & Dh 354a.