

SD 64.12b**Na Suppatikāra Sutta****The Discourse on the Not Easily Repaid****A 2.32**

Theme: Parenthood, gratitude and wealth

1 Parenthood and its duties**1.1 BEING A PARENT****1.1.1 Life, humanity and society**

1.1.1.1 Biologically, a male and a female together create life. They are said to “parent”¹ a child; hence, a parent is either a mother or a father. In special cases, there is only a single parent, that is, biologically a male or a female who ideally must play the role of both mother and father. In Pali, the word for “parents” is *mātā,pitū*, “mother and father,” with “mother” being placed first. This is mainly because, biologically, a child is formed in a woman (who then becomes a mother) for 9 months or 10 lunar months.

The mother then bears the labour and pains of childbirth—“very painful but well worth it”²—to bring the child into the world. She then nurtures the child during the early months and years. The mother’s care, love and guidance thus profoundly influence the child’s early life, and often for the rest of his or her life.

1.1.1.2 Hence, **the mother** is given the honour of precedence in the compound for “parents,” *mātā,-pitū*. **The father** forms the other component of the word for “parents” to signify that parenthood is naturally or should be an act of mutual love, and the child or children are the fruits of that love. Father is also mentioned in the twin compound or dvandva because, while the mother raises the child and humanizes him or her, the father socializes the child and often gives him or her direction in life.

In the suttas, the compound *mātāpitū* (“mother and father”) thus places *mātā* (mother) first to emphasize her paramount role and unique contribution to a child’s survival, and profound influence during his or her early life. Very often, the mother is “a friend in one’s home” (*mātā mittarṇ sake ghare*), to whom a child turns for unconditional love.³ On the other hand, to earn a father’s love or approval, the child often must be willing and able to wear his father’s shoes.

1.1.1.3 As the child matures, **the humanizing process** is vitally inculcated by the mother or whoever parents the child. A child is born merely with a human body as *a formative being*; without proper human care, they are likely, for example, to become “feral” or grow into “wolf children.”⁴ Or worse, when either

¹ “Parent” (v) can be either transitive (needs one or more objects to receive the action or complete its meaning in a sentence), eg, to “father” or “mother” a child; or intransitive (does not require a direct object), eg, to be a parent; hence “parenting.” See OED 2nd ed 1989: parent (v).

² A mother once told me.

³ S 1.53/188*/1:37 (SD 34.1 (2.5.1.2)).

⁴ Victor of Aveyron (c1788-1828, Rouergue, France) was the most documented case of a feral child: [NYTimes] [Wiki]. **The wolf children of E Prussia**: Following World War 2, some 20,000 East Prussian children survived by begging or working for food in Lithuania, often roaming wild in a hostile environment [YouTube]. **Feral children** refer to cases of children alleged to have been reared by wolves in the wild, such as Dina Sanichar from India: [Wiki] [Nature]. **Wolf Children** (2012) is a highly acclaimed anime movie directed by Mamoru Hosoda: [IMDb] [Guardian]. 15 Mar 2026.

parent fails to humanize the child, that child may assume subhuman qualities which will warp its fragile mind and go on to bring great suffering to them and to others, and may bring them subhuman rebirths.⁵

- When a parent is physically violent to their child's body or mind, that is, being physically abusive, the child may grow into an abusive person with a **hell-being** personality.
- When a parent is emotionally violent and calculating, measuring and grooming the child to measure and use others for selfish ends, then the child may devolve into an exploitative person with an **asura** personality.
- When a parent enforces routine into a child with fear and threats, seeing the child as merely an extension of the parent, driven to accumulate worldly gains and power, then the child may become a creature with **animal** instincts.

1.1.1.4 On the other hand, when the child is raised in the spaciousness of unconditional love, the child grows to learn from mistakes and to build strength in the face of weakness or lack. When the parent does not see their child in their own image and the child is taught the wisdom of and given the freedom to make responsible choices, the child will truly evolve into a wholesome adult who will benefit not only the family but many others in society, even significantly shape history.

When parents understand and accept that their child is unique and grows to shape his or her own wholesome destiny, the parents then become a special part in the child's impending humanity, even divinity, as seen in the case of the bodhisattva who became the Buddha. The parents then become the roots and earth deep below the waters of love from which arises the lotus of human awakening.

1.1.1.5 In most cases, a mother will naturally love her children, especially her only child. The Buddha knows this and highlights this image of a mother's love for her one and only child whom she will nurture and protect with her own life. This is in fact the only metaphor in **the Karaṇīya Metta Sutta** (Sn 149), thus:

*Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ
āyusā eka,puttāṃ anurakkhe
evam pi sabba,bhūtesu
mānasam bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ*

Just as a mother would guard her own child⁶—
her one and only child, with her own life—
even so, towards all beings
let one cultivate a boundless heart!

(Khp 9,7/p8 = Sn 149/p25), SD 38.3

Our existential bond with our parents—good or bad—is timeless; it is what has significantly shaped us; and will continue to shape us in the future. In the incessant cycle of samsara, we have mothered and fathered one another countless times⁷ [2.6.2.1]. How we treat our parents now will shape us in time to come. Yet, in this life itself we can correct or better how we treat our parents, and how we treat our children. What we do to others, especially to parents, will keep returning to us as habitual karma in one way or another. It is thus vitally important to end any legacy of hate and pain with wisdom and compass-

⁵ On the subhuman personalities, see SD 48.1 (5.2.4); SD 63.12 (3.3.2.5).

⁶ This is the only simile or parable in the whole Sutta and marks its climax. If we are inclined to, we could visualize ourselves as a mother (or father if it feels better) and regarding other people as our own children. Or, if this is difficult, we could regard others in an age-appropriate way: see **Piṇḍola S** (U 4.6/42 f), SD 27.6a(2.3). We could also reflect on the teaching and truth that, on account of our countless rebirths, we have been somehow related to one another in some way, as a parent, a brother, a sister, etc [6.3].

⁷ See eg **Mātā S** (S 15.14/2:189), **Pitā S** (S 15.15/2:189), and as our brother (S 15.16/2:189), as our sister (15.17/2:289), as our son (S 15.18/2:190), and as our daughter (S 15.19/2:190).

ion. Hatred can only be overcome with love (Dh 5). Unconditional love opens up new space for beautiful family lives so that we live in the divine abodes of *love, ruth, joy and peace*.

1.1.2 Angels and demons

1.1.2.1 When we decide to be parents, we may be bad parents or good parents. Only when we give up on our self-accountability do we lose our right to the choice of becoming good parents. In **the Saṁvāsa Sutta 2** (S 4.54), the Buddha describes a bad parent as one who lives breaking the precepts, being immoral and miserly, without any respect for others. Such a parent has *no respect for life, nor for property, nor for freedom, nor for truth, nor for mindfulness*. Such a parent is said to be a “corpse” (*chava*), or, in modern lingo, one of the living dead.⁸

The most unwholesome relationship between a couple would be where both the wife is a corpse and the husband, too, is a corpse. In other cases, the wife may be a corpse but the husband a **deva or angel**; or the husband a corpse but the wife a deva or angel.

Ideally, of course, both husband and wife are devas or angels. **The 2 Saṁvāsa Suttas** (S 4.53 f) describe such a wholesome couple as those who live keeping the precepts, moral and charitable, with proper respect for others. They are likely to become parents who have **respect for life, for property, for freedom, for truth, and for mindfulness**.

Angelic parents make the best parents since they are likely to raise angelic children. It is very likely that their children will continue this angelic legacy so that they inspire an angelic community. In this way, they cultivate and enjoy the divine abodes of love, ruth, joy and peace even right here and now.

1.1.2.2 Spiritually, an ideal parent is a deva or angel, who turns a house into a home, and a home that is heaven for the family. This is a metaphorical way of describing parents who show **love** (*mettā*), **ruth** (*karuṇā*), **joy** (*muditā*) and **peace** (*upekkhā*) to each other. Such a relationship is said to be a divine abode, which brightens up the family with heavenly space for children to grow in an angelic way, too, that is, with *love, ruth, joy and peace* in themselves and towards others.

1.1.2.3 Psychologically, a parent, whether a male or a female, should be mentally harmonious and emotionally integrated. In other words, **parenthood** is ideally a marriage of the best qualities of the masculine and the feminine, of mind and heart, of fatherliness and motherliness. For convenience, we can use the term **anima** for all the wholesome and helpful feminine qualities (such as compassion and joy) and **animus** for all the good masculine qualities (such as wisdom and calmness) that should be well developed and harmonized in either parent. Any imbalance may allow negative emotions to weigh in. A mentally harmonious and emotionally integrated parent is thus one who has the divine abodes of *love, ruth, joy and peace*, especially in their communication with their children.⁹

1.2 DUTIES OF PARENTHOOD

1.2.1 Sutta teachings on parent-child relations and their significance

1.2.1.1 In **the Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31), the Buddha gives specific teachings on reciprocal duties and tasks between parents and children, thus:

⁸ S 4.53+54/1:57-61 (SD 64.11).

⁹ SD 8.7 (4); SD 62.10a (3.2.1.1). Note that psychological terms like **anima** and **animus** have been used here merely for didactic convenience without reflecting any of the technicality as suggested by Carl Jung (1875-1961), which may be useful in an academic exercise. The purpose here is simply a spiritual study and investigation for practical application.

Young houselord, **parents**, as the east [the front quarter],¹⁰ *should* be ministered to by **a son** or a **daughter**,¹¹ in these 5 ways, considering thus:¹²

- | | |
|--|--|
| (1) 'Having been supported by them, | I will support them in turn.' |
| (2) 'I will do their work | for them.' |
| (3) 'I will keep | the family tradition.' ¹³ |
| (4) 'I will be worthy of | my heritage [inheritance].' |
| (5) 'And I will make offerings ¹⁴ | to the departed (<i>peta</i>). ¹⁵ |

Parents, young houselord, as the east, *having been* ministered to thus by **the son** or **the daughter** show them their¹⁶ compassion in these 5 ways, thus:¹⁷

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| (1) They restrain him | from evil. |
| (2) They exhort him | to do good. |
| (3) They have him trained | in a profession. ¹⁸ |
| (4) They arrange for his marriage | to a suitable wife [suitable husband]. ¹⁹ |
| (5) They hand over, in due time, | his inheritance. ²⁰ |

These are **reciprocal duties and tasks**, meaning that parents have raised their children in wholesome ways, so that they are mature and independent enough to support the parents in return, keeping the family happily together, wisely using their wealth and remembering them after their passing.

The Sutta here clearly refers to parents acting as:

- (1+2) experienced and compassionate counsellors at the right times;
- (3) giving their children proper and good education;
- (4) in our own time, this social teaching should be updated to giving the children support and space for a happily married life; and
- (5) wisely and fairly handing over the family legacy in due time (such as by a will).

(D 31,28/3:189), SD 4.1

¹⁰ The ancient Indians get their directions from the rising sun (the east) (*pubba*), which they face—hence, it is the their “front” (*pubba*). The Buddha’s use of the “directions” imagery is to reflect the totality or fullness and security of human relationships.

¹¹ “By a son or a daughter,” *puttena*. Comy on Sn 24b (**Dhaniya S**) says that *puttā* “refers to all the offspring, daughters and sons altogether” (*puttā ti dhītaro ca puttā ca, te sabbe puttā tv-eva ekajjhaṃ vuccanti*, SnA 1:38,13-15), which is applicable here.

¹² This whole section forms **Ṭhāna Putta S** (A 5.39/3:43), SD 4.1(1.3), on a parent’s reasons for having a son.

¹³ *Kula,vaṃsaṃ ṭhapessāmi*. “The family tradition,” *kula,vaṃsa*, ie, by guarding the wealth and property gathered by one’s parents, and if parents lack faith in the Dharma, one restores family honour by giving different types of donations (ticket food, etc) to the sangha (DA 3:953). Cf *kula,vaṃsaṃ ciraṃ ṭhassati*, “He will keep the family tradition standing long” (**Ṭhāna Putta S**, A 5.39/3:43), SD 4.1(1.3).

¹⁴ “Offerings,” *dakkhinā*; an allusion to doing deeds of merit and the dedication of merits to the departed.

¹⁵ *Atha vā pana petānaṃ kāla,katānaṃ dakkhiṇaṃ anuppadassāmī*, ie, by dedicating merits to the departed. On the significance of this, see D 31,2(5)+n (SD 4.1).

¹⁶ This is a common-gender plural.

¹⁷ Duties (6) & (7) are identical to those of the recluses and brahmins reciprocating the son of family’s goodness [D 31,33fg. SD 4.1].

¹⁸ “Profession,” *sippa*, lit, “the arts,” but here, following Comy, it has been rendered so. Comy says that the son is trained in the family profession such as conveyancing [transfer of property], accounting, etc (DA 3:953).

¹⁹ *Paṭirūpena dārena saṃyojenti*, lit, “they have him bound to a suitable woman,” which is said in reference to Indian society in the Buddha’s time. In contemporary terms, this has to be contextualized to “they let their son or daughter find a suitable spouse.”

²⁰ That is, at proper times and at death (DA 3:953).

1.2.1.2 In modern terms, we can describe **good parenting** as incorporating the following roles:²¹

- **ensuring safety and sustenance:** a good parent provides basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, health care, and safety from harm;
- **providing socioemotional support:** a good parent shows love, warmth, and joy in a secure engaging relationship that includes regulating emotions, promoting self-esteem, and inspiring positive behaviour;
- **supervision and monitoring:** a good parent keeps track of a child's activities, friendships, and whereabouts to train them in making good decisions so that they are secure and know how to stay safe;
- **structure and routine:** a good parent gives performable tasks; establishes predictable routines and boundaries to provide stability; which helps children feel secure and learn self-regulation;
- **modeling behaviour:** a good parent serves as a positive role model by showing positive conduct, values, and healthy relationship skills;
- **education and creativity:** a good parent encourages learning through stimulating activities, providing opportunities for intellectual growth, and encouraging creativity;
- **socialization:** a good parent supports warm connections with the family, peers, and community to foster healthy relationships and social skills;
- **responsibility and independence:** a good parent teaches their children to take responsibility for themselves and nurture their growing independence as they mature.

1.2.1.3 Key positive parenting techniques can be helpfully summarized as **PRIDE** skills:²²

- **Praise** Building self-esteem through positive reinforcement.
- **Reflection** Listening and responding to encourage positive communication and emotion.
- **Imitation** Participating in play to show interest, warmth and fellowship.
- **Description** Talking reflectively and positively about the child's actions to foster awareness.
- **Enthusiasm** Showing genuine enjoyment and friendship.

Parent's self-care. A good parent also knows and learns to take care of themselves to stay patient and present. This includes maintaining their own health, knowing and accepting their limitations, and establishing a supportive environment for the other parent as well.

1.2.1.4 When these wholesome behaviours and skills are shown by parents to their children during the first 7 years—or up to the 2nd 7 years at the latest—the child is likely to have imbibed the necessary personal skills to navigate himself or herself with peers and in society. More importantly, they are able to learn from mistakes, make good decisions, show healthy human traits and be able to learn from lacks and failures, and so be resilient and healthy individuals.

2 Wealth and modern family

2.1 A PSYCHOLOGY OF WEALTH

2.1.1 What is wealth?

2.1.1.1 Nowadays, in affluent urbanized society, **wealth** is often seen as a measure of financial prosperity in terms of assets, income, and whatever that we have. Wealth is a measure of one's net worth

²¹ See R Handman, "[The power of positive parenting](#)," UC Davis, CA, USA, 2026. 20 Mar 2026.

²² The Key Positive Parenting Techniques, commonly known as **PRIDE Skills**, originated in the early 1970s as part of Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT). They were developed by clinical psychologist Dr Sheila Eyberg at the Oregon Health Sciences University.

that includes housing, investments and savings (less liabilities). It benefits one by acting as a protection against life's uncertainties, giving one the ease and freedom to make choices for a better life, especially in a material sense. Although wealth may not guarantee happiness, it can increase one's life satisfaction and emotional well-being by giving access to better living conditions, education, health and leisure.

Broadly, wealth is often understood as the **money or finance** that one has or controls; thus it is **wealth** that is often associated with economic stability and security. One's financial wealth gives one the means to enjoy goods and services, invest in opportunities, and plan for the future. Financial wealth can offer one a sense of control and freedom, so that one can make choices in terms of one's needs, values and hopes.

2.1.1.2 However, in affluent societies, wealth includes intangible qualities such as time, health, relationships, and personal fulfilment. This broader perspective recognizes that wealth is not solely about accumulating money or having things, but also about having the drive, resources and opportunities to lead a fulfilling life.

Non-material wealth includes elements that contribute to one's quality of life and well-being. Intangible benefits include physical health, healthy social connections, emotional well-being, and the pursuit of personal passions and interests. Non-material wealth significantly raises one's enjoyment of true happiness and well-being beyond mere financial success.

2.1.1.3 Not surprisingly, this rise and spread of affluence amongst urbanized individuals, even those with little education, and amongst seniors, has led to a rise in a new form of crime—digital robbery or **cybercrime**. Millions are lost every year to digital criminals, individuals, organized and state-sponsored. The affluent are often scammed through the internet and phones, preying on the victims' greed and naivety.²³

In the **Ādiyā Sutta** (A 5.41), the Buddha mentions the 5 uses of wealth, that is,

- (1) for his own benefit (including his family),
- (2) for the benefit of friends and guests,
- (3) for keeping his wealth secure,
- (4) for offerings (gifts to others, including family rituals), and
- (5) for supporting worthy renunciants.

For the 3rd usage of his wealth—for the security of his wealth—the lay Buddhist is advised thus:

Furthermore, houselord, with wealth gotten by work and zeal, gathered by the strength of arm, earned by the sweat of the brow, justly obtained in a lawful way,

he makes himself secure against all misfortunes whatsoever, such as may arise from fire, from water, from the king, from robbers, and from bad heirs.²⁴ He makes himself secure, keeping his goods in safety. (A 5.41,4/3:45), SD 2.1

The layman's keeping his wealth safe from cybercrime would be included in his task of ensuring that his wealth is not lost to "virtual robbers," and, in the case of state-sponsored cybercrimes, that his wealth is not lost because one is gullible and unguarded. [2.5.3.1]

²³ For an overview and refs, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cybercrime>. 14 Apr 2026.

²⁴ This is stock. **Mahā Dukkha-k, khandha S** (M 13) lists these 5 as the causes of suffering for one who has to protect his wealth (M 13,10/1:86), SD 6.9. (**Satta, dhana**) **Ugga S** (A 7.7) declares how worldly wealth is subject to these 5 dangers, but that the 7 treasures (*satta dhana*) are not; that is, namely, faith (*saddhā*), moral virtue (*sīla*), moral shame (*hiri*), moral fear (*ottappa*), learning (*suta*), charity (*cāga*) and wisdom (*paññā*) (D 3:163; M 3:99; A 7.5,6/4:7; cf A 1:210 f).

2.1.2 What is happiness?

2.1.2.1 Happiness is a subjective state of well-being that encompasses personal, emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions that one experiences for oneself, that is, in one's own mind and body. It is often described as a sense of *satisfaction*, *fulfilment* and *contentment* with the present state of things or with one's life as a whole thus far. Happiness is often influenced by various factors, such as personal values, beliefs, relationships, achievements, and circumstances.

Happiness is “**subjective**” well-being since it is mainly about how we perceive and evaluate our own lives and others in general. It is characterized by our wholesome emotional responses (such as joy and contentment) and by general attitude to life, especially in terms of satisfaction. Subjective well-being thus includes both mental factors, such as one's wholesome personality and mindset, and external factors, such as one's life events and how one sees others.

2.1.2.2 In terms of early Buddhism, happiness may be categorized as either “material” or “non-material.” **Material happiness** (*āmisa* or *s'āmisa sukha*) is sense-based and as such “worldly,” especially when we find pleasure in it; this is the most prevalent kind of happiness or joy that people feel or enjoy. **Mental happiness** (*nirāmisa sukha*) is a subjective attitude which gives material happiness its quality. In either case, when the root of happiness is *non-greed*, *non-hatred* or *non-delusion*, it is a wholesome happiness. When that happiness is rooted in *greed*, *hatred* or *delusion*, it is unwholesome. Either way, such happiness is said to be worldly.²⁵

Mental happiness that arises with the Dharma as object or arises during meditation—when the mind is free from the 3 unwholesome roots—is said to be “**spiritual happiness**.” This type of happiness is, as a rule, free from greed and hatred. However, a subtle root of delusion may persist when one is attached to such a happiness. When the meditator overcomes this attachment to the meditation state, one then progresses on to the higher stages.²⁶ [2.2.1.1]

2.2 A SOCIOLOGY OF WEALTH AND HAPPINESS

2.2.1 Historical overview of wealth and happiness

2.2.1.1 The millennium spanning 800 BCE to 200 CE was marked with dramatic changes, turning-points, in human civilization, the effects of which we still see today; the period has been called **the axial age** (German *Achsenzeit*).²⁷ In ancient Greece, philosophers like Socrates (d 399 BCE), Plato (c 427-347 BCE), and Aristotle (384-322 BCE) thought about, amongst other things, wealth and happiness. According

²⁵ On happiness, worldly (*āmisa*; usu *s'āmisa*) and spiritual (*nirāmisa*): **Suddhika Nirāmisa S** (S 36.29), SD 55.4; also **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,32), SD 13.3; **Nibbedhika Pariyāya S** (A 6.63,6.2), SD 6.11.

²⁶ The phrase, “progressively higher distinction” (*ulāraṃ pubbenāparaṃ viśesaṃ*) refers to attaining dhyana to progress through the 4 stages of sainthood (*ariya* 4). See **Dhamma, cetiya S** (M 89,12+18), SD 64.10; **Bhikkhuṇī Vāsaka S** (S 47.10,3), SD 24.2; **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118,2,2+6.2), SD 7.13. On “more to be done” (*uttariṃ karaṇīyaṃ*), to work on for one's awakening: (**Ānanda**) **Subha S** (D 10,1.31 + passim), SD 40a.13; **Assa, pura S** (M 39,3.5-/1:271), SD 10.13; (**Gaha, pati**) **Potaliya S** (M 54,14), SD 43.8; **Sevitabbāsevitabba S** (M 114), SD 39.8 (1.1.1.8); SD 51.17 (3.4.2.5).

²⁷ A term and idea introduced by coined by German philosopher **Karl Jaspers** (1883-1969), referring to universalizing modes of thought that appeared in Persia, India, China, Israel, and the Graeco-Roman world, in striking parallel developments, without any known mutual influence amongst these disparate cultures. “What is new about this age, [in the ancient civilized societies,] is that man becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations.” (Jaspers 1949, tr M Bullock, *The Origin and Goal of History*, 1953:2); see also SD 60.1c (17.2); SD 61a (3.3.1.3).

to Socrates, wealth does not bring happiness; rather, happiness comes from virtue and wisdom. Plato, who formalized Socrates' ideas, explained that the desire for wealth may lead to moral corruption.

In India, the Buddha (6th-5th centuries BCE)²⁸ taught that material wealth can and should be a blessing for the laity to do good works, but for renunciants, **spiritual wealth** is beyond works or karma, and is attained through freeing the mind from suffering, that is, spiritual awakening (*bodhi*).

Aristotle, living just after the Buddha, spoke of "eudaimonia," often translated as "**flourishing**" or "well-being," which should be our ultimate goal. For Aristotle, wealth was a means to an end, not an end in itself, and true happiness was found in living a life of virtue and harmony. Modern scholars and writers sometimes use the term "flourishing" for the Buddha's teaching on spiritual wealth to highlight the broader original sense of "**wealth**" as being derived from "to be well."²⁹

2.2.1.2 Etymologically, "wealth" is directly related to "weal" and "well," originating from Old English terms that defined a holistic state of being, rather than mere material possession.³⁰ In fact, we see a deep positive relationship between *wealth* and *health* even in premodern English, where we see the overlapping etymologies of the two words beautifully reflected in the saying: **health is wealth**.³¹

The saying "health is wealth" is said to go back to the American philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote "The first wealth is health," in his *Conduct of Life* (1860). A similar sentiment was very much earlier made by Virgil (70-19 BCE), a Roman poet, who noted "the greatest wealth is health." Long before either of them, the Buddha teaches that **health is the highest gain** (*ārogya, paramā lābhā*, Dh 204).³²

2.2.1.3 All these beautiful sayings share the same sentiment which emphasizes that without health, wealth cannot be enjoyed. It suggests that physical, mental, and social well-being are the foundation for a productive and happy life. The Buddha's saying, however, stresses on spiritual wealth, that is, moral integrity, mental development and spiritual awakening, bringing freedom from suffering.

As we have noted [2.1.2.2], when the Buddha speaks of "spiritual wealth" as the happiness, wisdom and freedom of awakening, he also teaches how the unawakened laity should live cultivating **wholesome wealth**, which is of 2 kinds or levels, the material and the mental.

Broadly, **material wealth** is material well-being, that is, enjoying the pleasures of the senses; this is also called "hedonic happiness," which characterizes the whole joy of the laity "who enjoy sensual pleasures" (*kāma, bhogī*), as mentioned in **the Mahā Vaccha, gotta Sutta** (M 73).³³ Such pleasures of the senses are enjoyed by the laity who understand and respect the precepts; thus they enjoy such pleasures with *respect for life, property, the person, truth and mindfulness*. In other words, such laity knows when to stop

²⁸ Traditional dates of the Buddha are 624-544 BCE (Sri Lanka) or 623-543 (SE Asia); Western scholars' dates for the Buddha are: 566-466 or 563-463. The general consensus amongst modern scholars is that the Buddha lived around 480-400 BCE; that is, he died between 410 and 400 BCE. (See Oxford Dict of Buddhism, 2003 sv Date of the Buddha). The bodhisattva departed from Kapila, vatthu on the full-moon of Āsāḷha (June-July), when he was 30, ie, 594 BCE (traditional date). See **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16,5.27.4), SD 9; Skt **Mahā, parinirvāṇa Sūtra** 40, 49 (ed E Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. Berlin, 1950-51:376). [InternetEncyofPhilosophy] 16 June 2026.

²⁹ OED 2nd ed 1989: svv health + wealth.

³⁰ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/wealth>. 18 Mar 2026.

³¹ [Etymonline](https://www.etymonline.com/word/wealth): Old English *hælp* "wholeness, a being whole, sound or well," from Proto-Germanic **hailitho*, from PIE **kailo-* "whole, uninjured, of good omen" (source also of Old English *hal* "hale, whole;" Old Norse *heill* "heal-thy;" Old English *halig*, Old Norse *helge* "holy, sacred;" Old English *hælan* "to heal"). With Proto-Germanic abstract noun suffix **-itho* (see [-th](#) (2)), "of physical health" in Middle English, but also "prosperity, happiness, welfare; preservation, safety." "Health" is the abstract noun to *whole*, not to *heal*. 18 Mar 2026.

³² SD 29.6a (4.2).

³³ **M 73**,10/1:491), SD 27.4; SD 54.9 (4.2).

and when to abstain from sensual pleasures, even to reflect on the impermanence and suffering that such enjoyment entails.

Hedonic pleasures also include the divine bliss of the devas of the sense-world heavens.³⁴ The senses of such divine beings are better developed and more refined than those of humans, and they are the result of past good karma done by these devas. In other words, when the efficacy of such karma ends, these divine beings invariably fall from their divine state for lower states, even the subhuman realms, depending on their other past karma. Only those who are at least streamwinners do not fall below the human plane, where they re-arise to continue practising the spiritual life.

2.2.2 The roots and rise of modern materialism

2.2.2.1 Despite the positive premodern view of wealth and happiness, we notice that the modern attitude tends to prioritize **materialism**—that is, material wealth, status-consciousness and self-centredness. What led to this modern change? Modern views of success and happiness, especially in urbanized and affluent societies, are deeply influenced by modern Western materialist views, which, though rooted in the ancient Greek views of wealth and happiness, evolved with the rise of Christianity as a world-dominating power and influence. [2.2.2.2]

During **the medieval period** or Middle Ages (the 5th to late 15th centuries), Christian theology heavily influenced views on wealth and happiness in Western societies. The Bible contains numerous passages warning against the dangers of wealth, such as the famous saying, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”³⁵ Wealth was seen as a potential obstacle to salvation, and the pursuit of material wealth was discouraged in favour of faith by a belief in God, and in submission, that is, reliance on divine grace.

2.2.2.2 The rise of power-based Christianity has been profoundly arrested by various historical developments, the most significant of which is its own **internal schisms and heresies**, even within the early Church. Since God is at best an idea, a very powerful one, influential theologians and powerful kings worked to “reform” the God-idea, the Church and Christianity to be in their favour. Such tendencies led to devastating, often protracted, **religious wars** (8th century to the present) that traumatized local societies even to this day.³⁶

The Renaissance (14th-17th centuries) was a fervent period of European cultural, artistic, political, and scientific “rebirth” following the Middle Ages, that brought a shift in perspective with the rise of **humanism**. Thinkers like Erasmus of Rotterdam (c 1466-1536) and Thomas More of England (1478-1535) explored the idea that wealth could be used for the good of society. While they still valued moral and spiritual virtues, there was a growing recognition that **wealth**, when used wisely, could contribute to human flourishing and social well-being.

2.2.2.3 The rise of Islam (7th century onwards) and its rapid spread through its military might, brought about the conquest of Syria, North Africa and Spain, and displaced established Christian communities in these regions. During the **colonial era**, Christian nations, such as Spain, Portugal, Britain, France and the Netherlands colonized the world, and inadvertently exposed themselves to Eastern religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism. Eastern religions are today spreading all over the West, further depriving Christianity of even more of the religious pie.

³⁴ The sense-world heavens (*kāma, loka sagga*) are those of the 4 great kings (*cātum mahā rājika*), the 33 (*tāva, -tiṃsa*), the Yāma devas (*yāma*), the contented (*tusita*), those who delight in creation (*nimmāna, ratī*), and those who lord over others’ creations (*para, nimitta, vasavattī*): see Vbh 422-426; SD 1.7 (app).

³⁵ Matt 19.24; Mark 10.25; Luke 18.25.

³⁶ On religious wars, see SD 60.1c (15.2.1); SD 64.6 (2.1.4).

Historical changes in Europe itself, such as **the Reformation** (16th century) and **the Industrial Revolution** (1759-1900), weakened Christianity to its roots. While the Reformation effectively emasculated the Roman Church, the Industrial Revolution led to the rise of the commodification of humans and human actions into measurable statistics, and brought about other modern phenomena that led to the decline of Christianity in the West³⁷ and to its rise in radical adaptation to the modern world. [2.2.2.5]

2.2.2.4 The European Enlightenment (1685-1815) was an intellectual and philosophical movement that started in France but spread across Europe. It championed reason, individualism, and skepticism towards tradition, religion and authority—and introduced new ideas about wealth and happiness. Philosophers like English thinker John Locke (1632-1704) and Scottish thinker and economist Adam Smith (1723-1790) advocated for the pursuit of individual happiness and economic prosperity.

Locke taught that we have the right to pursue “life, liberty, and property” for personal well-being.³⁸ Smith spoke of the “invisible hand” theory which suggested that the pursuit of individual wealth could lead to societal benefits.³⁹ These ideas laid the foundation for **modern capitalism** and the belief that economic growth could lead to greater happiness.

2.2.2.5 The Industrial Revolution led to the rise of consumer culture which further shaped views on wealth and happiness. German revolutionary philosopher and socialist Karl Marx (1818-1883) criticized the capitalist system and religion, arguing that they led to *alienation and exploitation*, while others, like US economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1859-1929), examined the social implications of wealth and conspicuous consumption.

The 20th century saw the emergence of **psychological studies** on the relationship between wealth and happiness. US psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) spoke of the hierarchy of needs and the role of self-actualization in achieving true happiness. He argued that our most basic needs must be met before we can move up to more advanced needs.

2.3 THE FORTUNES OF WEALTH

2.3.1 Material benefits of wealth

2.3.1.1 The fundamental benefit of wealth is that it fulfills one’s **personal** needs, that is, access to essential resources such as healthcare, housing and education. This access can lead to improved physical and mental health, as well as create the right environment for personal, professional and mental growth. Access to quality healthcare benefits one with better personal health, while access to better education helps one gain a fulfilling career and to develop intellectually.

Better access to healthcare especially for those less financially well off means that they are less likely to have emotional stress and psychological issues, and more likely to enjoy greater mental well-being. In addition, when one has financial security, one is in a better position to meet basic needs (of food, clothing, housing, and health). In this way, one is unlikely to be stressed on account of the lack of enjoying basic human needs.

2.3.1.2 Financial security and proper management of wealth provide one with various personal benefits. This financial stability allows one to focus on savings, long-term goals and personal develop-

³⁷ On the decline of Christianity in the Western world, see [Wiki]. 18 Mar 2026.

³⁸ Locke, **Second Treatise of Government** (1689) as part of Two Treatises of Government.

³⁹ The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759), which describes the unintentional distribution of resources by the rich, and An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (1776), which refers to individuals promoting the public good while pursuing their own security.

ment without any worry regarding financial or material lack. One would have a safety net to manage emergencies (such as for necessary repairs and medical bills) without incurring debt; this gives one peace of mind.

2.3.2 Non-material benefits of wealth

2.3.2.1 Having some wealth allows one to have **financial independence** which can give a sense of freedom and autonomy, so that one is able to make choices that reflect one's values and desires. This freedom can be enjoyed in various ways, such as the ability to travel, enjoy hobbies or engage in philanthropic work. Financial independence can give one a greater sense of control over one's life and greater life satisfaction free from the burden of a stressful job, free from any negative relationships, and free to choose where and how to live.

2.3.2.2 Wealth often gives one better opportunities to properly pursue one's passions and interests. The resultant joy and satisfaction bring one an enriched and more fulfilling life. The ability to support causes or projects reflecting one's values and dreams can also contribute to **a sense of purpose and fulfilment**.

Other practical benefits or gains of well managed wealth include:

- **time gains:** wealth allows one to gain productive time by hiring others to handle menial or time-consuming tasks (such as cleaning, home maintenance, and routine work), freeing more time for spiritual practice and leisure.
- **generational gains:** wealth enables parents to provide better education and a wholesome environment for their family and children.
- **human gains:** wealth provides the time and resources to support and entertain family, friends, and charitable causes, which gives one a sense of meaning and purpose.

2.4 THE DISADVANTAGES OF WEALTH

2.4.1 Social distance

2.4.1.1 Wealth in urbanized societies often leads to **social isolation or distance**, when people find it challenging to relate to others who differ in financial status. This then results in feelings of **alienation** of the less affluent, the poor, and seniors, further causing them feelings of **loneliness and stress**. When one sees wealth as giving one social status, this creates **barriers** in forming genuine relationships, since one may question the motives of those who seek one's company. On the other hand, even with others of similar wealth status, one may in time find the relationship frivolous or false.

2.4.1.2 With wealth, one often may feel increased social pressure and expectations. One may feel the need to keep appearances or make a show of growth in wealth and status, leading to unhappiness and stress. One may feel compelled or is expected to behave or live in a certain way, keeping up with the elites, or doing "better." This often becomes burdensome and impacts one's mental well-being.

2.4.2 Fear of loss

2.4.2.1 Wealth often attracts attention and scrutiny, leading to **a loss of privacy**. Public interest in the lives of wealthy individuals may bring intrusive media attention and expose or give rise to personal

issues. This lack of privacy becomes troubling when it affects one's sense of security and personal privacy and freedom.

2.4.2.2 Invariably, one **fears** the loss of what one has, and real fear comes with actual loss. Such fear is aggravated with attachment to things and perception of one's status. Even before one faces real loss, there is an insidious fear that may become a significant psychological burden. Anxiety and stress may also arise from constant worry about financial markets, investments, or economic downturns. The pressure to grow or maintain wealth often overshadows its enjoyment and benefits. In this way, wealth actually becomes a source of suffering rather than happiness.

2.4.2.3 When wealth is seen as merely *having*, even family members may be measured in terms of financial worth. The family situation may become dehumanized when natural and warm relationships are forgotten, and family members fight over wealth and rights over assets, or blame one another for losses and so on. In fact, this explains why such families are really never happy; clearly, they lack the joy of a contented, interactive and loving family who are used to giving and sharing things.

2.5 HOW WEALTH AFFECTS THE FAMILY TODAY

2.5.1 Class and mobility

2.5.1.1 The class system or status mentality plays a significant role in creating and influencing perceptions or attitudes towards wealth. In societies with rigid or traditional class structures, wealth is often inherited and concentrated within certain families or groups, reinforcing **social stratification**. This can lead to a perception of wealth as unattainable for those outside the elite class, thus fostering feelings of disenfranchisement and inequality.

2.5.1.2 The perception of wealth and status is also influenced by the degree of **social mobility** within a society. In a society where upward mobility is possible, wealth is often seen as a reward for talent and hard work. Conversely, in societies with limited mobility, wealth may be viewed as arising from privilege and luck, leading to skepticism about the fairness of wealth distribution.

In a merit-based society, like Singapore, wealth is seen as both a reward for one's abilities as well as a mark of one's social status. The dark side of such a system is that one tends to see education and abilities as tools for such attainments, and people are measured in terms of their wealth, and as such commodified as valued objects, or otherwise—especially the poor and seniors—as obsolete waste to be ignored or at best tolerated, or relegated to some social work project.

2.5.2 Wealth and loneliness

2.5.2.1 One of the painful and dehumanizing results of a widespread and habitual status-conscious attitude is how seniors are perceived. **Seniors** are often defined as those older than the more socially active society members, and so are usually considered as those older than 60. In traditional societies (such as Myanmar and Thailand), seniors, even those a few years older than oneself, are shown respect and deference.⁴⁰

In affluent societies, personal wealth through professional employment gives personal independence to young individuals. While in pre-modern or non-affluent societies marriage often provides financial and other securities, in affluent societies, however, couples are more likely to break up in the face of personal

⁴⁰ On the Thai sentiment of เกรงใจ (*krengjai*), see SD 38.2 (3.1.2).

differences. Couples are also less likely to have children because of their long work hours and work-related socializing and engagements.

2.5.2.2 While work and socialization keep the young couple busy, **seniors** who stop working are often left to themselves to survive on their pension, savings or whatever wealth they may have. Without the benefit of the traditional extended family, seniors of means are more likely to be left to live *alone* in their own homes. As old friends pass on, and the younger generation ignores them, these seniors often silently live by themselves.

Due to a lack of social engagement, such seniors live their own lives unnoticed by even their neighbours. That is, until they suddenly die alone and their corpse begins to reek in the neighbourhood. This has been happening often enough at an increasing rate that in Singapore, for example, there are a growing number of “Active Aging Centres” and various senior help projects to ensure that seniors are accounted for.

Help for seniors in Singapore is collectively managed under various government-supported schemes often branded as “Silver” or “Care” programmes, providing financial aid, healthcare, and daily living assistance. Key initiatives include the Silver Support Scheme, Seniors’ Mobility and Enabling Fund (SMF), and Home Caregiving Grant (HCG), administered primarily by the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC).

2.5.2.3 Loneliness epidemic⁴¹ is a term used to describe a perceived increase of loneliness and social isolation amongst both the old and the young.⁴² The increase is thought to have begun in the 2010s and was worsened by social distancing, stay-home orders, and deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴³ Other factors credited for the increase in the epidemic include individualism, technology and social media, economic inequality, lack of social support, and lack of a college degree.⁴⁴

The loneliness epidemic affects all adult members of urbanized societies, especially young adults. It is a widespread, increasing, and dangerous lack of social connection, recently declared a global public health concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the US Surgeon General. Those affected by the loneliness epidemic have increased risks of having dementia, strokes, and anxiety, with ill-health (due to heavy smoking, and so on).

2.5.3 Wealth and happiness

2.5.3.1 Wealth in itself does not bring happiness: “a fool and his money are soon parted.”⁴⁵ One’s wise understanding of wealth guides one in the accumulation, management, enjoyment and happiness with wealth. **The Dīghajānu Sutta** (A 8.54) speaks of wealth as bringing one worldly welfare in the following ways:

⁴¹ On the epidemic of loneliness: [\[eClinicalMedicine\]](#) [\[Harvard\]](#). For refs: [\[Wiki\]](#). 19 Mar 2026.

⁴² L Barth, “[How Loneliness Is Damaging Our Health](#),” *NY Times* 20 Apr 2022. A Rodriguez, “[Americans are lonely and it’s killing them. How the US can combat this new epidemic](#),” *USA Today* 24 Dec 2023. 19 Mar 2026.

⁴³ L Barth 2022. F Nirappil, Fenit “[Loneliness poses profound public health threat, surgeon general says](#),” *Washington Post* 2 May 2023.

⁴⁴ ZHANG Xing & DONG Shenghong, “[The relationships between social support and loneliness: A meta-analysis and review](#),” *Acta Psychologica* 227 103616, 1 July 2022.

⁴⁵ This saying prob goes back to English poet and farmer, Thomas Tusser (1524-1580), who wrote the couplet: “A foole and his money be soone at debate: which after with sorow repents him too late.” (1573). W Payne & S Herrtage (eds), *Five Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie* (1878 ed), London: Trübner & Co for the English Dialect Soc, 1573, 1577, 1580:19, 19 Mar 2026.

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| (1) the accomplishment of diligence , | <i>uṭṭhāna,sampadā</i> |
| (2) the accomplishment of watchfulness , | <i>āraṅkha,sampadā</i> |
| (3) spiritual friendship , and | <i>kalyāṇa,mittatā</i> |
| (4) balanced living . | <i>sama,jīvitā</i> |

Basically, this means:

- (1) By whatever work or profession one earns a living, one is skillful and industrious at it.
- (2) Whatever wealth one has gathered, one wisely guards it with proper saving and insurance.
- (3) With faith, moral virtue, charity and wisdom, one keeps good and wise friends, young and old.
- (4) One lives a balanced life, neither extravagant nor stingy, living well within one's means.

(A 8.54/4:281-285), SD 5.10 [2.1.1.3]

2.5.3.2 The best way to benefit from material wealth is to understand the nature and difference between **ends and means**. “Ends” refers to one's goal in life or the benefits that will bring one happiness. “Means” refers to the ways that one should work or act so that one will gain such wealth. In other words, wealth is not good in itself. One may see *means* as having or owning wealth. However, possessing wealth alone does not guarantee one happiness or satisfaction.

In the **Anaṇa Sutta** (A 4.62), the Buddha teaches on **the 4 joys of wealth**, that is:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| (1) the joy of ownership | the joy of having | (the benefits of diligence), |
| (2) the joy of enjoying | the joy of being | (the benefits of watchfulness), |
| (3) the joy of debtlessness | the joy of giving | (the benefits of balanced livelihood), and |
| (4) the joy of blamelessness | the joy to come | (the benefits of spiritual friendship and spirituality). |

(A 4.62/2:69-71), SD 2.2

2.5.3.3 The influence of cultural and social factors

Cultural and social factors can shape personal values and mindsets, influencing financial satisfaction. Different cultures may have varying attitudes towards money, wealth, and success, which can impact how individuals perceive financial satisfaction. Social influences, such as family, peers, and media, can also affect personal values and financial behaviours. Understanding these influences can help individuals develop a more judicious approach to their financial decisions, ensuring they align with their true values rather than external pressures.

2.6 WEALTH AND WEAL

2.6.1 Purposeful wealth

2.6.1.1 One should wisely understand the practical limits of what wealth can do in the following ways:

- **diminishing returns:** Wealth builds one's happiness up to a point where income comfortably meets one's needs, after which the happiness becomes steady or decreases; just as the initial hours of a work day are usually the most productive, but later, productivity starts to decline as our energy and focus decrease.
- **true happiness is contentment:** Wealth may give one a sense of growing satisfaction with one's life. As one matures and ages, one realizes that feeling happy only comes from true contentment rooted in all the good qualities that one can muster.
- **enjoying the moment:** Wealth benefits us most when we can buy good service, save time, or enjoy friendship, rather than merely collecting and having things which we will ultimately have to leave behind.

2.6.1.2 That “**contentment is the greatest wealth**” (*santuṭṭhi, paramaṃ dhanam*, Dh 204b) is a profound teaching rooted in the Buddha’s wisdom. It highlights that true wealth is not found in material possessions or external achievements, but in an inner sense of satisfaction and peace that comes from appreciating what one already has (including skills, abilities and activities), enriched by the good one has done in creating happiness within and spreading it around.

True wealth comes from the real enjoyment of the moment, doing the good or right that needs to be done, accepting people as they are; even embracing failures and difficulties as lessons to be learnt in bettering ourselves in living a life that is morally good, with peace of mind and growing insight into our true nature.

2.6.2 Natural human connections

2.6.2.1 Human civilization and culture are the result of extended human relationships over space and time. Beginningless samsara—the cycle of rebirths—means that we have been through various kinds and levels of relationships. As humans, we have been *mothers and fathers* to one another, *brothers and sisters* to one another, *parents and children* to one another. Naturally, it will be more conducive for spiritual development when we are kind to one another since we will all meet again, and again.⁴⁶ [1.1.1.5]

2.6.2.2 The suttas use the Pali term *vissāsa* for the trust, reliance, familiarity, fellowship, engagement, camaraderie, intimacy and joy of togetherness, in both the worldly and the spiritual senses; it is difficult to find a single English word for it.⁴⁷ Habitually, *vissāsa* characterizes the *vissāsa* of streamwinners with other streamwinners, and similarly in the cases of other path saints.

The Dhammapada saying “**Trust is the best of relatives**” (*vissāsa, paramā ñātī*, Dh 204c) gives an excellent overview of wholesome social and spiritual interbeing and connection with one another, especially when we stand in the Buddha Dharma. On a simple daily level, we can say that *vissāsa* is a *social* manifestation of respect (*gāraṇa*) for and faith (*saddhā*) in one another—accepting ourselves as we are and happily associating with others by way of kindness and joy. To *live*, then, is to *love*; to love is to *learn*; to learn is to be *wise*; to be wise is to be truly free.⁴⁸

In this sense, it is said: “Trust is the best of relatives” (Dh 204c); “trust” here meaning a wholesome intimacy and openness. In other words, the connection is not or not merely *biological* but a more open one, treating one another as being part of a single universal spiritual family like the early monastic sangha.⁴⁹

2.6.3 An inclusive living

2.6.3.1 *Vissāsa*, in the sense of fellowship [2.6.2.2] encompasses engagement in acts of kindness and giving to others to bring them joy. It is also expressed in altruistic conduct, such as volunteering, donating, helping someone, or simply being present with or for someone. Such acts inspire in us a sense of purpose and belonging. The joy of giving and togetherness often arouses a “**helper’s high**,” a feeling of joy and satisfaction in appreciating the being of others.

⁴⁶ SD 55.11 (3.4.2.1) n.

⁴⁷ *Vissāsa* has been assimilated into Thai as วิสาสะ where it has come to mean “to speak; to converse, to be acquainted, to get together”; in Malay, it is close to the word *kemesraan* (abstract n of *mesra*).

⁴⁸ On trust and the family, see SD 38.4 (4.2).

⁴⁹ See also SD 54.8 (2.1.2.2); SD 54.20 (2.3.2.3).

2.6.3.2 Vissāsa is cultivated when we join in social engagement and community activities, contributing to the well-being of others, inspiring in them the joys of friendship and appreciating them just as they are. By engaging in community service or supporting wholesome charitable and bonding initiatives, we can create positive change and strengthen social bonds and connections, which leads to even greater fellowship in the group.

2.6.4 Wealth of happiness

2.6.4.1 Gestures of fellowship and engagement (*vissāsa*) [2.6.3.1] should be made with **mindfulness**, that is, to be present in the moment and properly engage with one's ambience. Deep breathing, mindful walking and meditation can help cultivate mindfulness. These practices reduce stress, enhance focus, and promote emotional harmony.

Being **present in the moment** means that our mind is alert and aware where our body is in the presence of others. We mindfully and joyfully act, respond and reciprocate the action and presence of others so that they feel appreciated with our sincerity and enthusiasm. Such mindfulness helps sharpen awareness of oneself and deepens connection with others.

This is not to say that such engagements are always pleasant or even civil. There can be difficult, uncomfortable and troubling moments, when we simply need to wisely measure our acts and speech, or simply be peacefully silent. The key plank in such a situation is our **good intention**, allowing the situation to safely unfold or, where we are confident or adroit before such challenges we can gently guide or influence the situation in a safe direction. Otherwise, we should be judicious enough to know when our absence will be for the better of everyone concerned.

2.6.4.2 Wholesome social engagement thus forms an important component of **the non-material aspects of life**, such as fellowship, personal growth, and a sense of purpose—these contribute to a sense of true happiness. These qualities often provide deeper and more lasting satisfaction than material possessions. Cultivating healthy social connections, engaging in meaningful activities, and pursuing personal development can enhance well-being and provide a more balanced perspective on the role of wealth and position in life.

2.6.4.3 In order to truly enjoy **wealth**, little or much, we need to understand that happiness is best experienced without limits. The closest limit is of course the self; enjoying wealth alone without consideration for others worthy of consideration is like a cut stem with flower in a vase of water. In a short time, despite the vase and the water, the flower will wilt, die and stink.

When wealth is shared, in the sense of bringing happiness to others, too, then we have empowered ourselves to change others' lives for the better. We become like the sunshine that brightens and livens a whole garden of flowers, plants, trees and beings. The garden becomes a pleasant place where people can simply feel free in the space of light, colours, beauty, health and joy.

Success too should not be seen as merely a personal achievement; indeed, success properly means our skill, patience and labour in a task which benefits others and the environment. Even when we gain wealth by such success, it is not the sole measure of our success. When that success benefits others—like some useful invention or a work of beauty or a vision of truth—that success is well beyond any measurable wealth since it benefits others and society, even after our wealthy life. We have thus also benefitted from non-material wealth.

3 Teachings of the Na Suppatikāra Sutta (A 2.32)

3.1 THE NATURE OF PARENTHOOD

3.1.1 What parents deserve

3.1.1.1 The Na Suppatikāra Sutta (A 2.32) states broadly that the goodness of parents cannot be repaid in any worldly way: whether by dedicated personal service throughout their lives, or even establishing them as rulers or world monarchs [§2]. It is difficult for children to repay parents' goodness because parents are those who **"show them this world"** (*imassa lokassa dassetāro ti*) [§3].

The Commentary gives a rather odd and parochial explanation, saying that "If parents were to take their child by the feet on the day of birth and throw him into a forest, a river, or off a cliff, he would not see desirable or undesirable objects (*iṭṭhābiṭṭh'ārammaṇa*) in this world. But, not doing so, because they have produced and nourished him, he sees desirable or undesirable objects in this world on account of his parents; therefore they are called 'showers of this world'."⁵⁰

3.1.1.2 Instead of the narrow traditional explanation by the Commentary [3.1.1.1], we can say that parents who deserve our **gratitude and thankfulness** are those who, during our vulnerable and formative years, have provided us with essential safety, nurturing emotional health, and guiding development through wholesome care and positive reinforcement so that we grow into well-adjusted and independent adults [3.1.2].

3.1.2 Parents who fail

3.1.2.1 The reality is that there are significant cases where parents **abuse** their children or regard their children as investments for the parents' future benefits; in other words, children become mere extensions of the parents. In this case, it would be difficult for the children to be healthy adults who joyfully show their gratitude to parents, except because of cultural conditioning or out of guilt.

When the children have been abused—which means that they have likely not learned how to love or relate warmly to others—they would naturally be unable to show gratitude or thankfulness to such parents. The insidious legacy of such abuse is that these children will go on to abuse their own children or that the family will be unloving or in some way dysfunctional.

3.1.2.2 Understandably, if and when the children grow into mature, well-adjusted and successful adults, they should end the legacy of hate and pain by showing their aging parents magnanimity and wisdom. Hence, **the Sutta** closes with the Buddha stating that parents should be taught **faith, moral conduct, charity and wisdom**, that is, "the qualities conducive to life hereafter" (*samparāyik'attha sarivattanika, dhamma*)⁵¹ when they lack these qualities for their own happiness [§4].

⁵⁰ AA 2:122,10-15.

⁵¹ AA 2:122,16 f.

3.2 WE ARE ALL PARENTS

3.2.1 One samsaric family

3.2.1.1 We have already noted how, through the teachings of **karma and rebirth**, we are related to one another, especially as humans, living together in various relationships as parents, children, siblings, and relatives to one another. Samsara is this living journey of karma and rebirth where we keep meeting one another, sometimes keeping to the same roles, sometimes switching roles. Rebirth is the cosmic drama on the living stage where we play different roles.

Shakespeare, in his pastoral comedy *As You Like It* (written in 1599, published in 1623) has the melancholy Jaques reflecting in this soliloquy:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.

(Act 2, Scene 7, Line 139)

This monologue is sometimes called “**the seven ages of man**,” that is, those of the infant, the schoolboy, the lover, the soldier, the justice, the mature man, and the old man “sans everything.” This progression suggests the changes we go through in life are simply stages in life's impermanence, becoming other, before the curtain falls.

3.2.1.2 When we understand how karma and rebirth are connected, forming and prolonging one another, we will see our roles—whether as mother or as father, as son or as daughter, as brother or as sister, and so on—as reminding us of our timeless connection. When we learn from our particular role, we see it as being defined and indeed refined by how we relate to others wholesomely.

A good act becomes another, and turns into a *habit*, which moulds our *personality*, which invites other personalities in similar ways—and we tend to repeat ourselves—this is called “familiarity.” And so we become **friends**, more than just relatives. This warm living friendship is called **vissāsa** [2.6.2]; it makes life more enjoyable and our rebirth pleasant.

3.2.2 Gratitude

3.2.2.1 In early Buddhism, **gratitude** (*kataññū kata,veditā*) [SD 64.12a (1.1.2)] encompasses 2 qualities: those of gratefulness and of thankfulness. **Gratefulness** (*kataññū*) is the mindfulness of a kind act, even for a moment; and **thankfulness** (*kata,veditā*) is the ensuing joy of that memory. We thus recall the whole person in kindness; this makes us whole in joy.

Gratitude is thus an appreciation and celebration of the positive aspects of life. Our lives are truly enriched through daily reflection on gratitude to others, keeping a gratitude journal, expressing thanks to others; praising acts of gratitude. Gratitude shifts focus from what is lacking to what is present, inspiring joy and light in a simple human act.

3.2.2.2 Psychologically, feeling **grateful** and **thankful** with joy bring numerous benefits, personal and social. Simply, it is an effective way of generating immediate happiness and intimacy (*vissāsa*); it increases happiness; it reduces sadness and depression, and improves relationships. By making a habit of recalling kindness others have shown us, and the joy that comes with this recall we easily cultivate lovingkindness, inspiring a more positive outlook on life and enhancing our well-being and of those connected with us.

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Na Suppatikāra Sutta

The Discourse on the Not Easily Repaid

A 2.32

1 [2] “Bhikshus, there are **two persons that cannot easily be repaid**.

What are the two? One’s **mother** and **father**.

2 Even if one should carry about one’s mother on one shoulder [62] and one’s father on the other, and [while doing so] should have a life-span of a hundred years, live for a hundred years; and if one should attend to them by anointing them with balms, by massaging, bathing, and rubbing their limbs, and they even void their urine and excrement right there— one still would not have done enough for one’s parents, nor would one have repaid them. Even if one were to establish one’s parents in supreme lordship and kingship⁵² over this great earth abounding in the 7 treasures,⁵³ one still would not have done enough for one’s parents, nor would one have repaid them.

3 What is the reason for this?

Parents are of great help to their children;⁵⁴ they bring them up, nurture them, show them this world.⁵⁵

4 But, bhikshus,
if, when one’s parents lack faith, one encourages, settles, and establishes them in **faith**;⁵⁶
if, when one’s parents are immoral, one encourages, settles, and establishes them in **moral conduct**;
if, when one’s parents are miserly, one encourages, settles, and establishes them in **charity**;
if, when one’s parents are unwise, one encourages, settles, and establishes them in **wisdom**—
in this way, one has done enough for one’s parents, repaid them, and done more than enough for them.”⁵⁷

—evaṃ—

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⁵² “Supreme lordship and kingship,” *issar’ādhipacee rajje*; ie, referring to the universal monarchy (*cakkavatti, raj-jam*) (AA 2:3 f).

⁵³ Or 7 jewels (*satta, ratana*): beryl, gold, crystal, silver, sapphire, pearl, and ruby: SD 45.18 (2.8.1).

⁵⁴ *Bahu, kāra bhikkhave mātā, pitāro puttānaṃ āpādana posakā*.

⁵⁵ “Show them the world” (*imassa lokassa dassetāro ti*, “showers of this world”). [3.1.1.1]

⁵⁶ *le saddhā sīla cāga paññā*; these are “the qualities conducive to life hereafter” (*samparāyik’attha samvattani-ka, dhamma*), “both the mundane and the supramundane” (AA 2:122, 16 f) [3.1.1.3]; “as in the case of the venerable Sāriputta” (18 f). See **Dīgha, jānu S (A 8.54, 10-15/4:284)**, SD 5.10.

⁵⁷ “One has done enough ...,” *Be Se katañ ca hoti patikatañ ca; Ce Ee katañ ca hoti patikatañ ca atikatañ ca*.