

The Seven Types of Wealth

Peter was in his late teens when I met him in 1976 on Hollywood Boulevard near my favourite bookstore. He approached me and asked whether I was a Buddhist monk. When I replied in the affirmative he was delighted. "Wow! I've been looking for a Buddhist monk for a number of years."

"Is there any particular reason that you are looking for a Buddhist monk?" I asked.
 "Man, I am a Buddhist, too."
 "Are your parents Buddhists?"
 "No way. They are definitely not Buddhists," he replied with a laugh. Then I asked him how he became interested in Buddhism. In response, he told me an astonishing story of an incident that had occurred when he was a five-year-old child.

His parents took him on vacation to Tijuana, Mexico. While walking on the roadside they saw many kinds of ceramic figurines for sale. All of a sudden Peter became fascinated by a particular statue and told his parents he wanted it. His father reproached him, saying that it was a statue of the Buddha and he couldn't have it. Peter cried in protest, demanding that they buy the ceramic figure for him, but his parents paid no heed. They got into their car and crossed the border, but Peter's crying did not stop.

Finally his mother got tired of listening to her screaming little boy and suggested to her husband that they return to Tijuana and buy the statue. This they did, and Peter was delighted that he was able to get it. When they got home, he placed it in a prominent place in his bedroom because he felt some sort of unexplained connection with it. That night before bedtime, he said, "Mommy, can you tell me more about the Buddha?"

"I'm sorry, Peter, but I really don't know very much about Him at all. I'm Jewish. I'll go to the library in the morning and do some research. Maybe I can tell you more at bedtime tomorrow."

Peter smiled, happy to hear this news. The following night Peter's mother tucked him in bed and began the story of the Buddha that she had learned earlier that day.

"The Buddha was a great and compassionate man who lived in India twenty-five hundred years ago. Peter, he was born a prince and all during his youth he enjoyed a happy, blessed life and he was given everything he ever wanted. Later he got married to the girl his parents picked out for him, and they had a baby son. Throughout his whole life, he never saw anything that was unpleasant or unhappy, until one day he went outside his father's palace walls and saw an old man, a sick man, the body of a dead man, and a poor holy man. He didn't understand what he had seen, and for a long time he thought about why people went through life suffering."

"Mommy, am I going to get old and sick one day, too?" asked Peter innocently.
 "I'm afraid everyone gets old, Peter, but I hope you don't get sick," she replied.

Peter tried to understand his mother's words, but at the time he couldn't imagine what it would be like to be old and suffering. His mother continued, "At the age of twenty-nine the young prince left the palace and decided to search for the truth. Prince Siddhartha, as he was called, gave up his royal clothes, put on a simple robe and went to the forest to meditate."

"What's meditation, Mommy?" asked Peter.
 "I'm not too sure about it, son, but I think it's being real quiet, maybe a kind of praying."

"So what did he do then?"
 "After six years of trying many different kinds of practice, Prince Siddhartha went to a place called Gaya and sat under a bodhi tree."

"That's a funny name for a tree, Mommy. Do we have those here?"
 "No, Peter, Bodhi trees only grow on the other side of the world, in Asia. Maybe one day you can go there and see one."

"So what did he do under the tree, Mommy?" Peter had a serious look on his face that told his mother he really did care about the Buddha's.

"Prince Siddhartha made a firm resolution. He said, 'My skin and bones may dry up. My flesh and blood may dry up in my body, but until I attain enlightenment, I will not leave this seat.'"

"Can you tell me what attain enlightenment means?"
 By this time Peter's mother was running out of answers as well as patience, trying to explain such difficult things to such a young boy. "I think it means knowing the difference between what is right and what is wrong, Peter, but even more than that. It also means becoming really smart and knowing all the answers."

"Can I become smart and know the answers, too, Mommy?" Peter's face lit up when he asked this question, as if he fully understood that it was possible.

"Of course you can, Peter. You can become anything in this world you want to be. Do you want me to continue with the story?"
 "Oh yes, Mommy. Please tell me what happened under that tree."

"Well, it was on the full moon day in May that Prince Siddhartha attained full enlightenment and all of a sudden knew all of the answers in the world. This is why he is called the 'Buddha,' which means 'All Knowing of the Past, the Present and the Future.' At that moment the Buddha understood the cause of suffering, which was the question he had asked himself from the beginning. He discovered that when there is suffering, there is a problem that is causing the suffering. He understood that when the cause of the suffering is removed, the suffering disappears."

"After realizing the truth, the Buddha spent seven days looking up at the bodhi tree to show his thanks for the fact that it had given him shelter. He did this to show the world that we must appreciate the people or things that help us."

"For forty-five years the Buddha preached the truth he had learned. He had many followers, both men and women, who gave their lives to practising his teaching. The Buddha finally passed away when he was eighty years old."

The Peter had asked his mother whether there were any monks and nuns still living. The mother had replied that came out of his mouth were, "I went to be ordained a

It was on that day that Peter decided he was a Buddhist. Many times during the following years, Peter would announce to his family that he was in fact, a Buddhist. Everyone would smile politely, but no one took him seriously, because he was too young to know what he believed in, or at least, that's what his parents thought. Eventually, however, when Peter was in his early teens, the family could no longer ignore what he said he was and his father eventually became furious with him because of his belief. He even sometimes blamed his wife, Peter's mother, for exposing the child to Buddhism.

"That is quite a story, Peter," I exclaimed, when he finally finished telling me about his introduction to Buddhism. I invited him to visit me at the Meditation Center the following day, and during the course of the next three or four months, we became good friends. I gave Peter a number of books about Buddhism and encouraged him to attend the meditation classes, which he did.

One day after meditation, Peter asked me if he could have a private word with me in my room. The first words that came out of his mouth were, "I went to be ordained a

Buddhist monk, Bhante. Will you help me?"

"That is quite a serious step to take, Peter. Are you quite sure about this?" Several times during my stay in the United States I have had young men and women approach me about wanting to enter the Sangha. I always advise them to be absolutely sure before making such a commitment, which, in my country of Sri Lanka, is for a lifetime.

"I am sure, Bhante, more sure than about anything in my life." I felt that Peter was sincere, so I took him to the Thai temple with my dear friend Suwat. Peter was ordained immediately, given further training, and sent to Bangkok by the abbot.

I kept in touch with Peter, and one day in 1979, I received a letter from him. By that time he went by the name Saddhajivo. I had known that Peter came from an extremely wealthy family, but I hadn't known that his father continued to object to his being a monk. Peter said in his letter that his father had finally decided to disinherit him if he did not give up his robe.

Peter said that he truly loved his parents. He also said that he, too, had the greatest wealth in the world: his robe and his alms bowl. I immediately replied to his letter,

stating that I admired his decision not to disrobe. I said, "When practising Buddhism, the Buddha told us that a person acquires seven different kinds of wealth, none of which can be destroyed or taken away."

I explained these seven types of wealth in my letter and I will share them here.

Saddha: This term is generally translated as faith or belief. In fact, the root word, sad, means good, and dha means holding or keeping fast to one's being. Thus, we can say that saddha also means holding good in one's mind. Saddha, according to the Buddha's teachings, is rational faith, not blind faith. The emphasis here is on confidence, seeing, knowing and understanding. I said in my letter, "Saddhajivo, your name itself means 'a person who leads a life with confidence, trust, and understanding of Buddhist practice.' You do, in fact, possess this type of wealth."

Sila: This translates as virtue or moral conduct, the highest principle of human behaviour. Sila can be divided into two parts: positive actions and avoidance actions. On the positive side, it dictates that one should discipline the mind, body and the speech so that one can contribute responsibly to one's family and society. On the avoidance

side, one is given a list of unwholesome actions from which to abstain and is told to avoid allowing unwholesome, negative thoughts from entering one's mind. The Buddha said that as a virtuous person, one is neither a hindrance to oneself nor an obstacle to others. Virtue, therefore, is a type of wealth that can only be obtained through self-development, self-cultivation and self-realization.

Hita: This type of wealth has to do with self-respect, which arises from within when one thinks of saying or doing something that is not wholesome. Contemplating how it would feel to bring disgrace upon oneself, one's parents, or one's family discourages one from carrying out any unwholesome impulse. Self-respect, therefore, keeps us on a positive, pure, and growthful path, which is a part of living rich, full lives.

Ottappa: This type of wealth can be called self-preservation. It leads us to abstain from unwholesome or illegal acts in order to protect our reputation and preserve our freedom. Most people fear the results that would befall us if we were to succumb to the temptation to commit wrongful acts. The Buddha said, "The door of evil reaps evil results. The door of goodness gathers good results." Self-respect and self-preservation work together in our minds and serve as protective shields against our thinking, saying, or doing negative and unwholesome thoughts, words, or deeds. I sometimes liken these guardians of wealth to police patrol cars. Even when we see a patrol car on the other side of the freeway, we tend to slow down.

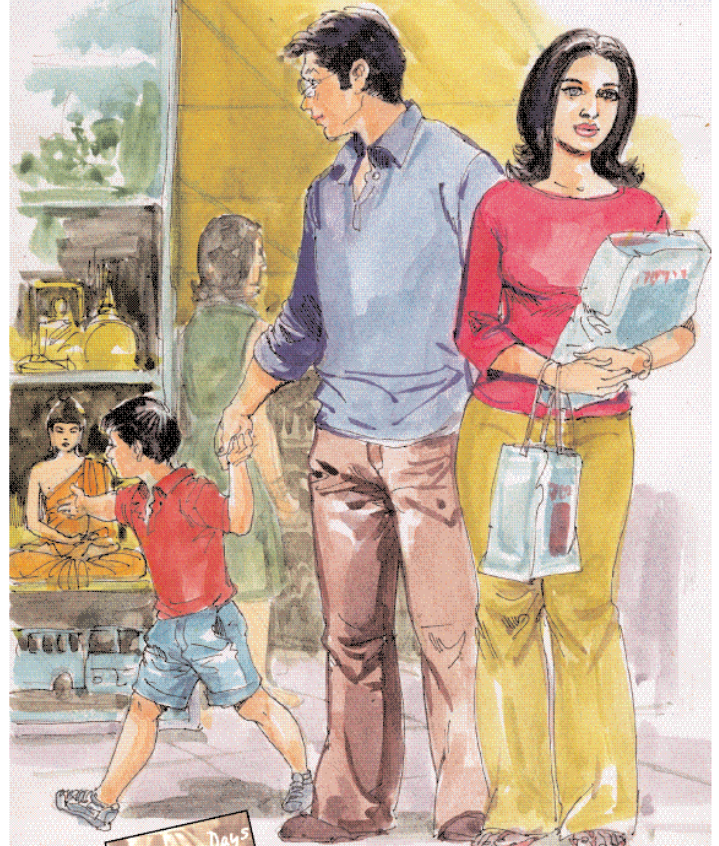
Suta: This very valuable type of wealth is the wealth of education. With a good education, we are equipped to be able to face and solve any and all problems we are given in life. An education ideally brings out the noble and virtuous qualities in an individual. It helps one to see things as they truly are, to cultivate wholesome habits and to be able to detect and eliminate any unwholesome habits (this includes negative thought patterns) that might have developed. Education doesn't mean only academic achievements; it also means acquiring wisdom through experience.

Caga: This very beautiful type of wealth is translated as generosity, meaning giving abundantly without expecting anything in return. When one gives, one helps to eliminate craving, the cause of suffering. Being generous makes those with whom we come in contact happy. It also helps the giver be happy. Developing generosity of spirit helps one maintain a pleasant and loving rapport with family members, friends, business associates, and even strangers. Greed, hatred, and delusion are obstacles in the way of our path to enlightenment. The only way to eliminate these roots of destruction is by practising charity with a generous heart. The practice of charity often times leads one not only to the accumulation of great wealth, but to keeping it as well.

Panna: Perhaps the greatest type of wealth is panna, or wisdom. In Buddhist teachings there are actually three types of wisdom: wisdom acquired through experience and education; wisdom acquired through analysis and deductive reasoning and wisdom acquired through meditation and spiritual insight. The first two types of wisdom are categorised as *vyana*, or knowledge. Panna is the third type of wisdom, which is gained only through spiritual practice and deep meditation. Panna and ignorance cannot exist in the same human mind. It is through panna that we are able to see things in their proper perspective. Panna enables us to solve problems, understand the nature of impermanence and see the underlying influences of causal relations. Ultimately, panna enables us to see the interconnectedness of all phenomena, which is the first step toward enlightenment. This is the point at which we realize that there is no self, nothing we can call I or my or mine. All of the obstacles and defilements have been overcome and the practitioner is on his or her way to attaining Nibbana. There can be no greater wealth than accumulating panna, which leads one to achieving the greatest prize, Nibbana.

The seven types of wealth as expressed by the Buddha are far more valuable than any kind of worldly wealth we could ever imagine or hope to attain. Saddhajivo has been a monk now for twenty years. Before his father passed away, quite some time ago, Saddhajivo was able to make peace with him and share with him the teachings on the Buddha's seven types of wealth. The father was able to acknowledge that the wealth his son had acquired was far greater than his own.

Health is the precious gain, Contentment the greatest wealth. A trustworthy friend is the best relative. Nibbana is the highest happiness.



Ven. Walpola Piyananda Thera, Founder and Viharahipati of Dhamma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles, California shares his experience of life in America in his maiden literary work *Saffron Days in Los Angeles*, which we are privileged to serialise every Saturday beginning today. With calm and compassion characteristic of a Buddha, the author dispassionately unravels the trials and travails of the life of a Buddhist monk in an alien country captivating the hearts and minds of the reader. The stories in the collection reveal the complex, contradictory, joyous, painful, intriguing and inspiring aspects of human condition and the power of true compassion. In this last part of the Collection the author describes how spiritual wealth is superior to material wealth.

Saffron Days in L.A.

Tales of a Buddhist Monk in America Twenty